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Sex Worker Rights Organizing as Social Movement Unionism: Responding to the Criminalization of Work

Crystal A. Jackson

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, cajackso@unlv.nevada.edu

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SEX WORKER RIGHTS ORGANIZING AS SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM:
RESPONDING TO THE CRIMINALIZATION OF WORK

By

Crystal A. Jackson

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2003

Master of Arts in Sociology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2007

Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2009

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

Department of Sociology
College of Liberal Arts
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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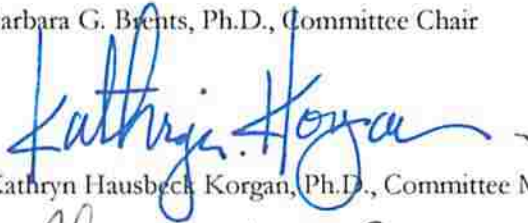
To Whom It May Concern:

This is to affirm that we, her dissertation committee, understand and agree with the need for a few changes to Crystal Jackson's PhD dissertation as originally defended. The committee supports the new version as submitted, with the addendum listing the changes/updates.

Sincerely



Barbara G. Brents, Ph.D., Committee Chair



Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D., Committee Member



Christie Batson, Ph.D., Committee Member



Marcia Gallo, Ph.D., Graduate College Representative



ADDENDUM -- ERRATA

This dissertation was updated in January 2014 to make minor, non-substantive changes from what appeared in the original document as defended.

Some participants chose to use their real names when they provided informed consent, but later found that doing so may not be in their best interest. As a result, the author and her doctoral committee members agreed that removing names and identifying information from the document would be the best course of action. These changes to anonymize participants has no impact on the substantive content of the dissertation, the research, or the findings.

Changes to the following pages: vii-viii, ix, 1, 10, 11, 16, 66, 67, 74-80, 96, 98, 100-102, 104-108, 110, 112, 120-124, 126, 128, 131, 132, 134-137, 139, 142, 143, 144-147, 157, 160-167, 170, 171-176, 178-180, 184, the original Appendix B was removed.



THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

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Crystal A. Jackson

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Department of Sociology

Barbara Brents, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Kathryn Korgan, Ph.D., Committee Member

Christie Batson, Ph.D., Committee Member

Marcia Gallo, Ph.D., Graduate College Representative

Tom Piechota, Ph.D., Interim Vice President for Research &
Dean of the Graduate College

May 2013

ABSTRACT

Sex Worker Rights Organizing as Social Movement Unionism: Responding to the Criminalization of Work

by

Crystal A. Jackson

Dr. Barbara G. Brents, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Sociology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

In a post-industrial, de-regulated economy, worker organizing is changing shape and function. While much research has focused on the decline of U.S. union organizing and the difficulty of organizing today's workers, a growing body of research on social movement unionism interrogates how "un-organizable" and "non-traditional" workers like day laborers and domestic workers are organizing. Yet sex worker activism in the U.S. is little studied, which is interesting given sex workers unique position as criminalized and contingent workers. Based on a two year ethnographic study from 2010 to 2012 of a national sex worker rights organization, the Desiree Alliance (DA), I examine the organizational structure and organizational goals of sex worker activists and their allies. I find that the Desiree Alliance embodies many characteristics of social movement unionism, such as an internally democratic structure, a reliance on a small, dedicated core of activists to maintain the organization, and an emphasis on worker development and community building over political advocacy or collective bargaining.

However, there are also aspects of the Desiree Alliance (DA) that do not fit with, and arguably problematize, the social movement unionism model. First, organizationally, as an alliance, the DA has no physical space, with decentralized leadership and diffuse membership spread across the country. Second, DA organizational goals revolve around community building and worker empowerment precisely because sex work is largely criminalized. Criminalization

necessitates a strong internal support system. Further, it limits worker's political efforts to the criminal justice system. Third, anti-trafficking advocacy shapes sex workers' collective identity, and impacts the success or failure of political advocacy efforts to decriminalize sexual labor. Arguing for decriminalization from a labor rights approach has been ineffective thus far, while using a language of protection—the language of mainstream anti-trafficking advocacy—has won some gains at the state level, such as the removal of prostitution charges for someone found to be trafficked at the time of arrest.

Therefore I argue that “social movement unionism” as a concept has yet to fully theorize the contemporary relationships between criminalization, contingent labor, and class, race, gender, and sexuality. Criminalized workers develop a counter-ideology in response to a socio-legal master status. In this way, worker rights intersect with citizenship rights. Social movement unionism literature fails to make explicit the role of criminalization as a form of labor control. And while social movement unionism research emphasizes the necessity of localized efforts, it has yet to parse out the different types and meanings of political advocacy. Overall, the sociological imperative to relate late capitalist worker organizing to early 20th century unionizing overshadows the changing faces and changing needs of low-wage, contingent workers in the U.S. economy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At the Desiree Alliance sex worker rights conference in July 2010, attendees bounced from workshop to workshop. In one room on Thursday afternoon, a member of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network in Canada presented in a small room packed with 35 attendees on “Indigenous Sex Work, Realities, and Rights.” The workshop was cross-listed with the Activism Track and the Harm Reduction and Outreach Track. In another room, attendees sat in a business development roundtable called “Your Girlfriend SUCKS! ...for Money!” The rest of the Business Development Track workshops that day covered “How Much an Hour?,” “Tricks, Training, and Transitions,” and “Sessions that Heal.” Harm Reduction and Outreach Track presenters shared their experiences with “Making Safer Sex (and play) Sexier.” Scholars from across the U.S. and Canada engaged in methodological conversations on researching sex work with titles like “Violating Sex Workers” and “Violence and Policy” as part of the Academics and Policy Track. That evening, attendees had a choice between “Healing Meditation for Sex Workers” and an evening yoga session before getting ready for the masquerade ball themed after-party at the Erotic Heritage Museum near the Las Vegas Strip.¹

What is the Desiree Alliance? An advocacy organization? A labor union? An identity based social movement? This project examines the U.S. sex worker rights movement to gain insight into the changing dynamics of labor organizing in today’s post-industrial society. In this ethnographic study, I explore the organizational structure and goals of the Desiree Alliance, the largest sex worker organization in the United States. Examining U.S. sex worker organizing efforts presents a unique opportunity to understand the shape and meaning of worker organizing among low-wage, contingent, and criminalized laborers.

The rise of part-time and independently contracted, low security, low-wage jobs, the growth of underground economies, and the effects of globalization on migration patterns, has challenged workers as they struggle to make living wages, often facing racial, gender, and sexual discrimination as they work. In an industrialized economy, labor unions organized masses of workers in large factories and won collective bargaining rights, minimum wages and benefits from employers in manufacturing industries. But with the rise of a service economy and neoliberal politics, traditional labor unions are less able to organize workers. They face

difficulties organizing low-wage contingent workers in home care, janitorial, food service, and hotel occupations, immigrant labor in the domestic work, construction, and agriculture; clerical workers in business services, professional and technical workforce in information occupations; independent contractors in body work, entertainment and personal services. Scholars attribute the decline of union membership and union power to demographics, union inaction, the state and legal system, globalization, neoliberalism, and the employer offensive that ended a labor-capital accord (Clawson 2003; Clawson and Clawson 1999).

In spite of the decline in labor unions, we continue to see pockets of activism in support of the right to work and better working conditions in a number of sectors such as immigrant rights and sex worker rights. Many low-wage contingent workers in a global economy must fight for citizenship rights at the same time as they fight for the right to work. Labor movements may be changing shape rather than declining. For example, Milkman (2006) analyzed the dynamics of immigrant worker organizing in California to determine the ways in which unions are changing shape to meet the needs of immigrant workers, and the ways in which political and economic conditions impede unionizing immigrants.

Much research on labor organizing has been about labor unions and the difficulty of organizing today's workers (Clawson and Clawson 1999). Relatively little has examined organizing among low-wage, contingent workers outside of unions. What research exists examines worker activism in two areas, the struggle for citizenship rights (Fine 2006b, Gordon 2005, Iskander 2007, Milkman 2006) and in organizations known as "alternative worker organizations," also referred to as "social movement unionism" (Gleeson 2010, Gordon 2005, Naduris-Weissman 2009, Rosenfeld 2006, Walsh 2012). However, there has been almost no research on organizing low-wage or criminalized contingent workers outside of immigrant workers and the rise of immigrant worker centers in the United States (Fine 2006b).

I find that the Desiree Alliance (DA) shares many characteristics of social movement unionism and is quite dissimilar from traditional labor unions. It appears to fit with the rise of new forms of worker organizing that address the multifaceted needs of diverse workers in non-traditional employment arrangements. The Desiree Alliance embodies social movement unionism in that there is an internally democratic structure (Moody 1997, Nissen 2003), a focus on leadership development, a reliance on a small but active membership core, an emphasis on community building (Clawson 2003; Fantasia and Voss 2004), and their advocacy and outreach efforts go beyond labor issues to other issues around identity and citizenship (Milkman 2006). However, I also find that the social movement unionism model as it is applied to criminalized workers is incomplete. There are other characteristics of the Desiree Alliance that do not fit neatly into the traditional labor union model or the social movement unionism model.

First, the Desiree Alliance was founded in 2005 as a largely decentralized organization with a loose membership structure, similar to SMU. Yet it is also difficult to classify the DA as an organization, which then questions whether the SMU label is appropriate. The DA has no physical space, leadership communicate primarily through list-serves and conference calls. The main purpose of the DA is to host a biennial conference; and more rarely, engage in advocacy efforts. The conference focuses on a range of activities including business development to help sex workers grow their trade, harm reduction to help individuals navigate health and safety risks, and information on research and legal challenges, political advocacy, and public education.

The Desiree Alliance has created a rather novel and inclusive organizational model. The DA leadership is pulled from its member organizations. The leadership structure has very self-consciously evolved to be inclusive of gender, racial, and class diversity, countering much of the criticism that early sex worker rights activists were white and middle class.

In the past several years it has become one of a main nexus of sex work organizing in the U.S., connecting together most of the active sex worker rights organizations in the country today. “Member organizations” include the national Sex Workers Outreach Project USA (SWOP USA) and the Best Practices Policy Project, as well as several local organizations. But even who counts as a member is questionable—conference attendees? Conference organizers? Member organizations of the Desiree Alliance? Should we count by the number of member organizations or by the number of activists within each member organization? Further, studies of social movement unionism focus on how localized organizations are, and that their effectiveness comes from being locally focused. For example, the rise of immigrant workers centers across the U.S. is a prime example of social movement unionism, yet the centers are not networked together nationally (Fine 2006a). But the DA is a national umbrella of locally focused member organizations, with little coordinated efforts beyond the conference every two years.

Second, the Desiree Alliance does share the social movement unionism emphasis on organizational goals that go beyond traditional labor organizing efforts. The DA efforts are two-fold—community building, which is fostered through collective identity formation and subsequent educational outreach efforts, and political advocacy. At conferences and within DA member organizations, activists focus both on empowering workers on the job and on developing activist skills. In this way, the Desiree Alliance is primarily oriented toward providing services to members. Learning how to engage in public educational outreach is also a way to solidify a sex worker identity and an activist identity. For example, engaging in performative protest art, as about a dozen sex workers did at the 2010 conference, is both a way to draw attention to a cause and build a sense of solidarity between sex workers. The community and identity building efforts of the Desiree Alliance lie at the crux of sex worker rights organizing, and signify social movement unionism focus on community over traditional union strategies.

The social movement unionism aspects of the DA have been effective in meeting worker empowerment needs and providing a network of social support. In this way, the DA and its member organizations are structured to offer more immediate relief from the effects of criminalization. Yet literature on social movement unionism offers little discussion of the use of criminalization as a contemporary form of labor control, and how that may impact organizing.

As largely low-wage contingent workers, sex workers face uphill battles in gaining labor rights because their primary targets are not employers or even clients, but the policies that criminalize them. They have been fairly unsuccessful in getting these policies removed. Sociologists have noted that the sex workers rights movement has failed in the U.S. (Weitzer 1991; Jenness 2000, 2003). Sex workers have been unsuccessful in efforts to reduce arrests and sentences. They have failed in legislative campaigns for decriminalization. Arguing for equal access and protection under the law has not been a successful strategy. Because sex work is criminalized in the U.S., sex workers fighting for labor rights must simultaneously contest the wide-reaching impact of criminalization, fight for citizenship rights, build community among sex workers, and reach out to a general public through grassroots education campaigns. Criminalizing sex work shifts the foci of activism from the realm of employment (and employer-employee relations) to the realm of the criminal justice system.

Sex worker rights activism has recently been made more difficult through a growing anti-trafficking social movement consisting of a “rescue industry” of social workers, non-profits and some feminists (Agustín 2007). The anti-trafficking movement targets all sex work under the rubric of protection, prosecution, and prevention. I find that dealing with the trafficking movement occupies a great deal of the energy of the Desiree Alliance. At the same time, the trafficking movement helped to galvanize and mobilize the organization as sex workers feel the impact of anti-prostitution policies enacted to end trafficking.

Sex worker activists in the U.S. are demanding basic legal reforms, many of which are already instituted in other North World countries. They also argue for more comprehensive interventions into what they see as dangerous and violent systems of repression that support poverty and violence by ignoring the structural inequalities that, for example, foster homelessness or outlaw harm reduction efforts like needle exchanges. Sex workers experience a form of state sanctioned violence.² They are unable to or afraid to report crimes, including sexual assault. Sex workers have described violence at the hands of both police and clients. They fear arrest, and fear the impact it will have on them and their families. Sex workers lie outside the “charmed circle” of acceptable sexual identity and activity, and are both criminalized and stigmatized (Rubin 1984). Said another way, sex workers live at the margins of society (Agustín 2007; Barton 2000; Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck 2010; Dewey and Kelly 2011; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998).

Analyzing sex worker rights organizing can add to our sociological understanding of shifting sexual norms and the changing relationship between the criminal justice system and the market. First, the sex industry has grown considerably since World War II as cultural norms around gender and sexuality have become more liberal and as the entertainment and body industries have grown (Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck 2010; Zelizer 2005). Scholars argue that the sex industry has become more mainstream, and the number of individuals entering the sex industry has grown (Bernstein 2007b; Brents and Sanders 2010). Second, like immigrant workers, sex workers are criminalized under current policies. The work they do is in an underground economy. Sex work is stigmatized, informed not only by gender discrimination, but also by class, racial, and heteronormative discrimination. Overall, understanding sex worker rights activism can tell us much about the intersection of politics, work, gender, and sexuality in the contemporary United States.

RATIONALE

This dissertation examines the intersection of politics, work, gender, and sexuality through an analysis of the sex worker rights movement. I ask, what does labor organizing look like for contingent, criminalized workers? In order to answer this, I use the Desiree Alliance as a case study of an organization that advocates for one group of contingent workers, sex workers. First, I map the organizational form of the Desiree Alliance. Then I examine their organizational goals, specifically, community and identity building, and public educational outreach. Finally I examine their political advocacy.

My work is grounded in research that has identified a general trend towards a politics of protection whereby policies are enacted to protect women and girls, rather than empower women and girls (Petchesky 2000, Richardson 2000). This is perhaps best exemplified by the federal *Violence Against Women Act* that criminalizes interpersonal violence and funds domestic violence shelters and rape crisis hotlines across the country, placing the onus on victims to report and seek assistance, while leaving social structures that normalize interpersonal violence untouched. I also draw on literature on social movement unionism and literature on the regulation of sexuality.

Sex workers are marginalized for violating gender and sexuality norms around economic behavior. This discrimination has real world consequences on the health and safety of sex workers and has important implications for their activism:

Sex worker activism is necessary because sex workers suffer disproportionate violence and discrimination, which in turn has effects on their education, social mobility, occupational opportunities, quality of life and health (Ditmore 2010: 239).

Studying sex worker rights activism can illuminate much about the meso-level intersection of gender, work, and policy, and the larger repercussions of anti-prostitution policies and what I call “protectionist politics.” Overall, I look at how sex workers and allies contest the legal and

cultural meanings of “sex” and “work,” and, on a larger scale, how this represents a re-shaping of a late capitalist labor movement.

My research fills a gap in the literatures of both low-wage contingent worker organizing and sex work research. By bringing sexuality into focus through a lens of contingent labor, this study contributes to feminist and sociological understandings of worker organizing, law, sexuality, and work. First, while recent research has studied how diverse workers, often women, engaging in part time or contracted labor, working in sweatshops or service industries, sex work tends not be included in these studies (Cobble 2007; Padavic and Reskin 2002; see Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002 as an alternative). Second, scholars have documented the shift from the traditional male-heavy, production-based unions of the past to diverse, service based unions of today, and how unions have shrunk in number and lost power due to neoliberal de-regulation (Clawson 2003; Clawson and Clawson 1999; Fantasia and Voss 2004). Neoliberal policies rendered “labor law largely ineffective,” making it “almost impossible for unions to win within the rules of the game as currently defined” (Clawson 2003: 91). Third, much of the sex work research to date focuses on the work itself, from various perspectives, but relatively little focuses on their organizing efforts (Ditmore, Levy, and Willman 2010; Vanwesenbeeck 2001).

Fourth, studies of low-wage contingent worker organizing look at the connection between a lack of citizenship rights and labor violations (Fine 2006b, Gordon 2005, Iskander 2007, Milkman 2006). To date, much of this literature examines issues of race and citizenship through the experiences of undocumented immigrant workers. Undocumented workers are a criminalized class of exploitable workers who must target the state for both the right to work and the right to be in a country (Fine 2006a, 2006b; Gordon 2005; Iskander 2007; Milkman 2006). I add new elements to the study of labor and state power by examining issues of gender, sex/uality, and citizenship. Overall, then, I argue that sociological attempts to understand the

changing nature of labor organizing in a post-industrial, service oriented, late capitalist economy have yet to fully account for the ways that current laws, beyond deregulation, have impacted worker organizing.

Finally, this dissertation is also an attempt to understand the impact of the sex trafficking movement on sex worker activism. In what ways does sex trafficking policy and advocacy impact sex workers who are arguing for labor rights? In what ways are anti-trafficking efforts a mobilizing grievance for sex workers? Overall, my research offers practical lessons and theoretical insight into both the socio-legal construction of gendered labor, and into the restructuring of labor organizing to address the issues and needs of low-wage, contingent work in a post-industrial era.

RESEARCH DESIGN

From 2010 to 2012, I engaged in an ethnographic study of the Desiree Alliance (DA), an umbrella network of 22 member organizations. This represents most all of the active sex worker rights organization in the U.S., including the national Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP), thirteen local SWOP chapters, and eight other sex worker rights organizations (see *Table 1*).

Table 1: A list of Desiree Alliance member organizations

Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP-USA)	Best Practices Policy Project (U.S.)	Author and activist Veronica Monet
SWOP New York (aka SWANK)	SWOP Las Vegas	SWOP Chicago
SWOP East	SWOP Tucson, Arizona	SWOP Michigan
SWOP Boston	SWOP NOLA, New Orleans, LA	SWOP Los Angeles
SWOP Northwest	SWOP SoCal (S. California)	SWOP NorCal (N. California)
SWOP Portland, Oregon	Different Avenues (D.C.)	Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive (HIPS) (D.C.)
Bay Area Sex Workers' Advocacy Network (BAYSWAN)	COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) (San Francisco, CA)	Arresting Prostitutes is Legal Exploitation (APLE) (Hawaii)
St. James Infirmary, San Francisco, CA		

The Desiree Alliance's main job is to provide a biennial conference, bringing together sex workers and their allies around five areas of interest, reflecting key organizational goals:

Activism; Harm Reduction and Outreach; Academics and Policy; Art, Entertainment, and Media; and Business Development. The conferences are a strategic form of skill building and community building. Around 100 to 200 people attend the conferences.

The Desiree Alliance (DA) does not have a physical location, and other than the conference, members and leaders communicate online and informally through localized activist networks. DA leadership (two co-directors and a Strategic Committee) is spread across the country. Leadership communicates largely through an online list serve and via phone conference calls. There are separate list-servs for conference attendees and people affiliated with member organizations. The DA advertises the conference through the national Desiree Alliance list-serv, and the national SWOP list-serv. The DA also uses social media to share the conference and other related information.

My ethnography consisted of participant observation of the 2010 conference, semi-structured interviews with leading sex worker rights activists, and archival research and analysis of supporting materials.³ As a founding academic ally with the DA, I have built relationships with a group that is often wary of researchers. I observed the organization and execution of the 2010 conference, six days of workshops, panels, and networking of approximately 130 attendees from around the country. I was active on the Desiree Alliance email list-serv. The director at the time lived in Las Vegas, and I worked with her to assist with local arrangements.

I also draw from 17 semi-structured interviews and two informal interviews with leading sex worker rights activists from twelve cities in seven states and Washington, D.C., from the Spring 2011 to Winter 2012. Using purposive sampling within the Desiree Alliance network, I interviewed people who are heavily involved with local sex worker rights organizations or have affiliated with the only by-and-for sex worker health clinic, the St. James Infirmary. I was also interested in interviewing independent activists who volunteer with anti-trafficking

organizations. I developed the interview protocol around sensitizing concepts from existing literature on the experiences of sex workers, sex worker activists, and contingent worker organizing. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and a half.

In Summer 2011, I accessed the Sex Worker Rights Archive at the Center for Sex and Culture in San Francisco, California, exploring the archive with the help of its creator, one of the most well-known sex worker rights activists in the U.S., Carol Leigh. The archive is the only collection of sex worker rights activism in the country, and includes some videos of Desiree Alliance keynotes and panels (“sex worker only” panels and workshops are not recorded), but mostly videos and pictures of earlier sex worker rights efforts in the 1980s and 1990s. I also draw from publically available Desiree Alliance materials, such as published programs, keynote videos, and materials from supporting organizations such as policy analysis from the Best Practices Policy Project.

BACKGROUND: WHY SEX WORK ORGANIZING

While much sex work research to date “is still much more about sex than it is about work” (Vanwesenbeeck 2001:242), there is a growing body of research that resists this trope by exploring the socio-cultural aspects of sex work (Agustín 2005). Studies have begun to examine how sex workers exercise agency within systems of structural inequality (Barton 2001, 2002; Chapkis 1997; Dewey 2010; Kelly 2010; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Price-Glynn 2010). This newly established canon includes studies of sexual labor as it relates to other institutions, interrogating market relations and government regulations (Agustín 2007; Bernstein 2007a, 2007b; Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck 2010; Dewey and Kelly 2011; Kelly 2010; Jackson 2011, Kempadoo and Doezema 1998, Sanders 2005; Weitzer 2010a), and social norms around sex, intimacy, and money (Bernstein 2005; Ditmore, Levy and Willman 2010; Egan 2006; Frank 1998, 2002; Zelizer 2005). Much of this research is beginning to go beyond a sole focus on explaining

sex work, and instead theorizing a political economy of commercial sex/uality, that is, theorizing about sex work for what it says about the contemporary political economy.

How U.S. sex workers advocate for themselves has yet to be fully empirically explored. Previous research of U.S. sex worker rights organizations has proclaimed the movement a failure, largely because there has been no large scale legal change toward a system of regulation or decriminalization (Weitzer 1991; Jenness 1990, 1993). Within the little sociological research exploring sex worker advocacy, U.S. sex workers' rights organizations are often criticized for failing to change current laws that criminalize prostitution.

Little research has been done on the U.S. sex worker's rights movement since the 1990s, which is surprising given the growth of organizations in the U.S. at the turn of the century, and the achievements of such organizations in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and the global South (Abel et al. 2010; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998, Kotiswaran 2011; Mathieu 2003; West 2000). Majic's (2010) recent research examines the dynamics of civic engagement of two U.S. sex worker rights non-profits, concluding that "social movement borne non-profits" are uniquely situated to maintain an activist edge while in a professionalized organizational setting. Ditmore's (2010) concluding remarks in an anthology on why "sex work matters" notes that "some people erroneously assume that sex worker rights activists are all 'happy hookers' who are thrilled with their work and have no suggestions on ways to improve it" (239). In that same volume, Brents and Hausbeck (2010) argue that there has been a convergence between sex work and mainstream culture, implying that the sex worker rights movement should have an increasingly easier time fighting stigma and finding allies. Yet these statements are largely speculative and, beyond this, little research exists on U.S. sex worker rights organizing.

An Overview of Contemporary Global Sex Worker Organizing Efforts

Sex workers rights organizations exist in the U.S. and around the world (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998, Jenness 1990, Mathieu 2003), led by and for sex workers demanding legal protections, an end to criminalization, and basic human dignity and rights. In some countries, social and legal changes have been a direct result of sex workers advocating for themselves, often in solidarity with non-sex worker rights groups.

The England based International Union of Sex Workers was founded in 2000 and offers union membership to U.K. sex workers. The Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) in India, founded in 1995 out of a 1992 HIV/AIDS effort, is an expansive organization of 65,000 members, including men, women, and transgender sex workers. DMSC works in collaboration with doctors and locals to decrease HIV infection rates and identify and help underage and trafficked women leave the industry (Gayen et al. 2004). EMPOWER Thailand (Education Means Protection of Women Engaged in Recreation) was founded in 1985 and offers a range of classes and support for sex workers, and has been active in international discussions on prostitution and tourism. The Scarlet Alliance is a government recognized organization that has been active in Australia since 1989 and both nationally and within each territory to remove prohibitionist and punitive prostitution laws. Scarlet Alliance members are networked with governmental and non-governmental bodies, sitting on the Commonwealth Attorney Generals' Roundtable on People Trafficking, and a board seat with the Australian Federation of AIDS Organizations.⁴ Zi Teng offers sex workers in China and Hong Kong information on their rights and health services, in addition to a 24 hour emergency hotline. The New Zealand's Prostitute Collective worked to marshal together support for decriminalization in that country, succeeding with the passage of a decriminalization act in 2003 (Abel et al. 2010).

These are a few international examples of organizing by and for sex workers. In the U.S., the “prostitutes’ rights movement,” as activists referred to it then, emerged in the 1970s along with many other identity based movements. Sex workers were galvanized partially in response to radical feminists who decried sex work and porn as oppressive to all women. This marked the beginning of a collective sex worker identity. COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) was the first organization of what now constitutes the contemporary movement, founded in 1973 in San Francisco by Margo St. James, and later taken over by Scarlot Harlot/Carol Leigh (Weitzer 1991; Jenness 1990, 1993). Many current sex workers’ rights organizations in the U.S. model themselves after COYOTE, largely because COYOTE’s directors have aided in the creation of many of the organizations currently involved in the sex workers’ rights movement.⁵

While the 1970s was a period of growth for sex worker rights organizations, including some that still exist today like COYOTE and PONY: Prostitutes of New York (founded in 1976), the movement stagnated in the 1980s. In 1991, Weitzer declared that the movement had failed based on COYOTE’s failure to initiate large scale legal change, e.g., legalization or decriminalization of the sale of sex on a national level. Noting a lack of popular support, third party alliances, and an inability to “alter conventional attitudes or convince authorities of the need for decriminalization,” Weitzer contends that the movement failed from a “poverty of moral, material, and human capital” (Weitzer, 1991:24).

Then in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a resurgence of sex worker rights organizing began, largely initiated by a core wave of new activists who were inspired by and supported by older activists like Carol Leigh. The by-and-for-sex-workers healthcare and social service center, the St. James Infirmary, was established in 1999 in San Francisco as a collaboration between COYOTE (of which Carol Leigh was the head of at the time) and the Exotic Dancers Alliance (which itself was established in 1993). Norma Jean Almodovar, who became an escort after

leaving the police force, founded the International Sex Worker Foundation for Art, Culture and Education (ISWFACE) in 1997.⁶ The Sex Workers Art Show, a nationally touring showcase of art in a range of mediums (paintings, written word, burlesque, performance art, etc.), ran from 1999 to 2009. They often stopped at college campuses, presenting to thousands of students over the ten year span. Carol Leigh founded the San Francisco Sex Worker Film and Arts Festival in 1999, and it is still active today as a showcase for a variety of art and performances by sex workers.

In 2003, Robyn Few founded the Sex Workers Outreach Project-USA (SWOP-USA), modeling itself on SWOP Australia. As she said in a 2011 video interview, “SWOP was founded because there was nothing else!”⁷

Because at the time there was no social justice network for sex workers, I mean, at all. There were hints of them, there were...there were still even shadows of them, but they were no more. And as I went to look for Margo St. James, and Carol Leigh and COYOTE, and the old organizations, and the women who had done of all the uprising and bringing attention to sex worker rights issues in the '70s, [I] found that the strategies and the ways things had become in the 2000s were quite different.

Robyn wanted to network sex workers together, provide support services and outreach efforts in addition to engaging in political advocacy. There are currently dozens of SWOP chapters across the country at city, state, and regional levels. When Robyn passed away in 2012 from cancer, many sex worker rights activists and organizations publicly grieved. The Best Practices Policy Project posted about the role Robyn played in the movement on their website:

Robyn and a circle of colleagues re-booted the struggle for sex worker rights in the United States in the mid-2000s by creating a way for sex workers and allies to organize locally via SWOP chapters and be connected by a national network. . . Robyn was a visionary, a wonderful spirit, creative, beautiful and immensely talented. She created a special bond with so many of us in the movements for the rights of people in the sex trade and with our children.⁸

There were two attempts to decriminalize prostitution in the early 2000s. In 2004, SWOP put Measure Q, a local ballot initiative to decriminalize prostitution in Berkeley, California.⁹ In 2008 Robyn Few and Maxine Doogan put Prop K on the ballot to decriminalize sexual labor in San Francisco, California. Both of these efforts did not pass, and failed to result in policy changes.

The national Best Practices Policy Project was founded in 2004 to provide analysis of media and policy pertinent to sex workers. Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive (HIPS) and Different Avenues were founded in D.C. in the early to mid-2000s as service and support organizations. Finally, the Desiree Alliance (DA) was founded in 2005. The DA describes itself as “a coalition of sex workers, health professionals, social scientists, professional sex educators, and their supporting networks working together for an improved understanding of the sex industry and its human, social and political impacts” (www.desireealliance.org). I go into more detail about the founding and organizational structure of the DA in Chapter Four.

The Politics of Prostitution Legislation

Scholars are struggling to make sense of a culture where there is more vociferous anti-prostitution sentiment and trafficking raids at the same time as an increasing “pornographication of everyday life” proliferates our culture (Brents and Sanders 2010; McNair 2002).¹⁰ Although countries around the world legislate sex work differently, from criminalization, to some forms of regulation (some criminal code), to decriminalization (removal of all criminal code), scholars find that there are “striking parallels and patterns at work in the lives of individual sex workers in such a variety of divergent cultural contexts” (Dewey and Kelly 2011: 4). Goodyear and Weitzer (2011) identify “two major trends in how governments recently have dealt with sex work: (1) intensified *criminalization* designed to eradicate it; and (2) *liberalization*

based on principles of harm reduction, labor rights, and civil regulation of commerce” (16, italics in the original).

On one hand, if we consider that the market operates under a “morality of contracts,” in which contracts between service providers and consumers are seen as paramount, we find that the formal regulation of the sale of sex reflects cultural norms around class, sex, and the market (Bernstein and Schaffner 2005, Zelizer 2005). For example, the development of high-end strip clubs and high-end brothels, and underground markets of expensive escorts, reveal some of the ways in which class informs the regulation of sexualized services:

In large U.S. cities, the seedy looking strip clubs and adult stores with blacked out windows are being displaced by much larger, more high-end sex shops and gentlemen’s clubs with bright signage and limo or car service. In Britain, “peep shows, erotic films, and lap dancing bars have become an accepted part of night-time, and to some extent, the day time entertainment industry.” In Antwerp, Belgium, a high-end “super brothel” has opened, decorated by super star architects and designers, and it caters to both a local and global leisure elite who want to consume this type of experience. In this context, even direct sexual services including indoor prostitution are becoming increasingly tolerated and visible. Prostitution is moving away from the streets and to the yellow pages and internet (Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck 2010: 36).

Although high classed businesses enjoy a level of legal and social acceptance, Dewey and Kelly (2011) find that:

Contemporary sex work is in many ways a microcosm of broader neoliberal practices, and it is hardly coincidental that sex trafficking has become a matter of international concern at the same time that large numbers of women (and men) are forced to seek work outside their home countries because of economic hardship (10).

Sex workers are subject to punitive legislation around the sale of sex and migration, as countries attempt to “[maintain] strict border control and limitations on citizenship” through anti-sex-trafficking policies and practices (Dewey and Kelly 2011: 10). The relationship between

citizenship, gender, and the regulation of sexual commerce reveals much about both globalized trafficking politics and the specific neoliberal U.S. political climate.

Prostitution legislation in the global North. Across the global North, many postindustrial countries began to relax their prostitution laws around the turn of the 21st century. Countries such as Canada, England, and Ireland find that the sale of sex itself is legal, though related activities like working together in a brothel or working in public are criminalized. Many countries have decriminalized or legalized prostitution in some form. It was decriminalized in New South Wales in 1996, New Zealand doing so in 2003, and the Western Australia Territory doing so in 2008. Other Australian territories are reviewing their prostitution laws. Sweden made it illegal to pay for sex in 1999, but not to be paid for it; this is known as an end-demand model. Norway adopted the end-demand model in 2000 as did Iceland in 2009. The Netherlands lifted their brothel ban in 2000 but criminalized other unauthorized forms of commercial sex. A recent Canadian lawsuit questions the legality of anti-prostitution statues for unfairly jeopardizing the health and safety of people who sell sex (*Bedford v. Canada 2010*).

While many North World countries make it legal to sell sex, there are laws that criminalize the *purchase* of sex such as end-demand policies aimed at discouraging clients, or laws that dictate the venue where sex work can take place; others have licensing requirements.¹¹ Scholars argue that no matter the model of decriminalization or legalization, policies are more about legitimating business than protecting workers. For example, outdoor sex work remains illegal in countries that regulate the sale of sex. A legalization model like Amsterdam's red light district limits where sex workers can work, and outlaws street-based sex work. Workers are not at the center of regulations:

[There are] no labor-emancipatory policies or policies against social exclusion or stigma, [...] no norms or guidelines concerning working conditions or relations, social security, or labor insurance. [...] In fact, sex workers have hardly been

informed about their new rights and the opportunities a legalized status could bring them. As always, the only authorities actively dealing with sex work are the tax office, the police, and the immigration authorities (Vanwesenbeeck 2001:277).

Interestingly, the Swedish end-demand model is gaining in popularity globally and with certain U.S. states that want to implement end-demand to decrease incidents of sex trafficking.

Prostitution legislation in the United States. Today, the U.S. outlaws the sale of sex entirely, a model known as criminalization.¹² By the 1920s, U.S. state governments either ended regulation or criminalized prostitution altogether, pressured by the federal government to do so.¹³ Sexualized entertainment like erotic dance and adult film is now closely regulated, targeted by police to catch violators, and heavily stigmatized. In 2000, the U.S. implemented the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* and imposed very punitive laws against trafficking, particularly sex trafficking.

Legislative bodies have long struggled to address market shifts that have incorporated sexual labor as an alternative mode of work (Bernstein 2001; Brents and Sanders 2010; Jackson 2011; Jakobsen and Kennedy 2005). Some pundits and supporters of sex worker rights argue for First Amendment protection. They argue that erotic dance specifically should be defined as *art* and protected by the First Amendment's right to free speech (Hanna 1998, 1999, 2005). Yet commercial speech is not of the highest order of speech protected under the First Amendment.¹⁴

On one hand, First Amendment court rulings have significantly expanded the legitimization of the sex industry, especially adult film (for examples, see Taormino, Penley, Shimizu, and Miller-Young 2013; Weitzer 2010a). Scholars further argue that the market and policy have struck a neoliberal balance for legal forms of sexual labor where "market growth relies on the gendered relationship between the law and the economy" (Jackson 2011:366). On

the other hand, the sale of sex itself remains wholly criminalized, despite shifting social attitudes and cultural norms (Attwood 2006, Brents and Saunders 2010). Therefore, arguing for freedom of expression under the First Amendment may be difficult in a punitive legal landscape. This legal landscape operates under the auspice of protecting communities, women, and girls from the potential negative consequences of sexual labor, rather than protecting the safety of people who engage in sexual labor.

Trafficking Victims Protection Act. When the federal *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* (TVPA) went into effect in 2000, trafficking rhetoric began to heavily influence how Americans view prostitution domestically and internationally (Agustín 2007, Weitzer 2007). Part of the reasoning behind the implementation of the TVPA was the sudden explosion (or perceived explosion) of sex trafficking as a result of globalizing trends such as the movement of people across borders, and increasing demands for sexualized leisure and tourism (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik 2011). Scholars find that policymakers and other interested parties often operate from a protectionist perspective, or what Weitzer (2010b) calls an “oppression paradigm” that argues sexual labor is one cause of sex trafficking. This perspective “has been used successfully by prohibitionist forces in their efforts to convince governments to pass punitive laws” and outlaw the sale of sex (Goodyear and Weitzer 2011: 28).

Intentionally or not, anti-trafficking rhetoric and laws can be, and often are, used as anti-immigration measures (Weitzer 2007). The promise of temporary visas, or “T-visas”, have proven to be quite difficult to get; unless a court persecutes someone for the crime of trafficking with the assistance of the T-visa applicant, that applicant will be deported or held in deportation facilities (Chapkis 2003). (In 2008, the U.S. government reported 791,568 apprehensions of undocumented immigrants, some are deported, others are held in deportation facilities.)¹⁵ Less

than a thousand T-visas have been granted between 2000, when the TVPA was implemented, and 2007 (Trafficking in Persons Report 2007). In this sense, the TVPA is used to restrict migration (Chapkis 2003).

Further, a “rescue industry” of non-profits, government agencies, researchers, and law enforcement rely on the idea of trafficking for funding and legitimacy (Agustín 2007). The “war on trafficking” produces a discourse of exploitation regardless of consent (Parrenas 2008).¹⁶ Trafficking efforts may be a form of “carceral feminism” where Evangelical Christians and some feminists work together, “turning away from direct engagement with the gender politics of the family and toward a focus on gender and sexual violence in the public sphere” (Bernstein 2010). And overall, scholars have found that international anti-trafficking efforts are not working (Pickup 1998, Sanghera 2005).

Hence fears of sex trafficking swamp discussions about prostitution as popular media and political discourses equate all prostitution with trafficking (Chapkis 2003), to the detriment of both the trafficking victim/survivor and the sex worker. The complexities of trafficking itself are often indiscernible in popular discussions around sex trafficking. The politics of migration, political and physical barriers to movement across borders, work, poverty, coercion, the meaning of citizenship, the consequences of focusing trafficking efforts on domestic trafficking of citizens across state or county lines—these issues are rarely discussed (Weitzer 2007).

Feminist interventions. Within the multi-faceted, long-established U.S. women’s movement, there is a huge emphasis on the intersection of women, violence, and capitalism. One major intersection is sexual labor. And this is where feminists disagree (Queen and Comella 2008, Vance 1984). They may use similar language—gender inequality, state oppression—but these concepts have very different ontological groundings depending on the researcher or activist. This junction of women, violence, and capitalism is not an easy one to theorize. With

sex work, there are complex questions of agency, racism, classism, poverty, “citizenism” (discrimination against someone based on their citizenship status, see Revilla and Rangel-Medina 2011), and gender oppression.

There is continuing disagreement between feminist scholars around issues of the sale of sex and sexualized services, and the meaning of gender equality for those currently in the sex industry and those affected by it. Some feminists argue sex work is work, it is not moral or immoral, but contextually and historically defined. Others say sex work is victimization, a pernicious form of the exploitation of women. Some scholars argue that most women in the sex industry are trafficked, and that the existence of the sex industry promotes trafficking and exploitation (Barry 1979; Farley 2004, 2007; Jeffreys 2002; Raymond 2004, 2005).

Over the past three decades a significant change has taken place in the feminist sex wars in the United States. The widely held feminist belief that sexual labor is a form of violence against women has changed shape from the anti-porn activism of the 1980s to the anti-sex trafficking policy, policing, and non-profit work of the 2000s.

Some anti-prostitution advocates argue that sex worker rights advocates glorify a sense of emancipation or liberation from sex work (see Ditmore 2010 for a response). While denying someone on the margins the right to express a sense of freedom is problematic, the larger point I take up in my study is how sex workers express their understandings of oppression, inequality, and discrimination, their demands for labor rights, and their experiences of organizing as sex worker rights activists. In so doing, one goal of this dissertation is to examine the impact of anti-prostitution and anti-trafficking ideology on sex worker rights organizing.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this study, I use certain terms that are historically situated, often borne of activist struggles. Thereby, they will be unfamiliar to some readers. First, the term “sex work” is a broad

umbrella term that includes criminalized and legalized labor from erotic dance to adult film to professional domination/submission work to the sale of sex. The U.S. sex worker community has established among themselves that sex work is a form of labor. In the 1970s, Carol Leigh coined the term “sex work” as a descriptive of the actual labor occurring to counter the terms “prostitute” and “prostitution.” Sex workers argued that “prostitute” is a legal term, one that stigmatizes, marginalizes, and harms sex workers by reifying criminalization. This is why the “prostitute’s rights movement” is now called the “sex worker rights movement.” I am aware that some activists even critique the use of the label “sex worker” because many people who engage in sexual labor do not take on that identity. This was even a subject of a 2010 DA conference workshop on community building and outreach. However, for clarity in this research I will use “sex work/er” or “someone who engages in sexual labor” interchangeably. I also use the phrase “sex worker rights activists,” often shortening it to “SWRA.”

Second, people of various gender identities engage in sexual commerce and participate in sex workers rights organizing. “Cisgender” refers to someone’s gender identity who identifies with the gender assigned to them at birth by a doctor; e.g., a cisgender woman. This is part of a larger dialogue to deconstruct the gender binary in how we speak. The term “transgender” is an umbrella term for all whose gender identity does not align with what was assigned to them at birth, and people may variously identify with masculine or feminine characteristics, and take on a label such as trans, transman or transwoman, or chose not to use “trans” as a prefix at all. Others may identify outside of the binary altogether, such as genderqueer people. “Cisgender” is a label that negates claims of a “normal gender” and recognizes the unearned social privilege of being cisgender. This means that pronouns are also lacking; I either use the preferred pronouns for trans activists, or I use “they,” “their,” and “them” as gender neutral pronouns, an accepted convention.¹⁷ Similarly, terms like “heteronormative” and “homonormative” refer to

assumptions and practices that reinforce normative sexual identity in practice and performance, and the necessary essentialist gender binary to achieve this.¹⁸

Finally, I use the phrase “criminalized labor” rather than “illegal labor” to illuminate the impact of criminalization as a process, and to highlight one of my central theoretical points about the shift of labor control to the criminal justice arena. I also do this so as to not label the work as “other” or “wrong.” This is an activist-academic re-framing of traditional ways of describing criminal activity.

I also use the terms “advocate” and “activist” interchangeably, although I recognize that some may take issue with this. I also refer to organizing, activism, and advocacy interchangeably. An ally is “a member of a dominant group in our society who works to dismantle any form of oppression from which she or he receives the benefit” (Ayvazian 2010: 684). For example, an ally could be a man who supports women’s rights, or a white person fighting against racism. Being an ally refers to an activist who recognizes their privileged positions around race, sexuality, etc., and attempts to mitigate that privilege by supporting the efforts of oppressed groups. There are many sex worker rights allies from the fields of academia and harm reduction that attend the Desiree Alliance conferences and present as part of the Academics and Policy Track or the Harm Reduction and Outreach Track.

ASSUMPTIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND SCOPE

My research is based on certain theoretical and methodological assumptions. First, this study is grounded in literature on the cultural study of sex work, not literature on sex work as a form of violence against women. Second, I assume that the participants in the study are knowledge creators who have the ability to reflect and comment on their lived experiences. I also assume that they will do so truthfully, in part based on my long-term involvement with the organization and existing activist relationships with many in the organization.

These both inform potential limitations of the study. By engaging as an academic ally—a feminist sociologist committed to social change—I both gained access to my participants and also risk a level of researcher bias. Within feminist research, this “bias” is often discussed as form of subjectivity whereby the researcher attempts to lessen power differences, and give voice to the participants without appropriating it (Olesen 2005). In Chapter Three, I go into more detail about issues of research ethics.

Further, the scope of my study is limited to this one organization at this one moment in time. I did not interview every leader of the DA, or every member organization leader. I did not engage with oppositional advocacy efforts or interview politicians. This limits the scope of my study to the perceptions, experiences, and beliefs of sex worker activists themselves.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This project examines the sex worker rights movement to gain insight into the changing dynamics of labor organizing, especially the relationship between criminalization and work. I explore the organization and strategies of the Desiree Alliance, the largest sex worker organization in the United States, for evidence of social movement unionism.

Chapter Two outlines the relevant literature around new forms of worker organizing—particularly social movement unionism (also known as alternative worker organizing), immigrant worker centers, sex worker organizing, and sexual rights/sexual citizenship. I lay out the key differences between traditional labor unions and non-traditional labor organizing efforts, as exemplified by social movement unionism. I also lay out the questions left unanswered by social movement unionism research. Chapter Three explains the methodological approach and data analysis used in my ethnography. As mentioned above, I also discuss the ethical considerations of studying a marginalized community.

Chapter Four examines in detail the development and organizational structure of the Desiree Alliance (DA). The Desiree Alliance has emerged as the main network of sex worker rights organizations in the country. I show that it has similar organizational characteristics to social movement unionism, but does not fit perfectly into the model. The Desiree Alliance is a decentralized network with no formal, physical space except the biennial conference. It has a loose, non-dues based membership structure. The DA is primarily oriented toward providing services to members rather than traditional union efforts like collective bargaining with an employer. Though the DA does not have physical space, member organizations act as “drop in” centers where sex workers can receive information around legal aid, healthcare, self-care, and support, while the conference provides additional training, networking, and peer-to-peer business support. In this way, this chapter demonstrates how the DA organizational structure, including membership and leadership, mirror certain aspects of social movement unionism while also challenging our contemporary conceptions of what counts as a worker rights organization.

Chapter Five examines one of two key organizational goals of Desiree Alliance—community building. The decentralized nature of contingent work, the criminalized status of sex work, and the ongoing stigma resulting from gender and sexual discrimination means that a primary goal for sex workers is to battle internalized stigma and isolation. Through activist trainings and worker empowerment workshops, the DA fosters a politicized sex worker identity. Activist development trainings function as a form of internal identity work—sex workers learn to articulate the meaning and value of their labor to a wider audience. I find that engaging in public educational outreach through media and art is both a key goal of the DA and a form of identity development. Further, sex workers engage in peer-to-peer business support and development in spite of the criminalized or marginalized nature of their labor. In a larger sense, labor support

is not typical of identity movements and is more characteristic of a form of labor rights for low-wage contingent workers. This is often a characteristic of social movement unionism; worker centers for undocumented immigrants, for example, offer assistance to people who work in the U.S. and yet are not given protections to do so. Worker centers teach workers how to advocate for themselves and in so doing, build community out their marginalized status. Sex workers are similarly building community out of criminalization.

Chapter Six examines the second key organizational goal of the Desiree Alliance, political advocacy. In this chapter, I identify three main characteristics of DA member activities around political advocacy. First, political advocacy is very diffuse and independently undertaken. DA leadership and member organizations engage in political advocacy with little formal collaboration or permission from each other. Second, the state has replaced the workplace as a target in the battle for rights, As a result of the decentralized nature of contingent labor, collective bargaining for a contract, official membership drives, strikes all disappear as key elements of the labor movement. Governments are the gate-keepers of safety and the right to work. In this sense, the Desiree Alliance operates as a hybrid of labor and social movement political advocacy efforts (Fine 2006b). Third, I explore the impact of criminalization on sex workers political participation, including attempts to influence anti-trafficking strategies that increasingly criminalize sexual labor. Fourth, I find that sex worker rights political strategies fall into one of two categories: demands for labor rights and protections for people in the sex industry, or demands for protections for people outside the sex industry. I argue that the latter is the more successful strategy because it aligns with anti-trafficking ideology, building what I call “protectionist politics.” Sex workers are fighting criminalizing statutes as a way to gain labor protections, or at least, the right to argue for labor rights. They are fighting for the right to work and the right to work safely.

I conclude with a discussion in Chapter Seven of the shortcomings of social movement unionism, and how the study of a sex worker organizing can help fill the gaps in the literature, and offer new directions for future research on low-wage, contingent worker organizing. First, I conclude that social movement unionism has not mapped how the terrain for labor rights is fought in the criminal justice arena. Second, I argue that my research provides evidence of how the criminal justice system has become a contemporary form of labor control that shapes worker organizing today. Social movement unionism literature is beginning to articulate the meaning and consequences of criminalizing low wage contingent workers. I argue that criminalizing sex work keeps workers focused on fighting criminality, and effectively shuts out attempts to fight for health and safety measures. The U.S. government's protectionist, carceral stance appears to be a form of labor control through increasing criminalization of prostitution under the guise of anti-sex trafficking advocacy.

Further, worker development and community building are primary goals of the DA precisely because sex workers are stigmatized and criminalized. The process of identity building also informs how sex worker rights activists construct their counter-stories when in engaging in public educational outreach. These counter-stories challenge the hegemony of policy and media constructions of sex workers as deviants, criminals, and victims. Here, I also question the very label that scholars use to identify this form of worker organizing. Sociologists refer to "social movement unionism," and others refer to "alternative worker organizing," in ways that are perhaps outdated (references to unionizing) and othering—if contingent work is the new norm, than this form of organizing is anything but "alternative."

Finally, I argue that sex worker rights political advocacy will only be partially successful—a human rights framework does not resonate with the current protectionist political climate in

the United States. Denied basic citizenship rights, sex workers continue to engage in organizing efforts in ways that may be less visible to a general public.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTS OF NEW LABOR ORGANIZING FORMS

This chapter reviews literature on social movement unionism and sex worker rights activism. I want to connect the study of sexual labor and low wage, contingent labor organizing to bridge the theoretical gap between the cultural study of sex work and sociological studies of work and organizing. This is particularly salient as feminists still disagree on whether sex work can be considered work at all (Jeffreys 2009, Stark and Whisnant 2004, Vance 1984).¹⁹

First, I will briefly discuss the changing workforce in the new economy as new race, class, and gender dynamics have arisen with the dominance of a contingent workforce, then move into a discussion of nontraditional worker organizing efforts. I focus on organizing efforts of part-time and independent workers in jobs like domestic work and day labor. I outline the organizational model, membership, strategies, and targets of what scholars variously call “social movement unionism,” or SMU, (see Walsh 2012 for an overview of sociological literature on SMUs) or “alternative worker organizing” (Rosenfeld 2006). I have chosen to use the term SMU throughout this research project for clarity. I draw largely from discussions of immigrant worker centers as an example of social movement unionism due to their emphasis on citizenship, criminality, and worker rights. I then discuss research on sex work and on sex worker rights organizing to do the same. I also map the relationship between work and citizenship as a mobilizing grievance and a goal within social movement unionism. I conclude with a discussion of how understanding sex worker rights as social movement unionism illuminates the contentious meaning of work for those in an underground economy and the social location of sex workers today.

CONTINGENT WORK

Labor organizing is a product of both the way that the economy is organized, and of the politics surrounding labor and labor regulations. In a post-industrial economy, service and leisure industries have overtaken factory jobs (Herzenberg, Alic, and Wial 2000; Kalleberg 2011).²⁰ The contemporary U.S. labor force is largely decentralized, flexibly employed, and do-it-yourself as a consequence of thirty years of neoliberal deregulation (Arnold and Bongiovi 2013; Appelbaum and Batt 1994; Pedulla 2011; Smith 2001). David Harvey (1990) refers to this as the flexible economy, an economic model that relies on a flexible, temporary workforce who typically earn low wages and receive few to no benefits.

As such, contingent employment is the new norm. Contingent work is any work that is temporary, and often part-time, where workers may be independently contracted or paid under the table. There are no worker incentives from a business; responsibilities of health, saving, and safety lie with the worker, not an owner or corporation. It is also important to note that contingent employment varies by class. There are “highly skilled technical professionals” (Kunda, Barley, and Evans 2002) and people who work temp jobs in offices (Henson 1996; Rogers 2000). There are also millions of contingent workers engaging in a range of low-wage contingent jobs—domestic workers, agricultural workers picking fruits and vegetables on U.S. farms, day laborers, construction workers, restaurant dishwashers and line cooks—all with no contracts, with no wage minimum or guarantee of payment (Barker and Christensen 1998; Kalleberg 2011; Kalleberg, Reskin and Hudson 2000; Middleton 1999).

The broadness of the term “contingent labor” substantiates the dramatic shifts in the U.S. labor market. “Industrial shifts, declining unionization, and the rise of contingent labor arrangements have fundamentally altered employment relations in America” since the 1980s (Pedulla 2011: 2). Today’s contingent workers do not have a Human Resources division to file

claims with, no manager to go to. Businesses do not need loyal workers anymore, they need flexible workers (Harvey 1990).

The politics of this new form of labor brings up new issues of classism, racism, sexism, and discrimination based on citizenship status (a.k.a. citizenism). Contingent workers in low-wage industries are not the predominantly white labor force of the past, but a diverse group of women, people of color, and immigrants. Contingent workers are working in what scholars variously call “underground,” “shadow,” or “grey” economies or “unregulated work” (Beckert, and Wehinger 2012; Elgin and Oztunali 2012; DeFilippis, Martin, Bernhardt, and McGrath 2009; Johnson, Kaufmann, and Zoido-Lobaton 1998; Rosen and Venkatesh 2008; Venkatesh 2006). Underground economies, as I will refer to them, are built on industries that are deemed inappropriate like selling drugs or sex, or are low-wage jobs largely staffed by undocumented workers (DeFilippis, Martin, Bernhardt, and McGrath 2009; Fine 2006a, 2006b; Rosen and Venkatesh 2008; Venkatesh 2006). Work in underground economies may be in part or wholly criminalized, often socially marginalized, with varying levels of safety, job security, and wage payment. Commercial sex is a burgeoning form of an underground leisure service that is highly stigmatized and criminalized (Bernstein 2007; Brents and Sanders 2010; Kamala and Kempadoo 1998, 2011; Sanders 2005; Weitzer 2010).²¹

Formal and organized workers, even if undocumented immigrants working in a meat packing plant, face different issues than informal and contingent workers like day laborers or sex workers. For low wage contingent workers today, there are often multiple worksites, and multiple bosses, making it much harder for a union to sign up large numbers of people. Without large numbers, there is no collective bargaining power (Clawson 2003, Givan 2007). Many scholars of consumer capitalism have documented the disappearance of the traditional

workplace with the rise of contingent labor. People work from home or have many “workplaces,” resulting in little contact with other workers.

At the beginning of the 21st century, labor organizing may seem to be a central need of low-wage workers who face unsafe working conditions, who are uncertain of when they may work next, who are often paid below minimum wage, or who may simply not get paid at all. Social scientists continue to try and understand the relationship between the government and contingent labor, partially through studies of how contingent workers are organizing. Workers turn to state and local governments for labor protections through the implementation and enforcement of safety regulations and wage payment (Gordon 2005, Milkman 2006). But beyond this, immigrant workers also turn to the federal government for citizenship rights, as a prerequisite for being able to fully demand and access labor rights (Iskander 2007).

While unions focus on “more organizable” workers in industry jobs, a particular form of social movement unionism has emerged—workers centers—for domestic workers, lawn maintenance, day laborers, and others who are deemed “less organizable” because of the underground or informal nature of their work. Contingent, low-wage laborers are deemed “less organizable” due to the impermanency of their work and worker identity (Gordon 2005, Gleeson 2010). Yet as Gordon’s (2005) research on an immigrant worker’s center showed, “the absence of unions in the worst jobs does not mean an absence of organizing” (281).

Further, undocumented immigrants engage protest the nation-state demanding paths to citizenship. Although this may not appear to be labor related on the surface, the right to work is intertwined with civic inclusion and the right to citizenship (Iskander 2007). Overall, compared to research on unions in centralized workplaces, informal labor organizing and organizing of underground economies is understudied (Iskander 2007, Venkatesh 2006). What exists largely

examines the organizing of undocumented and documented immigrant workers, and to a smaller extent, African American workers, in a range of industries (Fine 2006a, 2006b).

THE CHANGING FACE OF LABOR ORGANIZING

The Role of Unions

Unions have been the traditional form of labor organizing in a mass production economy (Fantasia and Voss 2004, Clawson and Clawson 1999). They are a collective space for workers in manufacturing, hotel, and service jobs. Members are signed up at the workplace, placing the loci of organizing on the job rather than outside of it. Membership is formalized through dues, newsletters, and member participation in union committees and voting. Union strategies focus on securing increased and/or stable wages, safe working conditions, and employer accountability. Unions target individual businesses and corporations with collective actions like strikes and litigation, and sometimes target the state or federal government. A union's collective bargaining power is the only way that workers can be fully represented and exercise power (Clawson 2003, Givan 2007). Without a large membership, this power fades.

The traditional union model is a business union model (Fantasia and Voss 2004, Walsh 2012). This approach to organizing workers is "characterized as formal, hierarchical, limited, undemocratic, reactive, and conventional (Fantasia and Voss 2004; Voss and Sherman 2000)" (Walsh 2012: 192). In the latter part of the 20th century, traditional unions became "narrow, bureaucratic, and insular. . .with elected leaders, paid staff, buildings and property, money in the bank" (Clawson 2003: 14). This, combined with neoliberal deregulation and the changing dynamics of the workforce, is partially responsible for the decline in labor union power (Fantasia and Voss 2004).

Scholars note that labor union participation and power continue to decline in the post-industrial era for a variety of reasons, from increased corporate resistance and anti-union

legislation, to labor diversity, to the fragmented and decentralized nature of work today (Carson 2010; Mayer and Roth 1995; Silver 2003; Sullivan 2010; Western 1995).²² Additionally, internal issues of racism and sexism within unions themselves also impacted their ability to organize an increasingly diverse workforce. This may have led unions to be somewhat irrelevant or unresponsive to the needs of women and people of color. Clawson and Clawson (2003) note that “the flawed records of unions vis a vis women and racial minorities is reflected not only in failures of organizing, but by an internal reluctance or inability to address issues raised by the feminist and civil rights movements” (98). Concerns about experiences of racism and sexism at work, and issues of family and childcare, largely went unaddressed by unions. Further, historically, “many unions are dominated by a macho style” that discourages women’s participation (Clawson 2003: 79).

New Forms of Worker Organizing

Yet scholars have also noted that the growth of an economy of flexible accumulation (Harvey 1990), beyond traditional factory work and long-term employment, had led groups of semi-autonomous, independent workers to re-structure and re-think worker rights and resistance strategies (Clawson 2003, Walsh 2012). Some scholars conclude that unions are not yet obsolete, and, since the 1990s, have changed shape to meet the new challenges faced by workers in a post-industrial economy and neoliberal political landscape (Clawson 2003). Others point out that, despite the changing face of labor unions, the “less organizable” workers like day laborers are still left out. Hence alternatives to unions have arisen along with the growth of service work and contingent labor.

In general, studies find that the focus of worker activism has shifted: whereas unions organize formal labor, alternative forms of organizing have evolved for contingent workers, who are often in underground economies (Fine 2006a, 2006b; Gordon 2005; Iskander 2007). For

example, Carty (2006) studied a coalition between student activists and sweatshop worker unions. Students organized anti-sweatshop campaigns against their campus bookstores, in coalition with unions. Clawson (2003) argues that collaborating with other organizations outside of labor is central to the success of new forms of worker organizing. He finds that “fusion with other movements” is paramount:

In the 1960s, the labor movement was largely missing when a set of new movements arose to fight for racial equality, women’s liberation, student empowerment, anti-intervention, environmental protection, gay and lesbian liberation, and much more. The failure of labor and those movements to connect weakened both labor and those movements. . . Labor lost a chance to reinvigorate itself and to make advances on issues central to workers lives. . . The new social movements, all too often, based themselves primarily on the affluent (Clawson 2003: 13-14).

Clawson (2003) argues that new forms of labor are ripe for a creative re-awakening of worker organizing.

Also, U.S. unions have begun to embrace immigrants’ rights. In the process of representing immigrant workers in traditional factory jobs, some unions have engaged with immigrant rights struggles for citizenship as “unions are now essential as coalition partners as much as they are movement leaders, as exemplified in the recent mass mobilization for immigrants’ rights” (Givan 2007: 849; see also Milkman 2006). Unions helped organize the recent wave of immigrant rights marches across the country. This is quite a shift considering the history of racism and sexism in union organizing (Gordon 2005).

Sociologists tend to refer to these new forms of organizing as “social movement unionism;” while some scholars and labor activists refer to this as “alternative worker organizing” (Nissen 2003, Walsh 2012, Hyde 2005). Both social movement unionism (SMU) and alternative worker organizing (AWO) are similarly characterized as a hybrid of social movement and labor that empower workers, democratize membership, foster local grassroots leadership,

and focus on community. Social movement unionism is an alternative to the traditional labor union (see *Table 2* for a comparison). For all intents and purposes, the two terms, SMU and AWO, are describing the same phenomenon.

For example, AWOs are described as “new organizations that advocate for working people. . .The common feature that sets AWOs apart from traditional labor unions is that they function more like social movements than traditional unions” (Hyde 2005: 385). SMUs are similarly described as “a particular form of labor organizing that differs from the ‘more traditional collective bargaining strategies’ (Almedia 2008: 166)” (Walsh 2012: 194). An SMU incorporates elements of human rights, social justice, and community, expanding the meaning and foci of labor rights (Clawson 2003, Fantasia and Voss 2004, Waterman 1988). Both embody characteristics of a social movement by engaging in identity politics in addition to worker empowerment, peer-to-peer labor support between workers, and sometimes educational outreach or political advocacy. Strategies may focus externally on social change, or internally on peer-to-peer support. Local organizations or centers offer services, support, advocacy, socializing, leadership training, and education from know-your-rights to civic engagement (Walsh 2012).

Social movement unionism can refer to everything from middle class professionals and office workers organizing (Henson 1996; Kunda, Barley, and Evans 2002; Rogers 2000), to college students boycotting their college bookstore for using sweatshop labor (Carty 2006), to undocumented immigrant worker organizing efforts (Fine 2006b, Gordon 2005, Milkman 2005). Social movement unionism perhaps can best be thought of as an umbrella term for various new forms of organizing that have appeared among workers who are diverse in terms of class, race, and gender, and whose labor, though often contingent and independent, ranges from white collar to blue collar.

Table 2: A comparison of key characteristics of social movement unionism and labor unions

	Social movement unionism (e.g., worker centers)	Labor unions (e.g., AFL-CIO)
Organizational structure	Internally democratic structure; leadership development	Hierarchical leadership, static structure
Membership	Small, active membership core; diffuse membership process (through participation)	Large membership; formal process to join, often dues required
Work/ers	Contingent work, no centralized workplace/ multiple worksites; diverse workforce	Focus on one workplace or industry, increasingly diverse workforce
Efforts	Community building and worker development; collective identity is central. Sometimes target workplace with boycotts, legal pressure. Sometimes political advocacy.	Bound by <i>National Labor Relations Act</i> ; secure contracts, engage in collective bargaining and strikes. Target employers. Political advocacy.

SMU or AWO literature both refer to the rise of immigrant worker centers, and to collaborative efforts between a worker rights organization and social movement organizations around women’s rights, immigrant rights, or civil rights (Fine 2006a, 2006b; Hyde 2005, Walsh 2012). For clarity, I will use the sociological term “social movement unionism,” though I recognize that many scholars and activists are familiar with the other non-sociological term. In the next section, I narrow my focus to new forms of organizing as exemplified by worker centers, and not, for example, the ways in which established unions like the AFL-CIO are changing shape. I focus on worker centers because of their growth in the last two decades, and because they cater to criminalized and contingent workers, undocumented immigrants. In so doing, worker centers also address issues of citizenship.

Worker Centers

Worker centers are “community-based mediating institutions that provide support to low-wage workers,” often undocumented immigrant workers in contingent jobs (Fine 2006b: 2). Worker centers have emerged as a successful and established alternative to union organizing, a mixture of union strategies, social movement advocacy, and an identity politics.²³ Worker centers provide a range of support, education, advocacy, legal aid, and in some cases, political advocacy. In the U.S., worker centers exploded “from five centers in 1992 to at least 139 in over 80 U.S. cities, towns, and rural areas across 32 states” in 2005 (Fine 2006a:421). Their strategies target employers and sometimes, local or state governments. Who is a member of a worker center, what it means to be a member, and paths to leadership, differ from traditional unions.

Janice Fine’s (2006) comprehensive survey of the U.S. worker center movement finds that there is a new form of labor organizing in the U.S., amidst a changing landscape of labor dynamics. She discusses the different worker center strategies, their emphasis on leadership trainings, and provision of legal clinics for undocumented, contingent workers in underground economies.

Organizational model. Organizationally, worker centers vary. What they have in common is a focus on local worker support; worker centers operate at the city and/or state level. They do not operate on or even near a work site as the workers may come from any number of businesses, like a restaurant, or temporary work, like yard maintenance in suburban neighborhoods. The leadership may rent or borrow space to meet. Worker centers are by-and-for community organizations that offer services, advocacy, activist development, and sometimes, organizing (Fine 2006a, 2006b). This may include everything from legal clinics to access to healthcare and educational services, from worker development and language classes, to civic engagement and leadership trainings.

In general, worker centers are loosely organized and somewhat informal, often operating as a legal clinic. This is why Fine's (2006b) comprehensive study of the emergence and operations of worker centers calls them "hybrids" that provide a range of services and opportunities, unlike traditional unions. So far, U.S. worker centers are not networked with each other, there is no umbrella organization that unites them. However, those in geographic proximity with each other will sometimes work together on an action or issue.

Similar to unions, a key point is that a politicized consciousness-raising comes *from* participation in an organization or movement, not as a prerequisite to it (Fine 2006b, Gordon 2005, Milkman 2006). Mobilization, movement maintenance, and political advocacy are processes that engender a critical consciousness.²⁴ Workers develop an awareness of social injustice, and learn how structural barriers are related. This sometimes leads to a vested interest in collective action.

Organizational goals. Community-led and community-based worker centers have a range of organizational goals, from developing workers skills to negotiating for pay or safety on the job, to developing workers skills as activists and community organizers. Worker centers help workers press unpaid wages claims, organize around new wage ordinances, find permanent space for day laborers to gather, and organize around labor and immigration bills. Therefore worker centers may target the state or local government, *or* a business. There may be just a few people with a grievance against a particular workplace or employer, not a mass of workers with a grievance against a large business as one would find with a union.

One key organizational goal is worker development. Knowing you have rights and being able to exercise them are two different things: undocumented workers are often unable to leverage their knowledge of labor rights without fear of losing their jobs; they were harassed as they waited in public spaces to get work. The Workplace Project legal clinic in Long Island added

educational courses to the worker rights courses. Workers then organized collective actions because there was an “increasing number of situations where a lawyer’s intervention could do little without a broader strategy” (Gordon 2005: 79). This could take the form of a collective action or a worker empowerment action. As an example of the latter, day laborers networked through a worker center organized a pay initiative. They created a worker-led committee and decided to ask for a certain pay rate, one that they decided on together, and encouraged each other to not accept anything lower (Gordon 2005). They then reached out to others at nearby locations to do the same.

Led by the workers themselves, worker centers sometimes organize a boycott against a business, like a restaurant that withholds pay or overtime for back-of-the-restaurant workers. Sometimes the workers are encouraged to go speak with the employer, and worker centers teach them how to negotiate on their own behalf. Other times, the worker center does so for them. Worker centers may target government agencies charged with ensuring business labor law compliance, or offer job-related services to workers. Alternatively, worker centers may be devoid of political advocacy altogether and focus solely on services, worker rights trainings, and legal aid.

For example, the Workplace Project brought unpaid wage claims to the state of New York Department of Labor. Though they did not get compensation, they were successful in organizing a campaign to get an unpaid wage bill passed, “the most far-reaching state wage-enforcement legislation in the country” (Gordon 2005:3). Even though many in the organization were undocumented and could not vote, they reached out to the immigrant community, business community, and Republican legislators less likely to sign on, and collaborated with two other local workers’ centers to garner support for the legislation. Gordon (2005) calls undocumented political activism “noncitizenship citizenship:” undocumented immigrants—who

cannot vote—organizing a political campaign to get the state legislature to pass a wage bill ensuring unpaid wages are remunerated.

However, collective actions are impacted by citizenship status. Even if the organizational goal is, say, formalizing a guaranteed wage payment, undocumented workers face other issues that impact their ability to fully access any labor rights wins:

While undocumented workers are ‘employees’ within the meaning of the National Labor Relations Act, their protections under the law are virtually meaningless. . . .They have no real protection from employer retaliation. . . .In some circumstances, they can collect unpaid wages or overtime if they avoid deportation or are willing to remain in this country long enough to allow the legal proceedings to be completed. (Rosenfeld 2006: 480).

Therefore, political efforts to gain worker rights are intertwined with the need for citizenship rights. Even though undocumented immigrants have rights under the law, the lack of citizenship shapes the nature of their labor, their worker identity, and worker organizing strategies.

In his review essay of research on worker centers, legal scholar David Rosenfeld summarizes the outcomes of worker center’s political strategies, arguing that:

In some cases, worker centers have effectively mobilized and lobbied to pass beneficial legislation. Some employers probably correct abuses fearing that workers will end up obtaining the assistance of the worker center. It is difficult to measure worker centers’ impact as there are few comprehensive studies of the effectiveness of worker centers (Rosenfeld 2006: 479).

The indirect impact of a worker center may be one of the most powerful outcomes, but we have yet to come up with a way to assess it.

Further, legal scholars are concerned about laws that regulate labor organizing. Currently, worker centers lay outside the prevue of the National Labor Relations Act (NRLA), which traditional unions are bound by. The NLRA was passed in 1935:

To protect the rights of employees and employers, to encourage collective bargaining, and to curtail certain private sector labor

and management practices, which can harm the general welfare of workers, businesses and the U.S. economy.²⁵

It formally recognized unions and imbued unions with certain rights, like the right to collectively bargain, providing “workers a voice both in the workplace as well as in the political arena” (Walsh 2012: 193). Legal scholars point out that if worker centers become more professionalized—bargaining with employers more regularly for back pay, rates of pay, work conditions, or other related grievances—this would change their status under the law. They would then be considered a “labor organization” and therefore fall under the auspices of the National Labor Relations Act (Rosenfeld 2006, Naduris-Weissman 2009). This may act as a barrier to the growth of worker centers, and may limit their ability to effect change in the workplace for low-wage workers. For example, a recognized union has to follow certain rules and cannot strike for a set amount of time—yet a worker organization has the grassroots flexibility to organize any of a number of collective actions without government oversight.

Further, worker centers have shown little interest in becoming full-fledged, traditional labor organizations. Instead they are dedicated to worker empowerment through a multifaceted approach to worker organizing that includes leadership trainings, worker rights trainings, peer-to-peer worker support, healthcare, collective actions by workers, and sometimes, civic engagement training. As a hybrid model for low-wage, contingent workers, worker centers complicate the meaning of “labor organizing.”

Leadership. The flexible organizational structure of worker centers allows them to change to meet the needs of the workers. As leaders are developed within the workers who use the center, the dynamics of leadership also change (Fine 2006a, 2006b; Gordon 2005). Leadership trainings, both informal and formal, politicize workers who otherwise came seeking assistance: “Workers who move through the centers become organizers and leaders. The centers have a moral impact by exposing the problems of low wage workers” (Rosenfeld 2006:

479). Fine (2006b) concludes that “the greatest strengths of worker centers includ[e] their successful leadership development programs and their success in winning improvements in the employment situations of low wage workers” (248). In a sense, leadership development is another organizational goal.

For example, as a lawyer, Gordon (2005) founded a worker center, the Workplace Project, in Long Island, New York mainly as a legal clinic. In her book, she documents how it “became a worker-led center” (78, emphasis in the original) which began to offer a range of worker support and actions. Leadership trainings develop new leaders from within the worker center after it has been established, meaning that leadership changes shape and direction over time (Gordon 2005). This also leads to a fairly democratic leadership structure, as new leaders are consistently emerging from leadership trainings.

Membership. Worker centers engage with workers in an underground economy that are often outside of or ignored by government labor oversight (Fine 2006a, 2006b; Gleeson 2010; Gordon 2005). Instead the workers are targeted for arrest or deportation by other government agencies like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE is an investigative office under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security).²⁶ Worker centers are traditionally spaces for undocumented immigrants, though some cater to African-American workers (Fine 2006b). In this sense, they are organized around both type of labor and identity—contingent labor—and here, racial or ethnic identity. Jennifer Gordon (2005) provides an in-depth case study of the “underground suburban economy” of immigrant workers: the day laborers, lawn maintenance, and home workers that have no formal employer except an individual or a shell company, with long hours, low or no pay, and unsafe working conditions.²⁷

Undocumented workers have fewer protections under the law, though they are covered by the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). The impact of criminalizing citizenship status negatively affects their rights as workers and their ability to engage in collective actions:

Undocumented workers may face a greater conundrum in the process of claims making. Undocumented workers are granted economic membership but not formal recognition as full civic members in the polity. They are not legally permitted to reside here, regardless of the rights and protections that federal, state, and local governments choose to extend to them (Gleeson 2010: 592).

Undocumented workers' citizenship status hinders their ability to benefit from worker advocacy. Therefore, worker center members are a uniquely marginalized worker, one who faces additional discrimination and oppression based on their citizenship status.

While it is easy to assess *who* uses the worker centers, sometimes it is more difficult to gauge the actual numbers of worker center members. The centers are an informal space where workers can drop in, get advice or referrals for legal aid, healthcare, or employment negotiation, and then leave. They can attend a class or workshop, and then go back out and work. For Gordon's Workplace Project, those who stayed to train and organize others became members: "graduates of the workers' rights course began to coalesce into a membership" (82). There were about 500 members, a large pool, with around ten to twenty percent active at any one time. This core of worker-activists would lead organizing initiatives, collective actions, and classes/trainings. Over a few year period, the center taught thousands of immigrants about their rights on the job. The impact of the worker center went beyond the active core membership.

Instead of a union with a large and countable membership base, worker centers are smaller organizations. This is partially because their hybrid approach relies on a politicized active core. And on one hand, contingent labor organizing does not require a critical mass of bodies to press demands through strikes and worker power as there is not one corporation to target.

Rather, worker centers rely on targeted actions by a core of workers-turned-activists (Fine 2006a, 2006b). On the other hand, can relatively small memberships and little financial stability sustain worker centers? Scholars question the ability of a small number of constituents to argue for political or legal change (Fine 2006a, 2006b).

Work and citizenship. Considering that many low-wage contingent workers are immigrants and often undocumented, worker centers also address discrimination based on citizenship. This can vary from educating undocumented workers about the rights that they do have under the law, to actually engaging in political advocacy for paths to citizenship. According to Fine (2006b), immigration policy weakens immigrants' labor market position—this may seem obvious, but the connection between citizenship and work underscores the lack of government interest or investment.

Undocumented immigrants lack of civic legitimacy impacts their work and worker rights strategies. Iskander (2007) concludes that the struggle for citizenship is implicitly a struggle for worker rights precisely because undocumented immigrants are limited to work in the underground economy. This research exemplifies why some activists and scholars consider low-wage contingent workers to be un-organizable—these workers are dealing with more than labor violations.

Gleeson (2010) explored worker identity through a case study of documented and undocumented immigrants working in two cities in the United States (563). She did so to understand “how undocumented status may shape the legal consciousness of workers.” In this way, she assessed the individual-level barriers to organizing immigrant workers. Gleeson (2010) identifies three ways that an undocumented status affects workers:

(1) by intensifying this aversion to conflict due to not only a fear of job loss but also the looming risk of discovery and deportation, (2) by injecting substantial uncertainty into life in the United States, which in turn frames current work

experiences as temporary and endurable; and (3) by placing *work* at the center of an undocumented worker's sense of belonging, thus rendering claims making antithetical to what becomes valorized as an extreme work ethic (594, italics in the original).

Undocumented immigrants, as a marginalized labor pool, often endure unfair and oppressive labor experiences. Instead of arguing that undocumented workers do not speak up because they are unaware of their rights under the law, Gleeson argues that the threat of deportation and job loss actually engenders a sense of pride in their ability to manage harsh working conditions. The impermanency of their work is shadowed by the potential impermanency of their life in the United States.

Therefore, engaging in know-your-rights trainings for contingent workers is not enough. This is why worker centers engage in additional forms of worker empowerment training and identity building efforts. Overall, the experiences of undocumented workers reflect a form of citizenism: undocumented workers are facing discrimination and oppression exactly because they lack U.S. citizenship status (Revilla and Rangel-Medina 2011).

In this sense, citizenship and labor are intertwined. Iskander (2007) studied how undocumented immigrant garment district worker in Paris protested against the government for refusing them the right to citizenship. She argues that because underground economies are, by their nature, outside of mainstream discussion of work and worker rights, politicians and researchers often overlook the ways in which demands for citizenship are largely demands for the right to work:

Examining protests that on their surface do not appear as labor mobilization can reveal erosions of worker power and changes in working conditions that might otherwise be invisible because the employment relationships in which they are embedded are often informal, and thus hidden from regulatory view (Iskander 2007: 310).

Iskander (2007) argues that “although the protests were cast as a call for papers and used the language of human rights to press their cause, I argue that they were at base a labour mobilization” because the protests consisted of workers, desiring the right to work, targeting the government in order to do so (Iskander 2007: 310).²⁹

Overall, as contingent labor grows and neoliberal policies continue to decentralize worker protections in today’s post-industrial economy, new forms of worker organizing are often intersectional, bringing together worker rights, citizenship demands, political claims, and arguments for social inclusion. Said another way, the law itself shapes the organizational structure of social movement unionism (SMU). Worker centers are one form of SMU that offer low-wage contingent workers a space to share grievances, learn how to press claims with a boss or company on a small scale, and gain a critical consciousness about worker rights, sometimes leading to political advocacy.

Worker centers walk the line between advocacy organization and a formal trade organization that requires regulation under the NLRA. Arguably, the emphasis on identity formation and community building help ensure that the worker centers fall on the side of worker organizing and not a labor union subject to federal regulation. Community building and identity deconstruction/re-construction are central to organizing marginalized workers from stigmatized communities, like undocumented immigrants, and as I will show in the following section, sex workers.

Organizing Sex Workers

I now turn to research on sex worker rights activism (SWRA). Sex workers rights organizations exist in the U.S. and around the world (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik 2011; Jenness 1990; Mathieu 2003), led by and for sex workers demanding legal protection instead of criminalization, and demanding basic human rights. I will

outline the organizational models, issues around mobilizing and organizing sex workers, strategies and tactics, and issues of legality and citizenship as identified in the existing scholarship.

Somewhat obviously, scholars have concluded that the law itself is a mobilizing grievance for sex workers who experience arrest, imprisonment, and/or harassment from law enforcement. The criminal justice system and immigration policies become points of intervention as sex workers attempt to change certain laws that impact their ability to work safely (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik 2011; Mathieu 2003). Several studies have addressed sex worker rights organizing in a range of countries from New Zealand to India, but few have focused on sex worker rights organizing in the United States.

First, I want to note the rise of the cultural study of sexual work. Only through the rise of the cultural study of sex work can studies of related experiences, like sex worker organizing, come to fruition. A canon of research exists on the sale of sex and sexualized services, empirically exploring the dynamics of sexual commerce in a late capitalist society. Sociological research has provided tomes of “descriptive studies about the daily lives of women and men in sex work” (Vanwesenbeeck 2001:247). Research interrogating the political economy of commercial sexuality—including the social and cultural context of sex work—has culminated in a prostitution-as-cultural-phenomenon perspective (Agustín 2005, Bernstein 2007; Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck 2010; Bruckert 2002; Frank 2002; Murphy and Venkatesh 2006; Sanders 2005). This cultural perspective has allowed scholars to develop a framework for understanding the political economy of sexuality today:

This economy spurs a sexualized culture and the sale of sex. Prostitution in late capitalism, more so than at the turn of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, exists in a culture and climate where economic and social relations have increased a market for sex, where the sale of sex is more commonplace, where more and more human relations are bought and sold in

growing service and leisure economies, where workers are more likely to routinely negotiate multiple selves, and where feminism has challenged inequalities in gender relations. Late capitalist culture has transformed the very notions of sex and identity, fracturing both, and opening both to heightened commodification as products that may be bought and sold in the global marketplace (Brents, Jackson, & Hausbeck 2010:41).

The political economy framework situates contemporary forms of sexual commerce in terms of neoliberal economic trends, immigration policies and processes of globalization, public health rhetoric, and changing gender and sexual norms. Considering all this, it is surprising that relatively few studies exist on the actual labor organizing of sex workers in the United States (the only studies of U.S. sex worker rights activism come from Jenness 1990, 1993; Majic 2011; Weitzer 1991, 2000).

There are specific obstacles around membership, the shape of an organization, and strategies for deviance liberation movements such as a sex workers rights organization that impact how and when political inclusion and social change can occur. Deviant and non-deviant movements alike face organizational issues around “mobilizing resources, building effective organizations, locating charismatic leaders, winning third party support, attracting mass media attention, and obtaining favorable responses from the authorities” (Weitzer, 1991:23). The social stigma experienced by deviant groups complicates these organizational issues. Social stigma is often reflected in the laws regulating sex work (Bernstein and Schaffner 2005; Brents, Jackson and Hausbeck 2010; Dewey and Kelly 2011; Kelly 2008; Kotiswaran 2011; Weitzer 2010).

Interestingly, the two main studies of U.S. sex worker organizing examined one organization, COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), the oldest but perhaps smallest sex worker rights organization in the country. In 1991, sociologist Ronald Weitzer conducted a resource mobilization analysis of COYOTE and found that it failed in comparison to other deviance liberation movements like gay rights (Weitzer 1991).³⁰ Applying a traditional social

movement framework, he analyzed their resource mobilization, alliance building, and political success. Valerie Jenness (1993) argues that COYOTE successfully legitimated its own existence. Jenness' (1993) historical account of COYOTE explores "the reconstruction of a social problem and the normalization of deviance" (1993:12). She situates the emergence of COYOTE alongside historical trends like the 19th century social purity movement and the women's movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

The U.S. sex workers rights movement has been deemed a failure from a resource mobilization standpoint, due to a lack of national attention to the issue and no successful attempts to decriminalize or legalize the sale of sex (Jenness 1990; Weitzer 1991, 2000). Yet Weitzer (1991) conceded:

COYOTE has not failed in every area. It appears to have enhanced the self-image of affiliated prostitutes. It has aided individual prostitutes, attracted some media attention, extracted concessions from some city governments and police forces, and won legal battles in the courtroom (36).

Recently, Samantha Majic (2011) studied the phenomenon of "social movement borne non-profits" through an examination of the political advocacy efforts of two sex worker rights organizations in California. Other scholars call for more research on sex worker rights activism (Ditmore, Levy, and Willman 2010).

Organizational model and leadership. Sex worker rights organizations around the world have taken the shape of unions, advocacy groups, or direct service providers. In general, scholars argue that unions are the most successful model of sex worker rights organizing, leading to increased worker safety, and increased access to policymakers, law enforcement, and healthcare providers (Gall 2007, 2010; West 2000). Advocacy groups engage in a range of strategies, including political tactics, community education efforts, and worker support/training, but are considered less successful because political tactics are few, and often unsuccessful. The

lack of political change leaves in place the structural inequalities that necessitate harm reduction and worker outreach efforts in the first place. Sex worker rights organizations often work in coalition with health services and other harm reduction groups for immediate actions and service provision (Gayen et al. 2004).

Gall (2010) differentiates between sex worker unions and sex worker advocacy groups in the North World, the latter articulated as the “less preferred form” of sex worker rights organizing (2010:302).

Emerging from prostitutes’ rights groups of the 1970s and 1980s, sex worker activist milieu moved to establish labour unions in the 1990s and early 2000s because of the perceived weaknesses of these aforementioned groups – this being believed to be their focus of their energies on civil, human, legal and political rights of prostitutes through the modus operandi of small elite groups comprising prostitutes, ex-prostitutes and their non-prostitute supporters (Gall, 2006). But with the expansion of the sex industry and the relative organizational and goal achievement stasis experienced by these rights groups, labour unionism came into view as becoming more appropriate and effective for the expanded ranks of sex workers (exotic dancers, strippers, porn models and actors/actresses, sex chatline workers) because it focused on economic, labour, union and worker rights through democratic and participative means of membership involvement (Gall, 2007) (cited in Gall 2010).

While unions focus on specific labor and economic rights, activist and advocacy groups focus on sex worker rights as human rights (a more abstract idea of what is morally right). Gall argues that unions offer concrete assistance and are more inclusive of sex worker leadership. This move to unionization appears in countries like England where sex work is not wholly criminalized as it is in the United States.

The demarcations between social movement, labor support, and advocacy may not so clear cut. For example, two California sex worker non-profits are unique because they are both service oriented and politically active:

[They] engage in political activities through a process of radical institutionalization, whereby they incorporate and advance activist goals through their organizational practices, and thus serve as sites of both service provision and civil association (Majic 2011: 822).

This is similar to the organizational mission of worker centers where contingent immigrant workers find services, support, and advocacy.

Interestingly, as more countries move to regulate prostitution rather than prohibit it, and more laws are created around legal forms of sex work like erotic dance, adult films, and escorting, sex workers rights advocates have more at stake (Gall 2007, 2010). Gall (2007) argues that the regulation of erotic dance, adult film, and prostitution actually opens up the possibility for union formation. In his research of sex worker unions and advocacy groups in North World countries, Gall (2007) found that “moves towards decriminalization and legalization of prostitution have led to forms of state regulation that created stimuli to union organizing by virtue of generating a series of leverage points and bargaining issues” (Gall 2007:78). Sex worker rights organizations want to have access to the protections of labor laws and social wage benefits. Laws that regulate instead of criminalize help legitimate sex workers’ rights claims.

Membership. Membership—who is a member, how many people are involved in each organization, and mobilization—is also a complicated issue for sex worker rights organizing. Inclusion and participation is affected by the “stigmatization of the groups lifestyle, occupation, or condition; low self-esteem among potential participants; and obstacles to organizing and mobilizing due to fear of harassment from citizens and control agents” (Weitzer, 1991:23). Difficulties in organizing a criminalized and/or marginalized group of workers is not surprising, however, as “it is predominantly the social stigma attached to sex work that fundamentally hampers self-organization” (Vanwesenbeeck 2001:277). Sex workers may not self-identify as laborers who deserve or need labor law protections. They may not have developed a political

consciousness of their experiences or potential experiences with, for example, the criminal justice system.

O'Connell Davidson (1998) argues that sex worker organizations fail, in part, because sex work is not like other forms of labor. Sex workers are atypical; they labor illegally in non-standard employment, and are not historically prone to mass organizing (Vanwesenbeeck 2001, Gall 2007). There are difficulties in organizing sex workers: unionizing contingent workers is difficult, in addition to the weakness of unionizing service sector workers. Plus women of color are traditionally underrepresented in unions, yet women of color make up a large number of women in extremely marginalized segments of the sex industry: street work and poor/working class workers.

Scholars contend that activists often form a collective identity both against criminalization *and* in conversation with it. Criminalization—a state process—creates the category of criminal.³¹ This is how the state structures collective identity (Robnett 2002). Activist who argue for prison reform and felon rights, for example, are creating a collective identity as felons and as felon activists. “Policies can be both the mobilizing grievances and the achievement;” in so doing, policies “create constituencies, that is, the people identified by their behavior, interests, beliefs, or some ascriptive characteristic as aggrieved or empowered” (Meyer, Whittier, and Robnett 2002: 19).

Yet little research has been done on the identity development of sex worker activists. One study found that interactions with external forces like the police inform the development of sex worker’s “oppression consciousness” (Chowdhury 2006). This is key to politicizing sex workers who reconstruct their identities as sex workers and as activists in relationship to social norms against sexual labor. Chowdhury (2006) explores the identity deconstruction and subsequent

reconstruction of Bangladeshi sex worker rights activists. She found sex worker rights activists articulating an “associational dialecticism” in four ways:

(1) sex workers are human beings like anyone else, (2) sex workers are citizens like any other citizen of the country, (3) sex workers are laborers like any other laborer, and (4) sex workers are women like any woman elsewhere in the society (Chowdhury 2006: 347).

Sex workers reconstruct their identities in this way in order to “disassociate” from negative stereotypes of Bangladeshi sex workers as thieves, or as deceptive.

Sex workers mobilize against the socio-legal construction of sex workers as “other” to claim both civil rights and worker rights (Chowdhury 2006, Iskander 2007). Chateauvert (2011, private communication) argues that the U.S. sex workers rights movement now “embrace[s] all the gender and sexualized varieties of sexual service occupations,” meaning that the identity politics of the sex workers rights movement encompassing a larger project of citizenship making.

Organizational goals and strategies. The push for restoration of citizenship status of sex workers is broadly called “decriminalization,” the removal of all criminal policies for violating civil rights. In the U.S., sex worker rights organizations have been unable to change state or national laws, despite efforts to do so since the 1970s. COYOTE failed to achieve its three main goals: public education on the costs of prostitution control, decriminalization, and normalization of prostitution (Weitzer 1991).

Sex worker rights organizations do provide space for sex workers to build community with each other and fight isolation by holding know-your-rights trainings, creating and sharing lists of bad clients who are violent or do not pay, providing financial planning and tax classes, establishing online community support boards, and imparting business strategies from health and safety tips, to how to word advertisements or design a webpage.

Sex worker activists construct “resistance narratives” about their experiences to legitimate both their sex worker and activist identities. As sex workers deconstruct and reconstruct their identity as activists, this shapes their strategies and tactics. “The claims-making strategies in the process of identity reconstruction reveal that the sex workers question the state as well as the economy and culture” (Chowdhury 2006: 353). In this way, identity development leads to a larger understanding of structural inequality.

A number of case studies conducted in England, New Zealand, China, and India argue that there are structural and systemic hurdles that impact sex worker rights political advocacy efforts (Abel et al. 2010; Gayen et al. 2004; Hung 2003; Outshoorn 2004; West 2000). Successful collaboration between sex worker rights organizations and other organizations, governments, and non-governmental agencies is crucial to sex workers rights efforts to secure legal rights and protections. Further, political climate affects how much influence a group can have over social policies. A human rights approach may work in a country with a pragmatic or liberal government like New Zealand (Abel et al. 2010), but not in a country with a moral majority like the United States (West 2000).

The New Zealand Prostitutes’ Collective (NZPC) garnered support from non-governmental agencies and politicians, making the organization instrumental in the push to decriminalize prostitution in that country (Abel et al. 2010). Sex workers and mainstream feminists worked together, finding allies in government, including Parliamentarian Tim Barnett, who then introduced the Prostitution Reform Act. Liberal feminist thought highlighted sex worker rights as a human rights issue (rather than a labor issue), which aligned with New Zealand’s liberal political climate (Abel et al. 2010). Although anti-sex work advocates voiced concern that decriminalization may lead to an increase in sex trafficking, the argument for individual liberty for sex workers resonated with New Zealand’s liberal political backbone.

West (2000) argues that the “influence” of sex worker advocacy groups in North World countries is dependent on successful collaboration and political climate. A conservative sexual politics lessens the ability to participate and change the debate about sexual commerce:

Prostitutes’ organizations have had very little influence in the US and UK, outside of health initiatives, partly because of ‘moral majority’ hegemony and preoccupations with disorder and abuse. This has been less true in some Australian states, in New Zealand and especially the Netherlands where a more pragmatic political culture has created a positive space for the advocacy of sex worker interests, albeit alongside others with a stake in control (West 2000:115).

While sex worker rights activists in the U.S. and U.K. are considered fairly unsuccessful, sex worker rights groups in other countries have had more traction with their governments, from South Africa to Canada (both overturned laws against sex work in 2012).³¹ For example, when South Korea instituted anti-trafficking laws in 2004, it fueled immediate protests by sex workers there, who directly challenged the state feminist position of protection of women *from* sex work, not protection for women *in* sex work (Gaphee 2006).

As sex trafficking policies spread globally, the rhetoric of state feminism is often one of protection. A “state feminism”—the inclusion of feminist ideals of gender equality within government agencies and actions—often lays at the crux of successful women’s rights political efforts, at least in Western Europe, North America, and Australia (Outshoorn 2004). Generally, North World state feminist positions consider women and girls to be vulnerable to a globalized sex trade and in need of legal protections. In South Korea, a new trafficking bill mobilized sex workers to question their exclusion from both feminist activism and labor activism. Sex workers were not invited to talks about the sex trafficking legislation, though other feminist and labor groups were invited:

The meeting of sex and work opens a door for some challenges to feminist and labor movements. To the feminist movement it asks a crucial question: what patriarchy are ‘we’ talking about?

The divide and rule of the patriarchal system operates in the feminist camp and feminists are not free from its preconception that divides 'women' and 'prostitutes.' And to the labor movement, it also asks questions: what is the definition of work and labor? Who is a worker and who is not? It raises questions on the gender-oriented patriarchy and male-oriented labor (Gaphee 2006: 319).

In this sense, a state feminism that supports protectionist policies creates categories of deserving citizen and workers.

The debate over labor is, then, also a debate over civic legitimacy. It is common practice to exclude sex workers from policy discussions, while other advocacy groups, non-profits, and affected parties are brought to the table:

Viewed as simply 'part of the problem' – or as passive victims to be 'rescued' – their input is considered to be of no value. The results of such decisions are predictably ruinous: for the sex workers, for the communities in which they live, and for larger programs such as efforts to control HIV/AIDS (Ditmore 2010: 242).

Excluding sex workers from policy talks is a sign that they lack legitimacy as workers and as citizens. It becomes clear that protectionist policies around trafficking or health are political forms of labor control.

Overall, these analyses of sex worker rights organizing provide interesting parallels to analyses of new forms of labor organizing for contingent workers. In the coming chapters, I will examine in what ways U.S. sex worker organizing may be a form of social movement unionism. To do so also clarifies the ways in which worker rights efforts and citizenship intersect.

CONNECTING CIVIC LEGITIMACY, ECONOMIC RIGHTS, AND SEX

There are few studies of sex worker rights as emblematic of sexual rights. "Sexual citizenship" as a term has largely referred to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) struggles for full social, economic, familial, and cultural acceptance (Bell and Binnie 2000, 2004; Seidman 2001). Studies show how sexual acts, behaviors, and identities are at the crux of many

citizenship claims, from extending marriage to gay and lesbian couples, to sexual violence as a militarized tool of oppression, to restrictions on the ability to cross national borders as they are applied to sex workers, HIV-positive people, and LGBTQ people (Payne and Davies 2012). Lesser studied are aspects of heteronormativity, sexuality, and the market (Hubbard 2001, Sabsay 2011). What does sexual citizenship mean when the sex is commodified?

Sex Work and Citizenship

Chateauvert's (2011) historical analysis maps of the U.S. sex workers rights movement maps how meanings of decriminalization have shifted over time since the 1970s, arguing that "though U.S. sex workers use human rights concepts to demand rights, they do so with the goal of expanding the meaning(s) of citizenship" (2011, private communication). The sex worker rights movement is arguing for a form of citizenship beyond the traditional dependency on the nation-state for citizenship rights. Chateauvert (2011) connects identity, citizenship, and worker rights by arguing that sex workers are largely subjects who endure duties to the state, rather than citizens who bear state-granted rights.

Sex worker rights, then, can be considered an intersection of gender justice, worker organizing, and sexual rights—an intersection that highlights cultural and political clashes about meanings of citizenship, sexuality, and work (Gaphee 2006; Lerum et al. 2012). Interestingly, the few studies on sex work and citizenship focus largely on the relationship between the law and public space. Street-based sex workers are the most visible sex workers and the most challenging to normative ideas of class, gender and safety, and community standards. Sex workers contest public and private space where and when they work, especially sex workers who are visible on the streets, and I would add, online. Hubbard (2001) finds that "a basic right of citizenship is the right to access and use specific kinds of space within a given territory" (54). Sex work and space is a contentious issue as police target the most public sex workers—street-

based workers and workers who use online bulletin boards like Craigslist. Sexual labor is positioned as “the Other that works as the pillar and guarantor of the normative socio-sexual imaginary” in the city-as-public-space (Sabsay 2011: 226).

For example, Buenos Aires decriminalized street sex work in 1998, and created a red light district for transgender sex workers in 2004. Sabsay’s (2011) argues that zoning transgender sex workers violates their rights as citizens:

[It] limits the access of sex workers to those entitlements that would qualify them as subjects of rights. In this way, this debate that implied a contest over the definition of public space and its moral limits instituted a spatial boundary that also demarcated the restrictions on citizenship and therefore, the limits of democracy (Sabsay 2011: 226).

A legalized model can severely restricts citizenship rights, especially for more marginalized workers like street-based and transgender sex workers (Sabsay 2011).

Sex, Rights, and Citizenship

Citizenship is a norm, a practice, and a right (Bell and Binnie 2000, 2004; Nash 2009; Seidman 2001). The desire for full citizenship around gender identity, sexual identity and ethnicity/racial identity is at the heart of many new social movements (Seidman 2001). Scholars have noted how citizenship itself is classed, racialized, gendered, and sexualized (Bell and Binnie 2000, 2004; Payne and Davies 2012; Richardson 2000; Seidman 2001). Undocumented immigrants, for example, are racialized and classed. Similarly, sexual actions, behaviors, and identities become points of contention for citizenship. “In this sense we can talk of the sexualization of citizenship, rather as others have talked of the ‘racialization’ of citizenship (Taylor, 1996) and of how citizenship is gendered (Lister, 1990, 1997a; Walby 1994, 1997)” (Richardson 2000: 84).

The process of becoming sexual citizens can be both disciplinary and potentially destabilizing (Seidman 2001). The rights of “sexual citizenship” are politically and economically

bound, the litmus of civil inclusion or exclusion (Bell and Binnie 2000, 2004). Canaday (2009) analyzes how U.S. immigration, military, and welfare policies created a *gay identity* by instituting a new sexual category, “gay,” that excluded people based on *sexual behavior*. The nation-state turned a behavior into an identity.

In this way, sexual citizenship, as with citizenship broadly, creates categories of second class citizens:

To the extent that particular groups of sexual and gendered subjects are frequent candidates for these categories, and that alien and immanent others of various kinds are constructed as Other using marginalizing discourses of sexuality and gender, citizenship has also become recognized as an inherently sexualized and gendered framework (Payne and Davies 2012: 253-254).

Citizenship itself is sexualized, and it is heteronormative (Payne and Davies 2012; Richardson 2000). Theorists have explored how the state shapes the sexual rights of lesbians and gays, and to a lesser extent, transgender people, in normative ways (Bell and Binnie 2000, 2004; Payne and Davies 2012; Phelan 2001; Richardson 2000; Seidman 2001). Heteronormativity, at its core, dictates that sex should be monogamous, in private spaces, and non-commodified, and is built upon a normative gender binary model. So gay and lesbian rights efforts are most successful when normative—pushing for marriage “to be like everyone else” (read: straight people)—then when challenging economic injustice, poverty, or racism (Seidman 2001). Transgender rights are slowly taking hold for those individuals who “pass” or desire to “pass,” whereas many trans individuals occupy spaces outside the narrow normative fold (Spade 2011; Sycamore 2006). Legal strategies for equal protections under the law are complicated by the fact that the law is not a neutral entity, and often dictates the shape of the gender binary and sexual identity binary (Seidman 2001, Spade 2011).

Sexual rights. At the turn of the 21st century, “sexual rights” continues to gain political and theoretical weight. Sexual identity has achieved some acceptance (Seidman 2001), but queers and transgender people continue to threaten social order. And in terms of sexual behaviors and acts, “sexual rights” has narrowed conceptually to the protection of women and girls. This focus on protection has diverged from the original feminist intent to secure women’s bodily autonomy and freedom of movement and thought. Petchesky’s (2000) historical account describes how sexual rights emerged from a human rights frame in the 1980s and 1990s:

‘sexual rights’ [was] the newest kid on the block in international debates about the meanings and practices of human rights, especially women and human rights. That such a concept, and lively discussions about it have finally surfaced in large international forums—in spite of or because of the pervasive climate of resurgent fundamentalism in the world—surely in itself marks a historic achievement that feminist, and gay and lesbian, movements should proudly claim (81).

Petchesky (2000) argues that sexual rights gained political legitimacy through a victim discourse, a “negative sexual rights frame.” A victim discourse creates victims in need of protection, and this protection is to be provided by the nation-state.

Framing sexual rights negatively, that is, in terms of violence and negative consequences and experiences, rather than positively, in terms of affirmation of identity, desires, and pleasures, denies basic autonomy and critical thought. Wary too of framing sexual rights in terms of “liberatory potential,” Petchesky articulates a stronger sexual rights framework of five “ethical principles of affirmative sexual rights:” acceptance of sexual diversity (beyond heterosexual), and habitational diversity (whom we live with varies beyond a nuclear heterosexual family), with emphases on health, autonomy/personhood, and gender equality, and the structural conditions necessary to support these principles (Petchesky 2000). Overall, she and other feminist scholars are suspicious of the intent and consequences of a sexual rights

framework that relies on displays of atrocities and extreme victimization as evidence for legal intervention.

A negative sexual rights framework is the basis of the U.S. anti-trafficking movement's strategy of increasingly criminalizing the sale of sex to eradicate sex work and sex trafficking (Bernstein 2010, Chapkis 1997, Weitzer 2007). Historically, the abolitionist viewpoint springs from the lineage of a 1970s strain of feminism that argued all commercialized sex—from prostitution to pornography—is a form of violence against women (Dworkin 1974, 1987; MacKinnon 1989). Such beliefs around the ills of public and commercial sex resonated with a moral majority and conservatives (Califia 1994, Chapkis 1997, Rubin 1984). At that time, radical feminists attempted but failed to secure legal bans against the production and consumption of pornography. But an upsurge in “violence against women” ideology culminated in 2000 with the passage of the federal *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* and the subsequent, quick narrowing of the bill to focus on domestic and international sex trafficking of women and girls.³²

Doezema (2010) theorizes a direct connection between the 20th century myth of white slavery with contemporary panics around sex trafficking, particularly as it has narrowed to a concern about domestic trafficking. Government concerns, and media portrayals, of white girls being abducted and sold into sexual slavery were largely untrue, and actually reflected racist and classist attitudes toward the recently arrived wave of immigrants. In the U.S., the numerous moral panics around sexuality, gender, and family (Beisel 1997, Rubin 1875, 1984, Califia 1994, Weitzer 2007) mirror the evolution of anti-sex ideologies targeting sexual minorities and commercial sex.³³ These moral panics are grounded in a negative sexual rights framework premised on protection “innocent” women and girls. An abolitionist ideology is central to mainstream anti-trafficking efforts today (Agustín 2007, Chapkis 2003, Parrenas 2008, Weitzer 2007).³⁴

An abolitionist ideology conflates prostitution with trafficking, and argues that prostitution must end if trafficking is to end.

DISCUSSION

With the growth of contingent work in underground economies, and the dominance of a negative sexual rights framework premised on protection, several issues need to be addressed. First, traditional unions are not organizationally structured to meet the needs of diverse, contingent workers, and so alternative social movement unionism structures have emerged to fill this gap. Who these workers are, what industries they work in, and how they organize requires more study. As “less organizable” workers find creative, useful forms of organizing, these alternative forms warrant study to learn more about work and the law in post-industrial economies. Further, while research has begun to explore the shape of social movement unionism for workers in a range of jobs including day laborers, certain forms of deviant, criminalized labor—sex work, drug trade—are absent. There is still an implicit hierarchy of what is considered “real work,” of what is considered legitimate, appropriate work, even within underground economies.

Second, work, criminalization, and citizenship are intertwined. Citizenship is grounded in socially constructed categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality, and the accompanying expectations around economic behavior. Today’s social movement unionism incorporates aspects of citizenship, class, ethnicity, and gender, responding to a neoliberal landscape that has re-shaped labor (Clawson 2003, Milkman 2006, Walsh 2012). The TVPA and criminalizing prostitution is to sex workers what a lack of citizenship is for undocumented workers. Worker centers are spaces for undocumented immigrants to find legal aid, worker development and leadership development, various services, and community and identity building, around issues of work and race, citizenship, class, and sometimes gender. What about other aspects of

citizenship like sexual rights? How are gender, race, and class dynamics re-shaping the face and frame of labor organizing? In particular, how might sex worker organizing epitomize the changing meanings of work and rights?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND ACCESS

I have long been interested in studying sex work. The meaning of sexual labor today is still hotly contested. As a feminist, I am fascinated by the ongoing “feminist sex wars” and the opposing paths to gender equality proposed by feminists. The complexities of selling sex or a sexualized service like erotic dance have divided feminist scholars for decades. The study of gender, power, oppression, and sex work has taken on new significance in the last thirteen years with the institutionalization of the policies and practices of the federal *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000*. Interrogating the experiences of sex workers, in cultural and political context, reveals the lived realities of “sex in the margins” (Agustín 2007). While sex work has been a topic of sociological study since the 1970s, few have studied the experiences of sex workers who organize and advocate for themselves.

In 2006, I volunteered as a student intern and helped with local arrangements for the first Desiree Alliance conference. Entitled “Re-visioning Prostitution Policy: Creating Space for Sex Workers’ Rights and Challenging Criminalization,” the conference brought in over 150 sex workers, sex work researchers, and advocates to participate in a four-day long conference in July of 2006. I worked closely with one of the co-founders of DA who was also living in Las Vegas. I helped with local logistics as she secured a location for the conference (which is private and only shared to participants after being vetted). I arranged the location of the after-party/fundraiser at a local gay nightclub, and worked the door for a few hours. During the four day conference, I staffed the front table with the other student intern, a friend of mine and a Women’s Studies undergraduate. People came up to us and asked general questions like “where’s the bathroom?” and “where can I make copies?” We tried to help the main conference organizers with logistics like how to get a hold of tech support for the conference rooms.

At the time, I felt a sense of excitement, both my own and among the organizers and attendees. Long-time leaders like Carol Leigh and Robyn Few were coming together with younger activists new to the issue. The DA planning emails, phone calls, and conference were buzzing. It was nerve-racking, exciting, and new to me. I worried about messing up as an intern, about being “outed” as a non-sex worker. I also developed friendships and widened my own academic and activist networks. For example, in November 2009, I attended a baby shower of a sex worker rights activist. Local and national leaders were in attendance. It felt historic and important.

Based on these observations as an academic ally, I became interested in questions of collective identity, organizational structure, and strategies for this particular group of workers. I wanted to explore how criminalized and stigmatized workers argue for rights, and what rights they were arguing for. What is the relationship between stigma and organizing strategies? How does anti-prostitution advocacy affect the shape and goals of the sex worker rights efforts? In light of those questions, I was curious about both the effectiveness of a national conference, and the meaning it had for attendees.

I officially began conducting ethnographic research with the Desiree Alliance (DA) in 2010 to answer these questions. That year, 2010, was a moment of change, and of organizational and personal upheaval for the DA. The remaining co-director ceremoniously stepped down at the conference. Many people who made up the loose 40-person leadership group were critical of conference decisions, particularly over diversity and not offering enough need-based scholarships or engaging in enough outreach to underrepresented communities like street based sex workers. Some were also concerned about the co-director’s decision to use conference funds to bring in New Zealand Parliamentarian Tim Barnett (who drafted the bill that decriminalized prostitution there) as a keynote speaker. There were misunderstandings,

frustrations, and disagreements over how to incorporate anti-oppression and anti-poverty work into workshops and discussions. For example, some leadership and attendees worried about a particular panel being transphobic, or worried that a presentation might gloss over issues of class. Like any organizing effort, there was much discord. As an intern in 2006, I came to the DA in the early stages, at a moment of synergy. As a researcher studying the DA from 2010 to 2012, I studied an organization at a moment of much change in terms of structure and leadership.

In order to assess elements of social movement unionism structure, collective identity, and goals within the Desiree Alliance, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork, including participant observation leading up to and during the 2010 DA national conference, semi-structured interviews with leaders of the DA and DA member organizations, archival research, and content analysis of organizational materials.

THE FIELD

The Desiree Alliance is a sex workers' rights organization, a formalized umbrella organization of 20+ national, regional, state and local sex worker rights organizations. The DA is primarily responsible for hosting a national conference every year to two years, as well as engaging in other events and advocacy year-round. The conference city is publically known, advertised on the DA website and calls for presentations, but the actual conference site is private. Between 2005 and 2010, the organization was led by a two person co-directorship and a loose 40 person leadership group. People within that group were tasked with overseeing the organizing of one of the five tracks (for example, I helped coordinate the Academics and Policy Track). With the exodus of the original co-directors, leaders created a new structure: a Strategic Committee of seven to thirteen people responsible for organizational and conference planning who would work with and oversee the co-directors. The Strategic Committee and new co-

directors wrote official by-laws, including a provision that states that the strategic committee can vote out a director.

The 2010 conference, entitled "Working Sex: Power, Practice, and Politics," took place in Las Vegas, Nevada. Over the course of six days in late July, there were close to 100 panels and workshops, seven keynotes including former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders, morning yoga and evening yoga, eight screenings of films by sex workers, one performance protest piece on the Las Vegas Strip, and an after-party/fundraiser. Attendees came from all over the United States and a few from Canada.

Access

I, without realizing it at the time, spent five years gaining entrée into the group that I am now studying. This has culminated an in-depth understanding of the culture and language of the Desiree Alliance and of sex workers rights efforts broadly in the United States, enhancing both my access to an otherwise closed off and guarded group, and my ability to theorize their actions and efforts. Nationally, I was on Desiree Alliance email list servs, including the leadership list serv from 2006 through 2010, and the general DA list serv from 2010 through today. I have been able to observe mundane and fairly heated exchanges unfold. I have been privy to internal disagreements and conversations about the shape and goals of the DA. I am listed on the DA website as a founding member. Additionally, I have attended sex worker rights events throughout the last six years in Las Vegas, Nevada including the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers and the inaugural Red Umbrella Diaries – Las Vegas.

I was given permission by the Desiree Alliance to conduct research during the six day-long conference in 2010. As an academic ally, I was able to gain access to a group that is otherwise quite wary of researchers and scholars.³⁵ Many sex worker rights activists talk about how tired they are of speaking to researchers only to be misquoted or misunderstood, of having

to explain the importance of sex worker-only spaces, or of how the resulting publications are of little use to their efforts. A few interviewees made a point of telling me that they rarely speak to researchers, or do not speak with them as much as in the past. Despite my long-term involvement with sex worker rights efforts, I felt an almost overwhelming sense of outsider-ness as I set up interviews. I was acutely aware of the suspicion of academics and the desire to only interact with in-group members.

But I also recognize that I am part of the in-group as an academic who participates in the DA conference's "Academic and Policy Track," and as a Las Vegas local who assists with conference planning. Many interviewees were welcoming and warm. My nervousness was alleviated, for example, when exploring Carol Leigh's Sex Worker Archive at the Center for Sex and Culture in San Francisco. While she guided me through a tutorial on how to use the archive, she offered positive words of encouragement for my research project. The ability to identify and deal with a perceived outsider status with actual outsider status is a constant balance, one important to a feminist ethnography.

Feminist researchers struggle with the issue of access and praxis, sensitive to "using" a population for personal goals (like publication) or political ends (that the subjects may not care about or have differing perspectives on). As such, feminist researchers critique the academic elitism of "going native" and encourage a model of "total immersion" to better understand the experiences and perspectives of the research participants (Punch 1994). As such, I have immersed myself as a participant observer and academic ally.

I am an academic ally to sex worker rights efforts as someone who does not identify as a sex worker, but supports the movement. As a feminist scholar, I am aware of how being an academic ally has given me both access to the field and a profound understanding of the ways in which academic allies straddle an insider/outsider status.³⁶ I worried about being viewed

condescendingly as just another academic who sees sex workers as a petri dish for my own ends. Being an ally is a feminist methodological practice that helps to overcome the “get what I need and go” research process; I have spoken with activists about how my research may be of use to them and work with the DA Academic and Policy Track.

DATA

Ethnography

I engaged in participant observation leading up to and during the 2010 DA conference. I helped with local arrangements, and I was a member of the 2010 Academic & Policy Track Committee, reviewing submissions and deciding who would be allowed to present. I co-presented with my co-author, Barb Brents, on the structure of Nevada’s legal brothel industry, a contentious legalized model among sex worker rights activists. I assisted with an opening roundtable for the academic track to brainstorm creative ways for our research to be politically and socially relevant and have an impact beyond academia. As a local resident, I assisted in securing the location (Erotic Heritage Museum) and audio equipment (in-kind donation from a local business) for the after-party and fundraiser.

I observed various conference spaces that are open to all attendees such as workshops, panels, lunches, and keynotes. Some parts of the Business Development and Lifestyle Track are “sex worker only” and are closed to allies. My name badge identified me as a researcher from my university. I took handwritten notes, observing people’s interactions within each space, participating as an ally if and when appropriate during open discussion in workshops and panels. Observations were tuned toward topics and social interactions, not individuals per se; no names of attendees or other identifying information was included in my notes.

I observed the diversity of the content and topic of panels and workshops. The art track was the most visible outside of the conference, organizing a performance protest piece on the

tourist-laden Las Vegas Strip.³⁷ I also noted the diversity of class, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual identity among conference attendees.

During my participant observation, I found that conference presenters and audience members often discussed their personal experiences in political ways, often reflecting the track that they were in: harm reduction, policy or academics, art and media. In informal conversations at meals or in the hallways, people who may not otherwise know each other would “click” when discussing the effects of criminalization on their lives or their frustration with anti-prostitution laws and practices. I was intrigued by how activists framed these issues. I also heard many conversations about experiences of, or fears of, racism, classism, and exclusion within the DA.

Many of the conference attendees have engaged in some form of sex work, whether legalized labor, like erotic dance or adult film, or in criminalized labor like the sale of sex, or a grey area like professional BDSM work that may or may not be criminalized, depending on the technicalities of local laws. Several conference attendees are allies of the movement from the fields of harm reduction and academia. Interestingly, some of the academics are also sex workers or former sex workers. While they may be “out” in this setting, they report being more private or cautious about sharing their experience with sex work in traditional academic settings.

Supporting Materials

I also reviewed materials that Desiree Alliance has published electronically such as websites, hand-outs, and videos of conference keynotes, in addition to materials from established member organizations such as the Sex Workers Outreach Project and Best Practices Policy Project. I also include, where relevant, a brief overview of national policy trends, like the federal *Trafficking Victims Protection Act*, and anomalies, for example, Nevada’s legal rural brothel prostitution.

I learned of the existence of a sex work archive from Carol Leigh because of my work with the DA. Carol Leigh, as a visual artist and de-facto historian of U.S. sex worker rights, created and donated a digital archive of sex worker art, organizing, and protests to the Center for Sex and Culture in San Francisco, headed by sexologist Carol Queen. I connected with both Carols to gain access to the archive. It is the only such archive in existence in the country. In July 2011, I went to San Francisco to explore it.

The two Carols work in buildings around the corner from each other. I met Carol Leigh in her office, after mistakenly going to the CSC first. We came back to the CSC together. After I signed a waiver at the CSC agreeing to only access the archive I wanted, and not go rogue and start looking in sealed or off-limits archives, boxes, or drawers, we got set up. Carol Leigh hooked up an external hard drive to a computer in the corner of the attic where all the archive materials are stored. She showed me how to navigate it using keywords, and then left me with it, checking in with me later.

There were a few things from Desiree Alliance conferences such as recordings of panels. The archive was mostly full of historical materials from the 1980s through today, videos, pictures, and descriptions of sex workers, art, policy work, and so on, than I could cross-reference across different topics. I stayed for a day, sifting through the electronic files.

I also draw from publicly accessible DA conference materials including presentation abstracts, speakers' biographies, and supporting materials on decriminalization policy from 2010 keynote speaker New Zealand Parliamentarian Tim Barnett. I analyzed other materials, such as the "Sex Workers Want to Stop Trafficking" video, and the Best Practices Policy Project fact sheets, media analysis, and policy updates (www.bestpracticespolicy.org). These were sometimes mentioned by other DA members; interviewees brought up the video several times as something particularly important in the struggle to reclaim how sex work is framed in the

public eye. I relied on a latent content analysis to identify key themes, narratives, and concepts in the texts. By examining these texts, I was able to explore what discourses and perspectives are deemed important to activists, and identify what was absent. This helped guide my analysis of participant observation and interview data.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with Desiree Alliance members, with a focus on those in leadership positions. I conducted 19 interviews overall, 17 semi-structured interviews, and two informal interviews. Pseudonyms are used for all the interviewees, even when referring to their public or media work, as well as when referring to confidential information about engaging in criminalized work, or for when discussing disagreements between activists. I spoke informally with Carol Queen and Scarlot Harlot when I travelled to San Francisco's Center for Sex & Culture (CSC) to do archival work. Both have been sexual rights leaders for over 25 years.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted from Summer 2011 to Spring 2012. All the interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the participant. The recordings were transcribed and entered into a Word document and Excel spreadsheet for coding. I have permission from all participants to re-contact for follow up interviews and clarifications.

My sample included leadership, including members of the DA Strategic Committee, and leaders of DA member organizations. I also interviewed a trans activist ally, a professor of trans studies who attended the conference and spoke on transgender sex workers and violence. She offered insights into issues around gender identity, sex work, and stigma. Interviewees continue to be active with sex workers rights organizing year-round with the DA, a local SWOP, or another sex worker rights organization; or as an unaffiliated activist volunteering with anti-trafficking organizations. All of the interviewees except the professor of trans studies are currently affiliated with the Desiree Alliance and/or a DA member organization. All interviewees self-

identify as an activist or advocate, some are current or former sex workers, others have no sex work experience. I do not differentiate for purposes of confidentiality.

The semi-structured interviews were one-on-one, lasting from 45 minutes to an hour and a half each. The interview schedule includes open-ended questions and a list of guiding concepts and questions (see Appendix A). The interviews provided additional insight into the complex intersections of labor, organizing, and identity among sex worker rights activists. I asked questions that explored activist's experiences with sex worker rights and any other advocacy experiences (e.g., LGBTQ organizing), work, what the movement has done for them personally and professionally, the stigma of sex work, and how they think the movement should respond to anti-prostitution advocates. I encouraged the participants to share whatever seemed relevant to them. Activists shared experiences with organizing, expectations and goals within sex worker rights, how well they think the movement is doing in achieving those goals, and what the relationship is between the Desiree Alliance and their local organizations or individual activist efforts.

Semi-structured interviewing allowed me to use sensitizing concepts rather than create a rigid interview schedule. I identified sensitizing concepts from the literature and my fieldwork, concepts such as stigma, activism, marginalization, and identity-making. Structured questions may not have garnered the depth necessary to explore the complexities of these concepts. Many interviewees would launch into long stories that interconnected various concepts, perspectives, and ideas. For example, when asked how they got involved with the Desiree Alliance, many volunteered a detailed account of what brought them to sex worker rights activism in the first place, not just the Desiree Alliance. They often outlined specific events and personal relationships that brought them to, or keeps them in, the Desiree Alliance or sex worker rights organizing broadly.

Participants responded well to open-ended questions that gave them the chance to emphasize what they felt was most important, and to share stories. For example, semi-structured interviewing evoked different gendered realities for cisgender men, cisgender women, and transgender women, including how they articulated the impact of criminalization on their lives.

I originally advertised for interviews by posting a sign at the 2010 conference's front table, with additional copies for people to take. The sign advertised the project and asked people to find UNLV researchers if they were interested; they would receive a \$10 gift card to a chain coffee shop in exchange for the interview. (Myself and two others were available for interviews. All the interviews included in this project are my own.) Interviews were to be held on site in a private room. The advertisement also included our email address.

However, this was not an effective strategy as attendees wanted to be present at workshops and panels, and network with other attendees between sessions. Many indicated that they were interested in being interviewed at a later date. Upon reflection, I think this was helpful as I was able to analyze my participant observation data before interviews began. This helped guide me in how I introduced sensitizing concepts during the interview process. This would not have been possible immediately during the conference.

I revised my process post-conference. Potential interviewees were identified via purposive sampling. The participants self-selected by responding to the research advertisement flyer or being referred by a previous interviewee. Interviewees were asked to pass along the researcher's contact information to others who may be interested. Many participants were out of state and so interviews were conducted the interview over phone. Only three were conducted in person.

I took steps to ensure that their participation in the study did not harm their ability to engage in sex work, engage in activism, or draw the attention of authorities. Participant's privacy and anonymity are protected by collecting only demographic descriptors and no other identifying information. Participants were instructed to not share specific qualifiers of their current place of work (i.e., no name or addresses). Confidentiality is ensured by re-naming the digital transcripts, and removing any incriminating material in the transcripts that could link the participant to the study.

Interestingly, the issue of using a pseudonym came up several times. Many activists I interviewed are established leaders, and have been interviewed by media, publish op-eds, have their own websites, and some have founded their own organizations. Several interviewees are well-known public figures ; as such, they stated that their interviews repeated information that is publically known. A quick online search easily finds their websites, published pieces, or media interviews. Two interviewees pointedly indicated that the information in our interview was public knowledge and can be found elsewhere. However, due to the small number of interviewees, I provide pseudonyms to protect everyone's identities.²⁸

I asked if they would like to choose their own pseudonym. This also gives a limited amount of authorship back to the participants, respecting the role of the participant in the research process. I also asked them to describe how they refer to themselves in reference to being a part of the movement (an activist? an advocate?), and the labor that they engaged in that brought them to them movement, so that I may use their words and self-described labels.

In summary, I interviewed 19 people total, two informally and 17 semi-structured interviews. Of the 17 semi-structured interviews, the majority of people identify as white (14 participants); one as black, and one Latina, and one as mixed race Latina and white. Two people identify as trans-women; I also interviewed two cisgender men. The remainder identify as

cisgender women. Few identified as heterosexual or straight, with a majority identifying outside of the heterosexual norm, either as gay, queer, or bisexual. Ages ranged from mid-twenties to early 50s, with eight participants in their 40s, and five participants in their 30s. Most all have some higher education, ranging from some college (3) or a bachelor's degree (1) to Ph.Ds (4), working or planning on obtaining a Ph.D. (2), or who have a master's or law degree (8), or are planning to apply for a master's (1). My interviewees skewed slightly toward graduate education than what is found in the DA leadership generally. For example, one member of DA leadership received a master's of social justice in her 40s.

Five interviewees live on the west coast, three from the mid-west, and nine from the east coast. Similar themes emerged across geography. Although the Desiree Alliance is a national network, local knowledge was a key theme in much of my research.

The majority of interviewees have experience with other social justice issues like LGBTQ struggles, anti-racism work, and reproductive justice (see Appendix B for a table summarizing activist involvement). For example one of the current members of Desiree Alliance leadership is also involved with a re-entry program for women after they get out of prison, largely based on her own experiences with difficulties getting a job because of her felon status. I do not discuss how many interviewees are current or former workers, or who is an ally that has never engaged in sexual labor, for confidentiality.

My sample is skewed to those with regular email access and consistent phone numbers, a sign of class privilege. Considering the intersection of racism and classism, I believe this is why my sample skewed white, not accurately reflecting the racial diversity of conference attendees or the Desiree Alliance leadership (directors and the Strategic Committee).

Qualitative research is concerned with reflexivity and credibility—capturing a subjective moment of lived experiences and offering multiple truths to describe an event and to build

theory (Altheide and Johnson 1994). One way to increase credibility is to include the participant in the research process. I did encourage them to create their own pseudonym as a token of my commitment to credibility. I did not share the transcripts with the majority of interviewees via email or mail, due to ethical issues of protecting anonymity and confidentiality when sending something electronically or a hard-copy by mail. However, those whom I speak to somewhat regularly as part of my continued involvement with the DA were asked if they would like to review portions of the dissertation as I write it, and if they would like to review their transcript. Two people have already done so, reading through some chapter drafts, providing general feedback, and also asking to clarify their statements. This process helps increase the credibility of my findings. Additionally, I plan to present the findings of my research with the DA at the 2013 conference.

DATA ANALYSIS

Using a grounded theory approach, I undertook several rounds of coding, creating “memos” with thematically linked codes. I did this first with my participant observation field notes, and later with my interview data. I integrated analysis and fieldwork into a preliminary “report” after conducting five semi-structured interviews and two informal interviews, and early ethnographic coding. From this assessment, I refined the interview guide by adjusting both the research questions and sensitizing concepts to capture oppositional frames, concrete examples of activist efforts, and the intersecting efforts and potential influence of other advocacy issues, like LGBTQ rights organizing. I reflected on my role as an interviewer and realized that I need to probe to get examples of activism. Participants are quick to provide the abstract reasoning for being part of Desiree Alliance (desire for freedom from fear of arrest, making friends who understand you), and less likely to report the mundane, everyday organizing work that is undertaken.

The first full round of coding used a general manifest coding process. I identified and counted repeating key words or phrases (like references to “activism,” including goals, strategies, actions, and experiences within the movement, or “identity” to indicate narratives around being a sex worker and/or an activist). The second and additional rounds of coding were latent, that is, identifying the meanings or assumptions of a statement (like labeling a narrative “discrimination within the movement” even if the participant does not specifically say, “I was discriminated against because of my class and felt ostracized at a meeting” or “I think that poor people should not be leaders in the movement because they do not have the right presence for media.”). Latent coding is important to capture shared meanings and unspoken inferences.

I identified three initial key themes in the data: external goals, internal goals, and identity. I began to examine how the Desiree Alliance acts as a hybrid of labor organizing, community building, and advocacy in three areas:

External organizational strategies: These include narrative framing of external goals like legal change; reduction of social stigma; activist activities around sex worker rights and on other issues; articulation of rights claims; articulations of collaborative efforts with other organizations, law enforcement, or governments; references to labor and labor rights; articulations of decriminalization and/or other alternatives to prohibition; legal issues and legal aid.

Internal organizational strategies: These include narrative framing of activist strategies around level of participation in, and desire for, media trainings, skill building workshops and skill sharing; know-your-rights trainings, etc.; the development of interpersonal networks and networking.

Identity: These include narrative framing of identity as a sex worker and identity as an activist; resisting essentialist labels like “prostitute” while re/claiming “sex worker;” references to self and/or to stigmatization; activist beliefs, actions, and support; articulations of social support and business support that have resulted from being part of DA.

The following rounds of coding went beyond classifying strategies in terms of target (e.g., are they focusing externally on political efforts or internally on worker development?) to build themes around structural discrimination. In this round of coding, repeating connected themes

appeared: experiences of marginalization and stigma as consequence of social oppression, leading activists to emphasize normalization and respectability.

Many participants spent time in their interviews overtly describing *internal* issues of oppression or discrimination within the Desiree Alliance, concerns about excluding marginalized voices like trans-women or homeless people who engage in sexual labor. Often they would inferring external experiences of discrimination with police or family but not offer details. At first, I found this frustrating. But I began to realize emphasizing their activism, rather than their mobilizing grievances that brought them to activism, is part of the identity-making process for a stigmatized group constructing an activist identity. They emphasize the socially accepted statuses, like activist, over less acceptable statuses, like prostitute. Plus I wanted to learn more about activism, not work, so it makes sense that my participants would pick up on that and discuss issues within activist organizing.

I connected the manifest coded data within thematic latent codes, and compiled a list of general themes and meanings around organizing, personal connections with other activists, desires for social and legal inclusion, and other frequent signifiers. Further coding narrowed to three specific areas that became “memos” and later, the basis of my three data chapters: organizational structure, collective identity making, and key organizational goals. Codes were re-organized, combined, sorted out, or extended for more analysis. For example, ethnographic and interview data reveal a focus on changes at the local level rather than at the national level, and a focus on targeting governments for protection rather than a business. Participants’ feelings about, and experiences of, racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of discrimination are central to their experiences and expectations with sex workers rights organizing efforts.

Organizational structure: how sex worker rights activists participate in the DA, confusions and disagreements about the role of the DA, how the DA should be run, and how the DA is structured; tension and issues around diversity and inclusion work;

development as an activist, especially into leadership positions or public outreach; where emphasis is placed in terms of strategies and tactics

Community building and identity formation: educational outreach activities around sex worker rights; being an activist/references to identity; level of participation in, and desire for, trainings, skill building workshops and sharing sessions, know-your-rights trainings, etc.; the development of interpersonal networks (e.g., friendships); references to stigmatization or marginalization in other collaborative or other advocacy efforts; articulations of social support and business support that have resulted from being part of DA; tensions, concerns, and issues around the process of normalization and the importance of normalizing sex work and sex workers; the perceived impact of educational outreach and media efforts.

Political advocacy: articulation of rights claims; references to labor and labor rights; articulations of goals like decriminalization and/or other alternatives to prohibition; engaging with policy change work and policy watch; legal issues and legal aid; activist beliefs, actions, and support around sex trafficking outreach; articulations of collaborative efforts with other organizations, law enforcement, or government agencies; narratives of the impact of anti-trafficking law enforcement on their lives; tensions, concerns, and issues with political advocacy and narratives of respectability.

I eventually linked one of the organizational goals, community building, with two strategies, the conference and educational outreach. This forms the basis of Chapter Five. After another full round of latent coding, and several rounds of coding within each memo, questionable or rare coded themes were further examined and re-categorization if needed, or set aside for a future project. Certain anomalies and contradictions considered important were included in the appropriate category (i.e., a particularly extreme experience of legal discrimination or harassment that influences an activist, or a particularly positive or negative experience based on their status as an activist). The coding process ended once all possible themes of organizing, structure, strategies, and inequalities became repetitive and exhausted. Irrelevant codes were set aside in a different data file, but effectively discarded for this study.

ETHICS

Sexual labor is a contentious research topic. The question of how to ethically engage in research with sex workers brings up issues of confidentiality, of how to mitigate researcher privilege, and how to consciously offer voice without appropriating it. The politics and ethics of

researching sex—especially commodified sex—call into question what research methods are best for exploring the diverse practices, narratives, and experiences of sex worker activism. I use a critical postmodern feminist approach to challenge hegemonic definitions of not only prostitution, trafficking, and victimhood but also gender, power, and social change.³⁸ My research is centrally influenced by a feminist ethnographic tradition (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, Gluck and Patai 1991, Hesford and Kozol 2001, Wolf 1996), a postmodern feminism that examines the discursive constructions, interpretations, and enactments of identity and experience in the social world (Butler 1990, Felski 2000, Harding 1986, Nicholson 1990, Singer 1992). A postmodern feminist approach assumes that identities are constituted through interactions, discourse, and identifications and are not essential, foundational core selves (Ashenden 1997).

By using a critical postmodern feminist methodology, this study provides insights into the organizing efforts of contingent, criminalized labor. Sex worker rights organizing is a unique site where I can explore the ways in which activists think about labor *and* identity, and how they advocate for change.

In this way, my research is a counter-story, a counter-narrative in response to “majoritarian stories” that silence or ignore marginalized experiences. Majoritarian stories have the ability to silence the oppressed group precisely because they are told from the perspective of those with more power.⁴⁰ Counter-story is a critical theory research method that illuminates the experiences of oppression and struggle of stigmatized, under-represented groups. They are a method that responds to and challenges majoritarian narratives in academia, media, and policy.

Counter-stories are useful for exploring marginalized communities such as sex workers. The majoritarian story of *who* sex workers are—poor women in survival mode doing work that they would not otherwise choose to do—homogenizes a diverse field into a universal

experience. Sex work scholar Ronald Weitzer (2007) argues that a large amount of research on sex work and sex workers “violate[s] the canons of scientific inquiry,” citing sex-positive feminist scholar Gayle Rubin who finds that much of “the radical feminist literature on prostitution and other types of sex work is filled with ‘sloppy definitions, unsupported assertions, and outlandish claims’ (Rubin, 1993: 36); such writers select the ‘worst available examples’ of sex work and treat them as representative” (Rubin, 1984: 301, cited in Weitzer 2007:214).⁴¹ Considering further that majoritarian stories depict all sex work as heterosexual, with women worker-victims and men client-abusers, a postmodern critical feminist frame becomes particularly relevant.

Majoritarian stories remove much of the agency of people engaged in the sex industry, to the point that their organizing efforts are also rendered invisible.⁴² Prostitution research by certain oft-cited scholars is situated in a belief that all commodified sex is abusive and harmful, that prostitution is “bad for the body, bad for the heart” (Farley 2004). Further, “anecdotes are generalized and presented as conclusive evidence, sampling is selective, and counterevidence is routinely ignored” (Weitzer 2007:214). Most sex work research has focused on women, particularly women who are street-based (Vanwesenbeeck 2001, Weitzer 2007); little is done on transgender people and men who sell sex/ualized services. Weitzer (2007) explains the theoretical foundation that affects the methods, tone, and nature of radical feminist research on those who sell sex:

Radical feminism uses emotive language regarding the workers as well. Instead of the term “prostitute,” these writers insist on “prostituted women,” “sex slaves,” or “survivors.” Jeffreys (1997: 330) concedes that use of such terms is ideologically motivated: the term *prostituted women* “is a deliberate political decision and is meant to symbolize the lack of choice women have over being used in prostitution.” These terms are extremely problematic. “Prostituted” clearly indicates that prostitution is something done to women, not something that can be chosen, and “survivor” implies someone who has escaped a harrowing ordeal. In its central arguments and choice

of terminology, the radical feminist perspective *denies workers' agency* (2007:213, emphasis in the original).

Scholars like Kathleen Barry (1979), Melissa Farley (2004, 2007)⁴³, Sheila Jeffreys (2002), and Janice Raymond (2004, 2005) are members of organizations like the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women and other national and regional organizations (like Farley's involvement in the Nevada Coalition Against Sexual Trafficking). Such organizations argue that efforts to separate sex work from coercive trafficking perpetuate violence against women.

I recognize that as an academic ally to the sex workers rights movement, it appears that I am the mirror opposite of Farley or Jeffreys. And in a way, I am. By engaging in a rigorous research methodology and maintaining a commitment to the peer review process, in addition to ensuring the participants can hear their own voices in the research, I hope to partially alleviate these concerns. Further, a feminist methodological approach encourages scholars to see the words of those in marginalized and oppressed groups *as* knowledge production (Collins 1998, 2000), as (counter-) narratives—not as examples of false consciousness.

Weitzer argues what “is needed is an alternative paradigm that is (1) based on sound empirical evidence, (2) incorporates the multiple realities of workers and other actors, and (3) encompasses different types of prostitution” (2007: 214). My study incorporates a little studied aspect of sex worker realities, that of engaging in organizing and advocacy. The ethnography attests to the diversity of this umbrella organization, the Desiree Alliance, where diverse sex workers from a variety of industries come together to discuss work, politics, community outreach, harm reduction, self-care, and social change. I situate my research as a response to Weitzer's call for research into the variation of types of sex work and the need for inclusion of male and transgender voices (Weitzer 2007).

Using a sex positive feminist methodological approach may increase the dependability of my findings. Sex positive feminists start from the assumption that sex is socially constructed

and historically mitigated experience that is not inherently dangerous or inherently pleasurable; I similarly situate commercial sexual encounters. Interrogating how “whore stigma” is an intrinsic part of the experiences of sex worker rights activists and the struggle for the right to engage in sexual labor reveals the lived realities of “sex at the margins” (Agustin 2007; Pheterson 1996). My research aligns with a growing body of research on sexual labor that addresses cultural, social, legal, and economic contexts of sex work.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I introduced my study of the U.S. sex workers rights movement via the umbrella organization, the Desiree Alliance. I described the ethnographic methods I used to explore how this movement represents a unique type of worker organizing, social movement unionism, for contingent, criminalized laborers. Ethnographic study helps capture the complex interactions of individuals, organizations, and structures involved in worker organizing.

Following the tradition of feminist counter-narratives, and situated in a critical postmodern understanding of identity and experience, I am able to examine the ways in which power is both experienced and resisted personally, socially, and politically. I track how legislation and stigma act as textually mediated ruling relations that shape sex worker rights advocates experiences with each other and with the social world they are trying to change. I am able to show how anti-trafficking and anti-prostitution policy shape the perspectives and strategies of sex worker rights activists.

In the next three chapters, I will discuss the findings of my ethnography. Chapter Four examines the membership, leadership, and organizational structure of the Desiree Alliance (DA). In what ways does the DA organizational structure reflect social movement unionism (SMU) characteristics? Can it be consider an SMU if there is no physical space beyond a conference? Chapter Five begins to explore the Desiree Alliance’s organizational goals in-depth. Worker

development and activist development workshops prepare sex workers for public educational outreach, empower workers on the job, teach harm reduction techniques, and create a sense of solidarity between sex workers. What can the nature of community and identity building tell us about the impact of criminalization on sex workers? Chapter Six then examines the political advocacy efforts of individual activists. Who do sex worker rights activists target politically, and what characterizes their efforts? How do they interpret barriers to their activism, particularly in relation to the federal *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* (TVPA)? And what does this reveal about the relationship between sex worker organizing and citizenship? Both Chapters Five and Six examine how sex workers articulate counter-narratives, and how these are embedded in their political advocacy and public educational outreach efforts. Overall, what are the implications of fighting for labor rights through the criminal justice system?

CHAPTER 4

ORGANIZING THE UN-ORGANIZABLE: SEX WORKER RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

This chapter examines the Desiree Alliance's (DA) organizational development, structure, leadership, and membership. The year 2010 was a moment of much change in terms of structure and leadership, as the DA shifted from their first set of co-directors to their second set of co-directors, and established a formal oversight committee. First, I discuss the organizational model of the DA, including the establishment of a national conference and the creation of a network of the majority of sex worker rights organizations in the country today. I also examine what constitutes membership within an umbrella organization whose main task is to host a conference for current and former sex workers from a range of industries. What are the characteristics of membership, both for organizations and for individuals? I then explore how disagreements over diversity and inclusion led to changes in organizational structure. Diversity is a central concern for labor efforts today, and the Desiree Alliance has addressed these issues in specific ways.

If social movement unionism (SMU) is characterized by a small politicized core of worker activists that maintain a commitment to worker empowerment, internal leadership development, democratic decision making, and social justice, does the development of the DA into an umbrella network and conference host count as an SMU? In what ways do the characteristics of the DA organization fit with a social movement unionism (SMU) model?

THE DESIREE ALLIANCE AS A NETWORK

The Desiree Alliance (DA) is the only national umbrella network of sex worker rights organizations and groups in the country. The key organizational feature of the DA, and perhaps its most unique aspect, is that its main purpose is to organize a bi-yearly conference. The DA began in late 2005 as an informal group of activists and allies who communicated via a listserv

and conference calls to organize the first conference in July 2006. I was part of this original list-serv of conference organizers. Since 2006, the DA has evolved as an umbrella organization for sex worker rights organizations. There is now a formal list-serv for the DA co-directors and a leadership committee, called the Strategic Committee, and a general DA list-serv to send out calls for conference workshops and attendance. Calls for conference workshops and presentations, and for volunteers, are disseminated six to eight months in advance among DA member organizations and other outlets, like sex worker support websites. There is no physical Desiree Alliance office; leadership connects via phone or email to organize the conference and discuss advocacy efforts. As a national organization, much organizing occurs online and over the phone. Not being face-to-face presents certain challenges to the committee members and the directors, as I will discuss in this chapter.

The Role of the Conference

The Desiree Alliance conferences provide workshops and panels on legal rights, business strategies and development, harm reduction methods, ways to build activist networks, and specific social and legal advocacy ideas. Since their founding in 2005, the DA has hosted four summer conferences. One conference was held in 2006 in Las Vegas, one in 2007 in San Francisco in conjunction with the Sex Workers Art Show, one in 2008 in Chicago largely organized by SWOP Chicago, and one in 2010 in Las Vegas again, with plans for one in 2013 in Las Vegas (2012 was the original date, but was pushed back due to sex worker participation in the International AIDS Conference/protest in July 2012). The inaugural Desiree Alliance sex workers rights conference in 2006 brought together nearly 200 sex worker rights activists from the U.S., Japan, Australia, and Canada. In 2010, around 130 people attended. Each conference consists of five tracks: Activism; Harm Reduction and Outreach; Academics and Policy; Art,

Entertainment, and Media; and Business Development. There are coordinating teams of three or more people for each track that will review submission and help put together the program.

In a sense, the conference acts as a “drop in” space, a space get educated and get inspired, and take that information back home, either as a worker, an activist, or both.

Conferences are a space of politicization and identity building, as sex workers challenge the stigma against their work together, through a multifaceted approach of business skill building and activism (this will be discussed more in-depth in the following chapter). Sex workers are encouraged to present as well as attend. The conferences are built on peer-to-peer development and many of the panels and workshops are led by sex workers (current and former). Attending the conference, or helping plan the conference, provides the physical space and time for concrete networking and brainstorming.

Attendees are screened by conference organizers to ensure that the conference is a safe space for sex worker’s to discuss legal rights, labor, and other issues (since some people, though not all, have engaged in criminalized labor). Applicants are asked to provide information on how they heard about the conference, and are asked to provide links to activist websites, art, or publications, and proof of work if from the fields of academia or harm reduction. In this way, the DA leadership reinforces who is considered an “insider” while trying to make sure that undercover law enforcement or disingenuous anti-prostitution advocates do not attend. Once vetted, attendees are told the specific conference location and given other logistical information on travel, room share, and other pertinent information.

Membership as an Informal Process

Who counts as a “member” of the Desiree Alliance is an interesting question. In terms of membership, there are no individual members of the Desiree Alliance per se, but rather member organizations, conference attendees, and leadership. Conference attendees can be

considered members, and activists who participate in a “member organization,” may also be considered members, as they are actively engaging in skill sharing, community building, and, sometimes, political advocacy and public educational outreach. In this sense, the DA is quite informal. It is more similar to social movement unionism in this respect than a traditional labor union. There are conference registration fees but no member dues, no requirements for participation like committee work. People attend the DA conference to increase business skills and activist skills, discuss harm reduction efforts and techniques, engage in art and media training, and share sex worker research. Attendees make connections with a national network of sex worker rights activists and groups. Like worker centers, membership is informal and is cultivated more through participation in a peer-to-peer format than paying dues or sitting on committees.

Type of worker. Conference participants and member organizations represent a range of businesses within the sex industry. Many people under the Desiree Alliance umbrella have current or past experiences in erotic dance (ranging from peep shows behind glass to lap dancing), the sale of sex in a range of venues both independent or working for someone, professional fetish and dom work, and queer and straight adult film. Some currently work; some have not worked since the 1980s. Some have worked for decades; others have just a few years of experience in sexualized service. In terms of labor, sex workers are contingent laborers: working as independent contractors with strip clubs or escort agencies, or working in criminalized, informal structures alone or with others.

Summer, a white cisgender woman in her early 40s, has experience as an erotic dancer and a professional dominatrix. She discusses what constitutes sexual labor, in the context of responding to media portrayals of sex work as coercive street work:

It's a many-different faced profession depending on how people got involved in it, depending on their circumstances, depending

on which part of the profession they're in. It's not 'one face' of sex work, there's multiple faces, and we usually tend to see in the media, the one face of the [*she deeps her voice to mimic a newscaster*] *destitute street prostitute who's got a needle in her arm or a pimp around the corner, or whatever* [voice ends]. And that's just one little tiny slice of what's going on, and doesn't represent hardly any of what's really going on. So, there's just all different forms of sex work under a big umbrella, and that's just such a tiny little piece of it that gives it a bad name.

The Desiree Alliance is not a homogenized group of workers, and activists often point this out.

The labor itself is quite varied, and the workers are diverse. Workers who sell sex often work out of hotel rooms, their homes, or public spaces, without a centralized or formalized workplace.

Sex workers may be undocumented. They may be felons. Sex workers are often criminalized, working in an underground economy. If engaging in legal or grey forms of sexual commerce

besides the sale of sex, like erotic dance, web-cams, or professional BDSM services, the work may be little regulated, or informal with no contracts, just a verbal agreement or short-term

agreement between parties. Plus, legal erotic labor is often targeted by police who suspect

illegal sex work is occurring. Qualitative studies have shown that for many low and middle class

women, sexualized jobs offers a higher wage and more flexible hours in the face of otherwise

stagnate and low waged service industry jobs and rising secondary education costs (Brents,

Jackson, and Hausbeck 2010; Brents and Sanders 2010; Roberts, Sanders, Myers, and Smith

2010; Roberts, Bergström, and La Rooy 2007). These are not the characteristics of traditional

union members.

Determining the size of membership. In terms of size, sex worker rights organizations have traditionally had a small number of active participants (Weitzer 1991). This may be a result of difficulties organizing across a range of businesses. This may also be attributable to the stigma surrounding sex work—sex workers may be less likely to seek solidarity or know their rights (West 2000).

The Desiree Alliance conferences bring in 100 to 200 participants depending on the year. At conferences, attendees can find a local organization to join, if they are not already affiliated with one, like a SWOP chapter. This is one of the main roles of the DA: connect sex workers and sex worker rights organizations with each other, forming a national network of political actors and sources of worker-to-worker support, legal aid, and health resources that sex workers can tap into. Member organizations are the main source of conference attendees. In that sense, member organizations play a pivotal role in DA structure. It may make more sense to talk about the size of membership in terms of conference attendees and the number of member organizations.

Member organizations. The Desiree Alliance has twenty-two member organizations that are often active in conference planning. Networked regionally and nationally, these groups generate varying forms of informal and formal support for sex workers, as I will show in the next chapter. Organizations do not pay a fee or dues to be a part of DA, it is more of an ideological networking of organizations. According to the DA website, member organizations have to sign on the DA mission statement, and provide a link to their organization to be published on the website. The DA mission statement reads:

The Desiree Alliance is a diverse, sex worker-led network of organizations, communities, and individuals across the US working in harm reduction, direct services, political advocacy, and health services for sex workers. We provide leadership and create space for sex workers and supporters to come together to advocate for human, labor, and civil rights for all workers in the sex industry.

Member organizations go through an informal vetting process. To become a member organization, an organization must simply email or call. If the organization is unknown, sex worker rights activists check with each other, asking if anyone knows this person or this group. It is rare for the organization to be unknown. Carol Leigh is arguably the most well-known sex

worker rights activist in the country. She emerged as a sex worker rights activist and performance artist in San Francisco in the 1970s at a moment of much activism around sex and sexuality in the city. She heads the Bay Area Sex Workers' Advocacy Network (BAYSWAN), and is the former head of COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics). Basically, Carol Leigh has been building her own informal network of activists for 40 years. Every sex worker rights activists I talked to has either met Carol Leigh or wants to meet her. Shawn, a white, gay cisgender man in his 30s who lives in a West coast city, was telling me about how she helped him get involved with sex worker rights, exclaiming, "Carol Leigh is the...god, I mean, she's the linkage between all of us!" This is a very different membership process from a labor union. Because it is an informal "who knows who" process, the DA is quick to establish insider/outsider boundaries.

The national Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP-USA) and thirteen SWOP chapters are member organizations under the DA network, in addition to seven other organizations:

- Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP-USA)
- SWOP New York (aka SWANK)
- SWOP East
- SWOP Boston
- SWOP Los Angeles
- SWOP Las Vegas
- SWOP Tucson in Arizona
- SWOP NOLA in New Orleans
- SWOP Portland in Oregon
- SWOP Chicago
- SWOP Michigan
- SWOP Northwest
- SWOP SoCal (Southern California)
- SWOP NorCal (Northern California)

- Different Avenues and HIPS in D.C.
- the national Best Practices Policy Project
- Author and activist Veronica Monet
- St. James Infirmary in San Francisco
- BAYSWAN (Carol Leigh's Bay Area Sex Workers' Advocacy Network)
- COYOTE ("Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics," founded by Margo St. James in 1973)
- APLE (Arresting Prostitutes is Legal Exploitation) in Hawaii

These groups provide space for sex workers to build community with each other in-person and online, they engage in harm reduction efforts, fight isolation through support groups and social meet-ups, hold know-your-rights trainings, financial planning and tax classes, and sometimes engage in social and political forms of advocacy. Because they are not worksite-based, sex worker rights groups do not need to collect dues to support collective bargaining efforts. And most of these sex worker rights organizations are not sector-specific, meaning that rather than consisting of people from one industry, like strip clubs or online escorting, they consist of people from a range of sex industries. Sex workers come together around issues like police brutality and harassment, healthcare needs, or the effects of trafficking policies on their lives and livelihood. The St. James Infirmary, a health clinic by-and-for sex workers in the San Francisco Bay Area, is somewhat unique in that it explicitly focuses on direct service provision.

In this way, the Desiree Alliance is made up of a number of organizations that have their own varying ways of formalizing membership. When I asked the leaders of these member organizations to tell me how many people were part of their organization, they were often unable to do so. They would talk about a list-serv of workers and allies that they use to advertise upcoming events, issue campaigns, protests, or fundraisers. They would also emphasize that a core group of active members keep the organization going, a group of three to six sex workers who organize the events and issue campaigns, engage in outreach to other sex workers, host support groups and workshops on safety and rights, and engage in political advocacy and public education.

The Desiree Alliance also works with a number of “partner organizations” who are listed separate from official member organizations. The exact differences between member organizations and partner organizations are somewhat unclear. It appears that joining the DA as a member organization is both a symbol of solidarity and a commitment to the conference.

Alternatively, partner organizations work with the DA to provide local events and learning opportunities for sex workers, but they do not help with conference planning. The national Harm Reduction Coalition, Prostitutes of New York (PONY), the Baltimore-based Power Inside (for women at risk of incarceration in general), the now defunct \$pread Magazine, St. James Infirmary, Sex Worker Action New York (SWANK), and the Woodhull Foundation for Sexual Freedom have all partnered with the Desiree Alliance in the past.

While there are a number of cities that are home to a local sex worker rights group, only a few have a strong, established presence. In Chicago, the local SWOP works with many non-profits and DePaul University. SWOP Chicago is often invited to speak at the university and in the community. In New York, SWOP/SWANK counter-protested feminists demanding that The Village Voice media group shut down backpage.com, an online sex worker advertising board (it has yet to be shut down). The Red Umbrella Project (RedUP), based in New York, has established a signature focus on training and empowerment through hosting writing workshops, media trainings, and legislative trainings for sex workers. Many Desiree Alliance leadership have participated in RedUP programs, learning both techniques for engaging the public and developing a sense of sex worker collective identity. In these ways, individual member organizations are central to “organizational regeneration,” maintaining and strengthening a core of leaders and representatives across the country.

Overall, the “who” and “how” of sex worker rights organizing membership shares more characteristics with social movement unionism efforts like worker centers than a traditional labor union. Like worker centers, the Desiree Alliance and its member organizations often have small memberships, with a core of committed activists, and workers come from a range of industries, not just one industry. The DA has a loose membership process; people attend the conference, often speaking at it or helping out with programming or registration, as affiliates

with a member organization. Membership comes from participation, rather than a formal joining process: organizing with a local SWOP, organizing or participating in a workshop or panel at the national conference, attending trainings, engaging in educational outreach through art and readings like the Sex Workers Art Show, or participating in local political forums around sex work, trafficking, and immigration.

This is why the Desiree Alliance network is somewhat unique. Individual actors and organizations are embedded in a network of national, regional, and local organizations through the Desiree Alliance. While some worker centers, for example, are just now networking with each other, the Desiree Alliance has established a national network of sex worker rights organizations.

With a non-traditional membership structure and non-traditional workers, the DA faces unique organizational issues. Sex workers are a diverse group, in terms of demographics and in terms of types of labor, and this has been an issue for DA leadership. How does a diffuse, online network ensure that all sex workers voices are represented and heard at conferences and in leadership?

ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL: DEVELOPING A NEW ORGANIZATION AND NEW LEADERS

Origins and Development of the Desiree Alliance

The DA was formed in 2005 out of a desire for, as sex workers put it, “our own conference.” A handful of sex worker rights activists attended the 2nd annual conference on “Prostitution, Sex Work, and the Commercial Sex Industry” in 2004 at the University of Toledo, Ohio. The “Toledo conference,” as attendees often refer to it, is a yearly conference organized by the social work department at the University of Toledo. It brings together social workers, harm reduction workers, and activists to present research and best practices, and discuss various interventions for sex workers. Sex worker rights activists attended the conference in

2003 and 2004, presenting on their activist efforts. They found that these kinds of conferences were an important audience to be visible to as sex workers. While sex worker activists do not organize the conference, they have been able to insert themselves onto the conference agenda.

In 2004, the Toledo conference was the only regular national gathering of activists around issues of sexual labor. It continues to be a well-known conference among academics and social workers. The conference continues to focus on exits from the sex industry, not labor rights for people *in* the industry. For example, conference organizers changed the title to the “Human Trafficking, Prostitution & Sex Work Conference” in 2008 to acknowledge issues of sex trafficking. There was talk of dropping “sex work” from the title in 2009, but sex worker activists were able to get organizers to keep the term in the title. (The National Association of Social Workers makes a distinction between prostitution as “involuntary” and commercial sex as “voluntary.”)⁴⁴ Catherine, a queer mixed race Latina/white woman in her early 40s and long-time sex worker rights activist, explains how the academic conference organizers changed the logo to accommodate the perspective of sex worker rights advocates when “a bunch of us showed up”:

They used to have this logo of a woman crying, and it was like ‘stop it! We aren't all victims!’ The people who ran the conference were [in] the social work department there, at the University of Toledo, and they were great. . . .It was a very interesting amalgamation of people for and people against, and people in the middle. So it was really, it was good, I thought, because it got conversations going, and people were open to having their minds changed about something.

Yet many sex workers felt that there was no time to address their concerns at the Toledo conference, because so much time was spent engaging people who had little understanding of sex workers who want to stay in the industry. This continues to be a tension with sex workers who attend this conference. For example, some of the conference organizers also run a social service agency, Second Chance. The Toledo conference website is now hosted

by this group. Second Chance “provides comprehensive services to victims of domestic sex trafficking and prostitution” and promotes their “You are Forever Priceless” campaign “on the website, encouraging people to wear a ribbon to “demonstrate how girls and women are priceless and not something to be bought and sold.”⁴⁵ Engaging with social workers and other providers is an important strategy to sex worker rights activists, to be sure. However, as Catherine and others share the story of the creation of the Desiree Alliance, it is clear that they desired space by-and-for sex workers and their allies.

Robyn Few, Scarlot Harlot, Catherine, and a few other sex worker rights activists shared a meal on the last day of the 2004 conference, contemplating the effectiveness and meaning of sex workers attending this conference. The group of largely white, queer or bisexual, cisgender sex worker rights activists represented a mix of activist experience: Catherine was relatively new to sex worker rights activism; Robyn Few had just founded the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP) a year earlier; Scarlot Harlot had been active for decades. The women felt that there was a lack of gathering space for sex workers and their allies to focus on issues important to them.

The sex workers decided to commit themselves to planning their own conference where sex workers and allies could gather and discuss issues important to them. They chose Las Vegas as a potential first site and contacted two local academic allies to get university support. There was debate about whether to do the conference through an existing organization, like the Sex Workers Outreach Project, or to create a new organization. Catherine and Roxy (pseudonyms) emerged as co-leaders of a new organization, which they named the Desiree Alliance. They purposefully chose a name without “sex” or “sex work” in the title, for both broad appeal but also to be inclusive of people who engage in sexual labor but do not take on a sex worker identity. The Sex Worker’s Outreach Project’s founder Robyn Few was unsure about what

exactly DA could provide that was not already being provided. SWOP, founded in 2003, offers support and community to sex workers. It is arguably the largest and most visible sex worker rights organization in the U.S., with around 25-30 active member chapters around the country, all connected under SWOP USA. Robyn and other SWOP members worried, as one activist put it, “is Desiree Alliance going to kill SWOP USA?” Roxy and Robyn were friends and that helped allay some of these concerns. The mentorship relationship between the new leaders and established leaders smoothed tensions and clarified the purpose of the Desiree Alliance.

Catherine and Roxy relied heavily on mentorship from Carol Leigh and Robyn Few. They eventually built up a loose, 40-person leadership team coordinated through a list-serv. About ten to twelve people were very active on the list-serv with weekly if not daily emails, coordinating the conference. Conference planning relies heavily on monthly (or more often, as the conference draws closer) conference calls and list-serv communication. This has become more streamline over the years as a smaller but very active core of activist leaders separated out from the original 40-person team. Conference organizers reach out to locals to formalize a local logistics team to find and secure conference space, hotel rooms, and an after-party space.

At the beginning of 2006, Desiree Alliance leadership sought academic allies. They reached out to University of Nevada, Las Vegas sociologists Barb Brents and Kate Hausbeck, and inquired about hosting the conference at UNLV. They wanted to mimic other conferences, like the Toledo conference, held on a university campus. Doing so lends the event a sense of legitimacy and importance. Although UNLV proved to be cost prohibitive, Barb, Kate, a Women’s Studies undergraduate, and myself were very involved with conference planning. The Desiree Alliance settled on a non-university conference space. As time has gone on and the DA has changed leadership structure, as I will show, the DA has relied less and less on academics for assistance, though the Academics and Policy Track is still a substantial part of the conference.

As a loose network of member organizations and independent activists, the Desiree Alliance has minimal administrative infrastructure. This is partially due to the fact that the Desiree Alliance has non-profit status through a larger organization that supports a range of progressive projects called the Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs (SEE).⁴⁶ Instead of applying for non-profit status directly, SEE helps emerging groups by providing some of the necessary infrastructure. The DA is one of almost 100 SEE member projects. This means that when fundraising, individuals and organizations can make out a check to SEE, rather than be linked directly to a sex worker rights organization.

According to SEE's website, "SEE creates working relationships with activists and projects that are charitable in nature. We incubate projects that will eventually make a cultural impact by creating progressive change."⁴⁷ SEE is the fiscal sponsor for the Desiree Alliance, meaning that:

SEE handles back office work so the project workers' time is freed up to focus on the fieldwork. SEE processes all donations for the individual projects, files appropriate paperwork with government agencies, sees to paying all related bills of the project, issues tax-receipts to donors and maintains a professional office for the projects.

In 2010, the Desiree Alliance created a position for a financial officer who oversees the Desiree Alliance budget, before that, it was the responsibility of one of the co-directors. The officer goes through SEE when raising conference funds and paying out funds to the conference space or scholarship recipients. Desiree Alliance opted to attain non-profit status in this way for ease (applying for non-profit status is difficult and time-consuming, and not always granted) and for legitimacy (SEE has broad appeal across a range of social justice issues).

The cost to host the six-day long conference and provide scholarships ranges from \$20,000 to \$30,000 total. Conference fees are around \$125 to \$200 depending on discounts for early registration, being a student, or being a presenter. Scholarship recipients receive full or

partial coverage (depending on need) of conference admission, travel, and board (a hotel room share). Small amounts of funding are cobbled together from a range of sources, often through grassroots fundraising efforts. These funds cover the cost of hosting the conference and providing scholarships for low-income sex workers to attend.

In 2010, the Desiree Alliance secured a \$25,000 grant from the Craigslist Charitable Fund, the largest single amount ever received. Other sources of funds include sex worker's clients, online fundraising through social media sites like Indiegogo, member organizations hosting fundraising events, and other small grants. Grants for a few hundred or a couple thousand dollars come in from social justice foundations like Common or the Third Wave Foundation as well as corporation philanthropy foundations like Astraea Foundation and the Ben and Jerry's Foundation. Most of the grants are awarded on the basis of harm reduction and diversity, with grant-writers asking for monies to cover the cost of bringing in marginalized populations who engage in sex work, like people of color.

Since its inception in 2005, the Desiree Alliance (DA) has struggled with its organizational identity. Some sex worker rights activists have expressed confusion over the role of the Desiree Alliance in a sea of existing sex worker rights groups. The establishment of Desiree Alliance as a conference organizer, rather than a competing advocacy group, helped alleviate those concerns. For the first few years, DA organizers and leaders hammered out the differences between the DA, the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP), and other organizations. SWOP is now the DA's biggest member organization. Currently, one of the DA co-directors sits on SWOP-USA's board, and one of SWOP-USA board members is an alternate and consultant for the DA Strategic Committee. As the DA has developed as a national network and conference host, concerns about the role of the DA have given way to concerns about inclusion and representation of marginalized sex workers.

Battles over Diversity and Changes in Organizational Structure

From the beginning, a number conference organizers committed themselves to ensuring the DA maintained a social justice vision of inclusion. They wanted to make sure the DA maintained a social justice commitment to incorporating the concerns of trans sex workers, sex workers of color, and poor sex workers in leadership decisions (and later, developing leadership trainings for marginalized sex workers to take on leadership positions), and to ensuring there were conference scholarships available for marginalized workers and a welcoming space once they got to the conference. While all the leaders agreed a social justice perspective was important, there was disagreement among leaders as to what this should look like. A social justice perspective is grounded in an intersectional critique of oppression and discrimination at the individual, institutional, and structural levels. Even within a marginalized group like sex workers, differences of class, race, gender identity, citizenship status, and sexual identity mean that some sex workers are more privileged than others. Several leaders were very vocal about their concerns that the Desiree Alliance was not committed to helping individuals and groups attain fair treatment and equal access at the conference.

For example, one activist who has been instrumental in several east coast sex worker rights and outreach programs, also helped found the Desiree Alliance. She was excited to support the new organization and the conference, recounting, "I brought all of my grant writing expertise, my staff. I remember, I printed out Desiree Alliance's grants on our computers." She was frustrated by the Desiree Alliance, recounting:

I do remember at one point before the first Desiree Alliance conference, one of staff at [another organization], that she refused to work with the Desiree Alliance because it was not an anti-racist organization. And I said, 'I respect you in that.' And I also remember at some point having to put my head down on my desk at [that organization] because I just felt so not heard. And so, these issues were so hard to navigate.

She felt that DA leadership was not responsive enough to her concerns.

In order to address these issues, Trish and others calling for diversity and inclusion formed a committee in 2006, “a committee which was I think called the diversity committee initially, and then became the social justice taskforce.” The committee was racial diverse, and diverse in terms of gender identity and class. Trish explained that they “created a diversity statement, which I think was renamed the social justice statement,” that outlined how the DA was trying to engage in “anti-racism and anti-oppression” work. The committee is now in charge of overseeing the conference scholarship application procedure, and applies for grants to help cover scholarship costs. They also participate in conference programming to ensure that workshops and topics are relevant to, and address issues important to, transgender sex workers, sex workers of color, and poor sex workers. They help find local methadone clinics and help set up childcare options at the conference.

Catherine, with her class privileged background and master’s degree from the London School of Economics, felt especially targeted over others concerns about diversity and the DA. Roxy stepped down in 2008 because she wanted the conference to be more activist in nature, and less academic. Catherine remained. Although she identifies as a “white Latina” (a Latina-identified woman who looks white in appearance), she felt that people assumed her whiteness and class privilege meant she was not dedicated to social justice work within the movement. With each conference, people argued over how to best include a range of sex workers voices and needs. In a side conversation with me, Catherine reflected on how some activists are focused internally on the movement, and others are focused externally on legal change:

Catherine: Some people strictly want decriminalization, that's their whole point [in being an activist]. Some people want to grow the movement. I was kinda a combination of the two. Some people want to see equality *in* the movement; it's most important that they have equal representation within the movement itself.

Crystal: Around like?

Catherine: Social justice issues, like racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, you know, -isms. And that's their main concern, making sure that the movement reflects equitable society. That kind of a thing. And then there are other people who are concerned about advancing their skills in the sex industry. So Desiree's conferences were often a very interesting combination of all of these concerns.

The tensions over the meanings of equality within the movement were the most heated conversations on list-servs and behind the scenes at the 2010 conference. Discussions over how to best spend funds leading up to the conference were really conversations about inclusion: how to balance paying for the conference and providing enough scholarships for room and travel for marginalized sex workers.

When Catherine left the DA in 2010, she confessed that:

The most stressful thing for me at the end with Desiree, was that there seemed to be a very vocal...minority maybe, because I think it was a minority who was very dissatisfied with the way that I was doing things. And the reason they were dissatisfied is because they felt that I was concentrating too much on growing the movement. I wanted the movement to try and appeal to as many people as possible.

Issues within the movement threatened the continued existence of the Desiree Alliance. When Catherine left the DA, a new formalized leadership structure was instituted.

Leadership

At the end of the 2010 conference, the DA shifted from a large 40 person leadership team and two co-directors to a formal committee that has the power to vote out and vote in new co-directors. The same directors were in place from 2005 through 2010 (in various configurations from 2005 through 2008, and 2008 through 2010). It wasn't until 2010 that the organizational structure truly shifted with a change of leadership and leadership structure.

This new leadership structure is considered by the social justice taskforce activists to be a more democratic leadership structure (see *Figure 1*). Now the co-directorship answers to and works with a Strategic Committee, a formalized committee, rather than an email list-serv of *all* 40 or so interested sex workers and allies. After the 2010 conference, a white, cisgender woman in her early 50s, and felon rights activist from Arizona, and an African-American transgender woman activist, assumed the shared leadership role. They were asked by leadership to take on the role. Both had had a strong background in activism already; working on a range of issues around gender, prison rights, anti-racism, and anti-oppression work. . They had also completed a leadership training for marginalized sex workers in 2007, hosted by the Best Practices Policy Project.



Figure 1: Desiree Alliance leadership structure

Maribel recounts the decision to formalize a broader leadership structure beyond the co-directors, explaining, “The first thing we did when we did start restructuring the organization is...We didn’t have a board. [So] we put together a small mentoring group for leadership. . .Then that kept our members from screaming out ‘you’ve got too much power!’” The mentorship group began working on by-laws, and formally took on the label “Strategic Committee.” Maribel

notes that the Strategic Committee and bylaws were put in place in response to people's concerns about the two directors having too much power, saying:

That way nobody gets too much power, or not enough. Having the bylaws in place, and things like that, gives us a lot more structure and hopefully puts our organization's membership at ease, that we have all this. So that's been my biggest struggle, was just learning how to be a director of an organization, this virtual organization-- and virtual is really hard. I find that, not a home base, virtual organizing can be extremely hard and consensus is a really hard thing.

The process took some time, but they were able to "finish re-structuring:"

We've got bylaws now. There is no power structure. We've got our committee that...there's a lot of things in place now for Desiree to go to if we need [to]. You can oust somebody. We can be voted out, leadership can be voted out, by the committee.

With the establishment of a Strategic Committee came the creation of by-laws, including a provision for leadership to be voted out by the committee.

The Strategic Committee is made up of representatives from member organizations and sex worker rights activists, not outsiders. The DA stresses that leadership has to be majority sex worker (current or former), although long-time allies are afforded some inclusion at that level. This focus on being by-and-for the workers is a key characteristic of social movement unionism. It ensures that strategies are directly connected to the workers' needs and not the needs of outside non-profit or policy groups, in addition to fostering community building.

The DA Strategic Committee works year-round, coordinating online and via conference calls, and is made up of individuals from a range of sex worker rights organizations. It is very diverse in terms of race, gender, and sexual identity, aligning with the DA's social justice taskforce statement. According to their website, the original 13 person committee consisted of:

- Bhavana Nancherla representing SWOP NY;
- Carol Leigh, BAYSWAN;

- Deon Haywood from Women With A Vision (WWAV) in New Orleans;
- Jill McCracken with Desiree Alliance and SWOP USA;
- Kitten INFINITE from SWOP Chicago and Tucson;
- Melissa Sontag-Broudo, the consulting attorney for the Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center in New York City;
- Naomi Akers with the St. James Infirmary in California;
- Penelope Saunders from Best Practices Policy Project in Washington, D.C.;
- Peter Bailey with SWOP New York;
- Sandy Guillame with the Desiree Alliance & Harm Reduction Advocate,
- Stephen Crowe from Harlem United and PROS Network (Providers and Resources Offering Services to sex workers Network) in New York City;
- Californian sex workers, artists and activists Juba Kalakma and Kirk Read.

In 2012, the Strategic Committee shrunk to seven people from the original Committee, Bhavana Nancherla, Juba Kalakma, Kirk Read, Melissa Sontag-Broudo, Penelope Saunders, Sandy Guillame, and a new representative from Harlem United / PROS Network, Brendan Conner. Jill McCracken and Deon Haywood are alternates, and Carol Leigh is considered a consultant, continuing to provide guidance and mentorship in a less formal capacity.

One of the leadership members joked that every time she introduces a new idea with the Strategic Committee on a conference call or via email, she's "back up on the cross again." She laughed, saying later that something as simple as "'hey, what color nail polish should I wear today?' could go on for months! For months and months because we are such an opinioned group of people." Even sex worker rights activists refer to themselves as somewhat un-organizable. Catherine in reference to the larger leadership group, said somewhat exasperated, "there's that saying that organizing sex workers is like herding cats! I would say that there is definitely something to be said for that." In addition to the stigma of identifying as a sex worker, she adds, "I think it is difficult for people to agree on what's important in the movement." The

diversity of what is important to the movement is evident in the development of five conference tracks. Some focus on worker development, like the Business Development Track and Harm Reduction Track, and others focus on external advocacy, like the Activism Track and Academics and Policy Track. The Art, Entertainment, and Media track often includes both activist and worker empowerment.

The new leadership structure, with a Strategic Committee overseeing the two co-directors, appears to have stabilized the organization. Maribel believes a more formal structure is having a positive impact:

I think that's been the best thing for Desiree, is having a solid structure. And it also gives us a more solid structure when we approach communities and organizations, or if we're on working groups or attend conferences, it really gives us some credibility.

Overall, the DA organizational structure and leadership share certain characteristics with worker centers: there is a diffuse organizational structure; leadership is flexible and democratic, changing shape with the growth of the organization. The DA has solidified a social justice focus, which will become clearer in the next chapter on collective identity and worker empowerment. The leadership is by-and-for the workers, and even then, who gets to represent the workers can be contentious. Sex workers themselves have largely taken the lead, whether dealing with internal issues within the DA or engaging in community building or political advocacy for decriminalization, as opposed to outside organizations or social service providers speaking for sex workers. The use of an informal and internal vetting process to gain membership indicates strong ties to local communities of sex workers. The DA member organizations are significant hubs in the larger national sex worker rights network, and as I will show in Chapter Six, central to political advocacy efforts at the local and state levels.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the Desiree Alliance embodies many key characteristics of social movement unionism (SMU) today. SMU efforts may share certain tactics with unions, like protests, but there are otherwise many differences. The Desiree Alliance is nowhere near what the National Labor Relations Board would consider a labor union. Alternatively, the DA's organizational structure and membership appears to mimic many characteristics of SMU, particularly around membership structure and leadership development. Yet the DA is also different: the leadership is diffuse, there is no drop in center. In a way, the member organizations are the drop-in centers. The conference too offers a physical space for interaction.

First, the DA membership is small and fairly informal, with a concentrated group of activists leading most efforts. Similar to worker centers, a concentrated group of dedicated activists, not large numbers of members, maintain the organization. Second, the DA's lack of emphasis on building large numbers and minimal infrastructure embody the grassroots social movement aspects of social movement unionism.

However, worker centers are just beginning to network with each other, previously working locally with little interaction or communication with other worker centers. The Desiree Alliance network is a step ahead, networking together independent organizations, building on existing relationships between key sex worker rights leaders. And although the Desiree Alliance does not have a physical space, the member organizations appear to provide many of the services that worker centers provide like worker development trainings, and similarly engage in community building and public educational outreach.

In conclusion, the Desiree Alliance has organized a group of workers considered to be less organizable than workers in legal, stable jobs. Although there is discord, which has led to changes in leadership structure and the institutionalization of a national conference, sex

workers are organizing to address their experiences of oppression, violence, and discrimination. Sex workers, similar to undocumented immigrant workers organizing through worker centers, exemplify the changing nature of worker organizing in a post-industrial economy that is built on contingent work, and the accompanying racial, class, and gender dynamics of such work.

In the next chapters, I will discuss the two major organizational goals of the Desiree Alliance (DA), community building and political activism. This will illuminate what social movement unionism looks like when the workers carry a criminalized master status. In Chapter Five, I will examine organizational goals that are largely focus on worker development and support *within* the DA. In Chapter Six, I explore external advocacy and collective actions *for* sex workers and how they struggle to build political power. These next two chapters examine why the DA is very internally focused on community building and public educational outreach. How the DA trains sex workers to engage with the general public and the criminal justice system reveals much about their collective identity, and how sex worker activists develop a counter-ideology in conversation with criminalization.

CHAPTER 5

BUILDING CONNECTIONS OUT OF CRIMINALIZATION: COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY BUILDING IN THE DESIREE ALLIANCE

In this chapter I will discuss one of the two major organizational goals of the Desiree Alliance (DA), building a sex worker collective identity. I explore the ways in which DA leadership, including member organization leaders, define key interpersonal outcomes of participating in the conference or with a member organization. I will focus on what the DA sees as important elements of sex worker activism through a discussion of the various workshops in their conferences and related trainings, and subsequent public education outreach efforts. First, I examine how worker empowerment and activist workshops develop both a worker identity and an activist identity, fostering a sense of social solidarity. Second, I examine how this collective identity is built in opposition to anti-trafficking ideology. I do so through an examination of public education outreach efforts.

First, within the DA network, there is a dual emphasis on both worker development and activist development, building both identity and community among sex workers. This approach is very similar to the organizational goals of social movement unionism, especially immigrant worker centers. Worker centers are different than traditional labor unions in part because of the multifaceted emphasis on worker development and empowerment.

In interviews, DA leadership and member organization leadership stressed that community building is a strategic way for sex workers to counteract the social marginalization and legal oppression that comes with the criminalization of sex work. Conferences focus on peer to peer support. The DA conferences provide worker empowerment workshops around harm reduction, legal rights, and professional development. This is done in order to increase sex workers safety, enhance solidarity, reinforce safer sex norms, encourage harm reduction

practices, and connect sex workers to social services, legal aid, and importantly, to each other. The DA conference also provides activist development workshops where sex workers learn how to articulate their lives and their work to a general public. They construct an activist identity through learning about, and engaging in, public education outreach. This can take the form of art, storytelling, talking to media, or undertaking community research projects.

Know-your-rights workshops, outlets for artistic expression, activist development, workshops on autonomy, skills, and self-sufficiency, and other peer-to-peer support are forms of community building unique to alternative forms of worker organizing (Fine 2006b). As scholars and activists alike point out, political consciousness and identity evolve over time (Barker and Lavalette 2002; Klatch 2002). Issues with occupation and industry, such as unsafe working conditions, violence, or arrest, are often a primary mobilizing grievance that brings someone to a worker center or a sex workers rights organization. But community is what keeps them. Low wage contingent workers lack formal spaces that a workplace or union would provide, places where they could otherwise find training or camaraderie. Emphasizing both worker and activist development acts to retain members, politicize workers, and foster a sense of community.

The conference itself is a key component of community building. The content within the conferences is fairly organic and democratic. Conference leaders organize the conference into five tracks, but the workshops and presentations within these tracks are proposed by and led by sex workers and allies themselves. There are a number of trainings outside of the conference that many DA members attend to on political advocacy and public engagement. Further, participating in the conference impacts sex workers after the conference is over. Many report friendship, continued business support, and opportunities for art and activism.

Second, criminalization drives much sex worker identity and community building efforts. The DA as an organization emerged at the same time as the anti-trafficking movement was

building in the United States. The U.S. anti-trafficking movement has become a mobilizing factor as trafficking campaigns agitate for increased criminalization of various aspects of sex work. As a result, I argue that the development of an anti-trafficking ideology has impacted how sex worker rights activists think about their identity, and their organizational goals. The anti-trafficking movement is built upon a protectionist frame that casts all sex work as coercive, and all sex workers as victims. Therefore, a collective identity within the sex worker movement generally, and in the DA specifically, is constructed in and around the frames of sex worker as victim/criminal, in opposition to anti-trafficking ideology.

EMPOWERING WORKERS, DEVELOPING ACTIVISTS

The 2010 Desiree Alliance national conference, like others before it, had five tracks: Harm Reduction and Outreach; Art, Entertainment, and Media; Academics and Policy; Activism; and Business Development and Lifestyle. These five tracks can be loosely organized into two categories: those that empower workers, and those that develop activists. The Harm Reduction and Outreach track, along with the Business Development and Lifestyle track, offer workshops and panels that empower workers to work more safely, make more money, explore new work opportunities, and talk about burn-out and how to engage in self-care. The Activist Track; the Academics and Policy Track; and the Art, Entertainment, and Media Track develop participants' activist skills. In this next section I will discuss both of these in relation to social movement unionism. Is worker empowerment a form of labor rights? What role do both worker and activist development play in collective identity building?

These two strategies effectively build membership and ensure the movement is by-and-for sex workers. Educational workshops and trainings in both categories are structured so that sex workers learn how to make larger social and political critiques. This has engendered a sense of solidarity with sex workers in other countries, leading to international networking via social

media, and coordinated global events, like the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers in December, International Sex Workers Rights Day in March (co-created by SWOP founder Robyn Few), and the recent 2012 coordinated protests in D.C. and Calcutta, India over the International AIDS Conference decision to stay in Washington, D.C. despite the U.S. travel ban on “known prostitutes” and “known drug users.” At the DA conferences, there is evidence of an ongoing focus on the global impact of U.S. prostitution and trafficking policies.

Empowering Workers

Workshops and trainings that empower workers offer a space for workers to address their needs on the job. This can be something as simple as learning that sex workers have rights under law, even if the work they engage in is criminalized. A large part of worker empowerment also comes in the form of peer-to-peer support. Sex workers teach each other about best practices for condom usage and what to do when interacting with the police. The conference also helps sex workers build a social support network; sex workers make new friends who share business related advice and tips on non-judgmental, sex worker friendly healthcare facilities and other businesses.

Valuing Labor: Safety and Health. The Harm Reduction and Outreach track is one of five tracks at the Desiree Alliance national conference and focuses primarily on empowering sex workers as workers. Broadly, “harm reduction models” identify and work around barriers to safety, health, and well-being for marginalized communities like sex workers, drug users, homeless youth, etc. For example, sex workers have created “bad client lists” of violent, non-paying, and generally bad clients for street-based and online-based sex workers precisely because they fear going to the police for assistance.

Although sex workers are marginalized and disempowered under the law, efforts like condom distribution and needle exchange programs help reduce the likelihood of risk taking and

increases the health and well-being of sex workers. At the Desiree Alliance conferences, harm reduction is a broad concept that includes everything from spiritual development and parenting advice to more traditional efforts around condom negotiation, sexual health and general health, healing and surviving for sexual assault survivors, tips to reduce violence and assault, and specific services for transgender people, male sex workers, undocumented people, and drug users. Conference workshops promote practical policies and practices for sex workers, encouraging peer education, offering trainings in condom negotiation and safety tips by venue, and providing paths to accessing non-judgmental healthcare. During the conference, attendees are provided information about local AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and NA (Narcotics Anonymous) meetings, and directions to the closest methadone clinic.

In terms of addressing the impact of criminalization on sex workers lives, the DA also focuses on know-your-rights trainings and best practices for interactions with law enforcement. (Member organizations often offer similar workshops at the local level.) In this way, sex workers learn about labor and the criminal justice system, from how to engage police to how to articulate the impact of policing on their lives. Conference speakers are either sex workers themselves, or are brought in from local universities or local chapters of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). At the Desiree Alliance conference in 2010, the ACLU of Southern Nevada shared “common myths about police encounters” as part of the Activism Track.⁴⁸ They distributed a peach-colored wallet-sized pamphlet with “tips for interacting with law enforcement” (this was also included in the registration packet). Two male lawyers facilitated the workshop to a small audience, about 15 people, to “explore why the U.S. Constitution should provide sex workers and the sex industry fair treatment under the law, and [...] share organizational insights into how this campaign has been carried forward through legal and legislative action.”

Because people's experiences with policing varies by race, class, gender identity and presentation, sexual identity, and age, the DA also offered workshops that addressed the specific needs of marginalized groups. A grassroots workshop in the Harm Reduction and Outreach Track screened a video "by and for LGBTQ youth of color who have experienced quality of life policing and policing of sex work." During the workshop, organizers distributed specialized know-your-rights information to attendees.

In addition to know-your-rights and safety workshops, there are also more traditional business development workshops. During the 2010 DA conference, another lawyer with the ACLU of Southern Nevada led a workshop on "contracts and what to look for" in the Business Development and Lifestyle Track. This was one of the few business workshops that was not sex worker led. Most of the business workshops were by-and-for sex workers. These workshops included "A Tax Workshop for the Cash-Based Professional," "How Much an Hour?", and "Clicking with Your Photographer: Journalizing Your Portfolio and Knowing Your Rights." Business development workshops also addressed how to deal with burn out, how to "come out to your loved ones about sex work," how to screen clients, how to balance parenting and sex work, how to advertise online, and how to maintain personal privacy and boundaries with clients.

Workers are empowered through workshops that teach sex workers how to ask for payment, how to negotiate with a client, and how to build websites. In short, learning how to identify "the value of sex work," another business development workshop title, is key to worker empowerment. I asked Kennedy, a white, queer cisgender woman, former erotic dancer, and current artist in her mid-40s, what the DA conference provides to attendees. She said that the conferences help sex workers think about their work:

How am I going to be a better hooker? How am I gonna make money at this shit? And there's nothing wrong with a heavy

dose of capitalism because money is power....And I think that networking for hookers- fuck yeah! And, 'how I do my job?' That's awesome! And also, issues of safety. Also, issues of humanity. And how do we care for each other?

For Kennedy, “networking for hookers” is empowering exactly because it provides a space for sex workers to talk about valuing their work. In this way, sex workers are building a sense of collective worker identity. They are doing so in opposition to anti-trafficking and anti-prostitution ideologies that negate their work as work. As research on non-traditional labor organizing has shown, worker rights courses often transform the way that workers see themselves (Gordon 2005). In this sense, empowering workers is part and parcel of the push for labor rights. And as I will show later, education about rights for criminalized, low-wage workers is also education about citizenship, often motivating workers to engage in social change and political actions (Gordon 2005).

Identity and worker solidarity: business and friendship. People who attend the conference often report that they have made new friends, and have new ideas about work and about activism. Sex worker rights activists consider the friendships they form to be an important part of their activism. Friendships with other sex workers may help them feel less alone and less stigmatized, in addition to providing each other with business support. In this sense, sex worker rights activists consider micro level forms of support to be a type of “activism.” Activism is more than traditional outreach through an organization or even peer to peer training, it is also about producing a strong sense of shared experience.

Astrid, a bisexual white cisgender woman in her early 40s, for example, discusses how the people she has met at the DA conference have created a larger social support network for her. This is something that several others echoed. For example, she and others shared contact information for businesses that are sex worker friendly, which is important to her and her work as an escort. Astrid explains:

I'm more comfortable dealing with someone in their business if I know that they're sex worker friendly. So in that way, giving those resources to each other...like if I have an accountant or chiropractor, OB-GYN, that is comfortable with me, than I can share that with all of my friends that I've made in the community. Or if I'm travelling to a different city and am like 'hey, I'm going to be here and I need something, can you help me out? Can you direct me?'—for any number of resources that we all share that are sex worker friendly. That helps, that's a big bonus.

This grassroots support system is the essence of feminist organizing: the personal is political, friendship is activism. For Catherine, and many others, sharing business advice is a form of activism. She declares, “And your activism might not even be traditional activism. It might be just giving someone a great idea online about how to screen somebody, or how to improve your website, that's activism too.” In an informal economy, networking and self-made business connections are necessary to replace what a business or owner would supply an employee. Members of the DA receive or give business support, share clients, offer website building assistance or professional-style photography, share client screening and safety methods, and have also made “life-long friends.”

When I asked sex worker rights activists about the most rewarding aspects of being an activist in the sex workers rights movement, many responded by emphasizing friendships and camaraderie. While working at a West Coast based organization, Shawn started a support group for male sex workers that lasted from 1999 until he left the organization in the mid-2000s.

Shawn, a gay male sex worker, acknowledged:

I just felt like men were so, so far behind women in just basic organizing. I, to this day, if you went on a male sex worker website in a major city like New York or San Francisco, you could find men who don't know another sex worker, [men who] don't have friends who are sex workers. Like, the level of isolation is astounding. So we would have these very kind of sweet support group meetings.

Friendships take on political meaning as criminalized workers come together to find relief from isolation and stigma. As we will see, this also acts to politicize some sex workers into public outreach and civic engagement. Jana, a queer cisgender woman, an escort and erotic dancer in her mid-20s, remarked, “The people that I’ve met has been the most rewarding part of being an activist. It’s really empowering to be around really passionate people, who want to reshape the world for the better.” Catherine, who travelled the world as an erotic dancer, made some of her best friends through her involvement in the movement, exclaiming:

Some of my best friends! All of his aunties! [Motioning to her baby] He’s a product of the sex workers movement! [She laughs] Yeah, yeah, some lifelong friends and people I will always know and work with.⁴⁹

Kennedy excitedly shared how she has found support, friendship, and caring in coming together as a community of sex workers and allies. As an artist, she feels that her work has benefited from her involvement with the Desiree Alliance, in addition to making new connections: “I have a whole bunch of new hooker friends!”

Jana, who works both in strip clubs and as an escort, says that she has gotten business support, client referrals, and learned new skills through her involvement with the Desiree Alliance and SWOP:

I love that I have this customer that I’m supposed to see, but I’m going to be on my period, but I can call other people in the SWOP chapter and ask what I’m supposed to do with that situation. And that’s kinda cool!, to be able to have a really open discussion about the body, sex, and sale of sex.

When asked if the activist movement has helped her business, she exclaims, “yeah, absolutely!”

I asked Jana how she refers to the people in her network, are they associates, friends, or something else? She replied, “Friends!,” continuing:

It’s nice to know if you’re gonna do...like, as a stripper, it’s nice to have friends in that industry that I can hang out with. In terms of out-call or in-call, it’s nice to have people know some

of the customers and can attest to their personality or [tell] you about certain things.

Here, she clarifies that other sex workers will let her know about a client's idiosyncrasies, or if a client "might take forever to have an orgasm." Sex workers also warn each other about problematic and violent clients, both informally through quick emails and texts to each other, and also formally through "bad client lists" published online by a sex worker rights organization or an individual in a particular city. In this way, the movement community offers a level of support indispensable for worker health, safety, and wellbeing. For contingent, criminalized workers, this is "work-place" organizing.

Astrid lives in a mid-western state and often travels for work as an escort. Here, she discusses the impact of this support system for her as an activist and a sex worker, explaining:

Something that, again, has kept me going when things are difficult or when you try something and it doesn't work, you know that you have...like, I have friends everywhere! Everywhere in the country, every state, I've got a friend now. Or, you know, if I'm traveling somewhere, I can go, 'oh there's someone in this city that I can hang out with!' I don't have to be alone anywhere. Certainly, it's, on a more personal level, it doesn't matter if I stay in sex work or if I'm even an activist, I know I'm still going to have those friends forever.

Astrid said that while she may not get many visitors in her Midwestern city, sex worker rights activists in other states open their homes to her:

Even if I have friends visit, stay at my house, obviously it's more comfortable when—especially for a few friends that I have that travel all the time [for work]—to not have to stay in a hotel, whether financially they can or not, it's just nice to be in a house. You can cook your own meals, it's comfortable, and you have, you know, that kind of bond. There weren't a lot of people that I would invite over [like] that a few years ago; before meeting them through Desiree Alliance, I would be more leery. [But now] knowing that we share the same views and kind of the same goals, on professional levels, on activist levels, I'm like, 'oh okay, they're cool, I can talk to them!' that kind of-- it's also a different level of trust. I know that we're that passionate about something.

The informal membership process of the Desiree Alliance means that personal connections are what build the network, not formal committees or coordinated multi-state political efforts (I will show in the next chapter how political strategies are locally driven). Overall, it is clear that friendship is important for creating a collective sex worker rights identity.

As more and more people are employed in part-time labor, particularly in criminalized or shadow markets, we can theorize how workplace arrangements are changing in the post-industrial, late capitalist era. Contingent workers do not have a traditional workplace to get training, or to talk to other workers. Instead of relying on a business or on social services, rights organizations are a source of service provision. The organizational emphasis on worker development aligns with the purpose of social movement unionism. Community building among sex workers fights isolation, provides business support, and increases harm reduction techniques. These are forms of grassroots activism that center around labor, not identity or an issue, as with traditional social movements. Just as day laborers and other undocumented contingent workers find worker development and community building go hand in hand at worker centers (Fine 2006a, 2006b), so to do sex workers build a sense of collective identity and community through the DA conference and network of member organizations.

Developing Activists

The sex worker rights movement also places enormous emphasis on activist development. This involves sex workers with the DA or member organizations on an ongoing basis and develops the skills of worker-leaders. In addition to the DA conference, activist trainings are offered throughout the year by other national and local organizations like the New York-based Red Umbrella Project, local and national SWOPs, and the D.C. based Best Practices Policy Project. These trainings focus on leadership development, grant-writing, media

engagement, writing in general (the Red Umbrella Project offers writing classes for sex workers), and legislative advocacy.⁵⁰

At the 2010 DA conference, the Activism Track offered workshops in “effective grassroots organizing for disenfranchised populations” and information on how to build “effective issue advocacy campaigns.” There were issue specific workshops like “New York’s ‘no condoms as evidence bill: Exploring its rationale and advocacy” and a workshop on how sex workers can get involved with the then upcoming 2012 International HIV/AIDS Conference in Washington, D.C. (the international conference was being held in the U.S. for the first time since 1990).

The Desiree Alliance also hosts a day-long leadership pre-conference. Potential attendees must apply for this private training. Around 10-20 sex workers are brought in, with a scholarship, a day early for the “leadership development project.” These sex workers often represent more marginalized communities, including people of color, transgender people, current or former drug users, poor and street based sex workers, and felons. The training leaders are other sex workers, mostly DA leadership. This leadership training is largely influenced by DA Strategic Committee member Penelope Saunders.

In 2007, the Best Practices Policy Project (BPPP) hosted a three-day leadership conference for sex workers, some of whom had some activist experience, some did not. The “National Leadership Training Institute” was held in Washington, D.C. for sex workers who are historically underrepresented in organizing efforts. The current co-directors of the DA (as of Fall 2010) emerged from this leadership development effort. BPPP continues to host leadership workshops to develop sex worker leaders for the movement. In this way, trainings have developed new leaders from within the ranks of sex worker activists to ensure that the Desiree Alliance is always by-and-for sex workers.

This is a critical characteristic of worker centers and social movement unionism generally. Even if the worker center is founded by an “outsider,” like the lawyer who founded the Workplace Project worker center in Long Island, New York, a worker center’s success comes from developing worker leaders who then take over the direction, goals, and actions of the center (Fine 2006a, 2006b; Gordon 2005). Similarly, while academics, including myself, were tapped by sex worker rights activists in 2005 and 2006 to help establish the Desiree Alliance, we have largely left leadership positions and now engage as allies within the Academics and Policy Track.

Teaching civic engagement. The DA conferences also offer workshops on legislative advocacy at the local, national, and transnational level. For example, the workshop on the International HIV/AIDS conference was centered on how to challenge the U.S. anti-prostitution pledge. As of 2003, any foreign organization or government receiving U.S. aid must sign a pledge that the organization is anti-prostitution and no funds will be used in support of prostitution. (The pledge applied to U.S. base organizations from 2005 – 2012.) It is formally known as the President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), but is commonly referred to as the anti-prostitution pledge or oath. PEPFAR is problematic from a public health perspective. Organizations distribute condoms or offer free healthcare to impoverished communities worldwide where some of the constituents receiving aid may be involved with sex work.

The workshop on the New York “no condoms as evidence bill” discussed “the process that activists have undergone to get this bill written and supported.” One of the goals of this workshop was to teach other activists to how to write and get support for a similar piece of legislation in their own states. Yet the “no condoms as evidence bill” did not pass in New York in 2010, and still has not passed. It has been introduced almost each session since 2003 to the New York Legislature, but has yet to pass.

Sex worker activists argue that one reason it has not passed is a lack of advocacy. For example, Angela, who lives in New York, reflected on the bill:

Part of the reason it's gone nowhere is because there hasn't been good advocacy around it. We really need to get sex workers to talk to their elected representatives about what the problem is. And that's really hard to do! So we've been doing these advocacy trainings for the past three years. And one, the big sticking point that is really gonna make advocacy a problem is that we really need to be able to do this, to talk to your elected representative, and say to them 'I live in your district, here's my address and my name,' either 'I'm a sex worker, or I'm an ally of sex workers, and here's why this matters to me.'

There are barriers to civic participation. Since sex work is criminalized, sex workers can be hesitant to participate in political advocacy. Sex workers are concerned about arrest or harassment. The issue of citizenship, of citizens engaging their representatives and learning about politics, is complicated by fears of "coming out." "Coming out" as a current or former sex worker is a risk, as Angela, who helps host trainings on media and political engagement for sex workers, expounded on the tension of coming out and being heard:

But that's a point that people balk at, people are like 'wait! I don't want to give them my real name and address!' But that's how democracy works. They need to be able to prove that you live in their district. So we've had people who are unwilling to identify themselves by their name and address, and that just makes it impossible to do representative advocacy. But that's a real concern for people! So how do you deal with this? How do you explain that to the elected representatives?

Summer, who is active around a range of issues from education to sex work to the environment (including the "ecosexual" movement), argues that political engagement can be difficult for sex workers precisely because of experiences with the criminal justice system. She discusses how the legal system can both help and hurt sex workers:

I know I have a negative attitude toward a lot of the legal system, even though I know there's some of it that can help and there's good people out there. And I've experienced that! I've had good people help me! [But] I have such a knee jerk reaction,

to experiences I've had and experiences I've seen other people have.

When Summer was an erotic dancer, a police officer began to stalk and harass her and her two children. After consulting a lawyer about her options, she decided to move her family out of state. She was advised that the chance of successful legal recourse was slim. She does not trust the legal system, and sees this wariness of the legal system impacting political engagement among other sex workers:

We've had this—and understandably so—this fear of getting involved with the politics, the legal system, whatever, because most of us have been burned by it in one way or another. [...] It's like we're just getting that piece figured out. Some people started going to trainings on how to lobby and how to write an ask, or how to go to your congressperson or their staff. That's just starting to happen.

The DA legislative workshops are short (an hour or so), and often just begin to introduce the topic. Outside of the conference, the Best Practices Policy Project and the Red Umbrella Project offer day-long or multi-day legislative advocacy training for sex workers. Like worker centers, legislative advocacy is not always a main organizational goal. Some worker centers do not engage in political work at all, and focus solely on worker empowerment. Sex workers, like the undocumented immigrants who go to worker centers, are concerned about the consequences of “coming out” and are aware of the lack of political power they have due to their status.

Media training as identity work. The Desiree Alliance conferences also offer media trainings to sex workers. “Media” refers to public engagement through a variety of venues, whether through actual news media, creating art/engaging in performance art, or something like writing a memoir. In general, the DA activist media trainings take one of two approaches: 1) a traditional media engagement training on how to talk to a reporter, or 2) a creative approach on the use of art—drawings, short stories, performance pieces—to reach broad audiences. Art-

based workshops are also offered as a form of catharsis or healing, and as a way to build community with other sex workers through art shows. Engaging in media justice is one strategy that DA workshops encourage to raise awareness about physical and state violence against sex workers. For example, the 2010 DA conference had a two storytelling workshops like one titled “your body is the mountain, your story is the gold” that teach sex workers how to craft their experiences into stories to be shared.

DA media workshops encourage public education and outreach and train activists to re-narrate the story told about them, to offer a different perspective than the socially constructed narrative about victimized sex workers or criminal delinquents. A counter-story or counter-narrative is a response by an oppressed group to “majoritarian stories” that silence or ignore their experiences of marginalization and discrimination. Majoritarian stories have the ability to silence the oppressed group because they are told from the perspective of those with more power (Covarrubias and Revilla 2003).⁵¹ Member organizations and individual activists have engaged in much public educational outreach in this way, writing op-eds online, publishing a by-and-for sex worker magazine (2005-2008), producing posters and art, organizing art shows showcasing sex worker artists, giving public talks at venues from universities to bars, building websites, and engaging in community research.

For this reason, much sex worker rights media engagement focuses on differentiating between sex work and sex trafficking. Activists see this as a critical element to media work. Sex work scholar Ronald Weitzer (2007) refers to the need for “counter-evidence” to refute moralizing prostitution research. The majoritarian story of *who* sex workers are—poor women in survival mode doing work that they would not otherwise choose to do—homogenizes a diverse field into a universal experience, and in so doing, removes the ability of individuals from that group to speak for themselves if they stray from the script. Majoritarian trafficking stories

remove agency to the point that sex worker rights organizing efforts are often rendered invisible in U.S. policy and media.⁵²

This requires a nuanced understanding of the presentation of self and messaging. Learning how to craft a media self is rooted in identity and community building. At the 2010 DA conference, the Art, Entertainment, and Media Track workshops are more internally focused on identity and community building. For example, there was a writing workshop one day for sex workers to work on spoken pieces for an open mic night at the conference that evening. On a different night, sex workers took to the public sidewalks of the Las Vegas Strip with a performance protest art piece that they spent three days creating. The conference provides space for sex workers to practice what they want to say or how they want to express it, and in so doing, this validates their experiences in the sex industry. Their experiences are knowledge producing. This builds a sense of solidarity among sex workers, too. Some activists are then inspired to learn more about how to engage in public educational outreach, and may go on to attend one of the most established media training programs: the Red Umbrella Project.

The Red Umbrella Project (RedUP) is the brainchild of one of the most influential sex worker rights activists today, Audacia Ray. Ray was an Executive Editor of the now-defunct \$pread magazine from 2005-2008, and now heads the Red Umbrella Project. RedUP offers media trainings, writing workshops, legislative trainings, and a public education outreach event called the Red Umbrella Diaries, where sex workers share stories of their lives with general audiences in New York, Las Vegas, and Chicago. Ray was also active with the Desiree Alliance conferences from 2006 to 2008.

Audacia Ray's influence on the sex workers rights media culture in the U.S. and abroad is evident in sex worker art, ad campaigns, and cultural outreach efforts. During a media training in 2009, she created a video where each sex worker named a couple of "normal" aspects of their

lives and then say “and I’m a sex worker.” This video has greatly influenced other media efforts and artists in the U.S. and abroad.

For example, Kennedy is also an artist, and described how she liked the message communicated in the video, one that normalized sex workers lives. She explained that the video was set up to normalize their lives: “[sex workers would] talk about themselves and their lives, and then say ‘and I am a sex worker.’ ‘I am a human being who does all of these things--I’m a really good cook, I’m great at Boggle, I have a cat, and I’m a sex worker.’ Cuz I’m a human being just like you.” Kennedy and Angela both note that this tactic has shown up in an Irish sex worker rights organization’s campaign. The organization, Turn Off the Blue Light, is fighting against an anti-prostitution organization that wants to criminalize the purchase of sex (which is currently legal in Ireland).¹ Kennedy explains, “they [Turn Off the Blue Light] just recently did [this] in Ireland, this great series of posters, people saying ‘my sex worker put me through college,’ ‘I love my tramp,’ ‘My hooker is the best cook ever’” (see *Figure 2*).

¹ See <http://www.turnoffthebluelight.ie/> for more on the movement, and see here for all the posters: <http://michaeljfaris.com/blog/2012/02/turn-off-the-blue-light-campaign-irelandthere-is-currently/>



Figure 2: Posters from Ireland's 2011 sex worker rights campaign.

In describing how creating educational outreach materials is a “complex beast” of “earned media,” Angela indicates that there is a level of networking nationally and transnationally among sex worker rights activists that leads to similar campaigns or wording:

The last couple years, I've seen a couple of earned media campaigns that are awesome and I've been so proud to see [them]. Like, Stepping Stone in Halifax did a really good poster campaign, and the Irish Blue Light Campaign [see *Figures 2 and 3*] came out good. And the St. James Infirmary, their ad campaign in San Francisco [see *Figures 4 and 5*]. So I've been really excited to see all of those things popping up.

And I do think that they're related to-- I mean, I'm not going to claim those as things that I produced in the world, but I created a [video], in 2009, at the media training, we did this "I am a sex worker" video, where people just stood in front of the camera and said one silly fact about themselves, and then said "and I'm a sex worker." And I see the seeds of that in all these projects, which is really exciting.

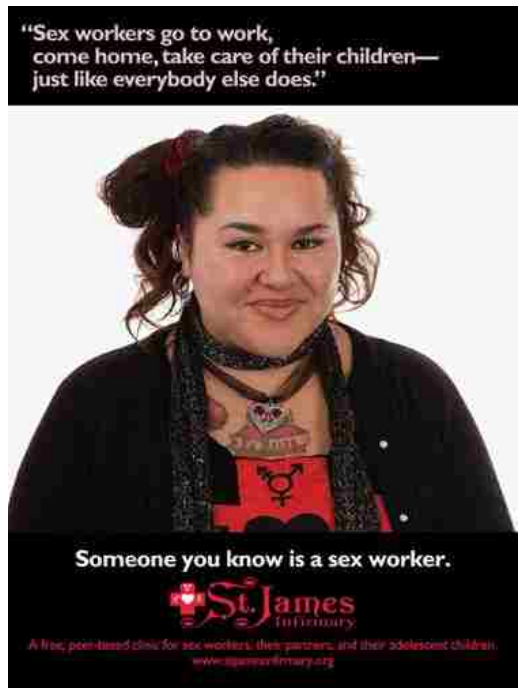


Figure 3: Advertisements (2011-2012) from the St. James Infirmery, a health clinic by-and-for sex workers.

Although each country or locality may have different laws or norms, sex workers are able to apply the general idea of normalizing sex work within their own efforts.

Kennedy has high praise for the Red Umbrella Project’s national media training workshops:

I think [the RedUP]media workshops for sex workers are amazing. We're continuing to have the conversation because of these women. Because of Audacia Ray. Because of Melissa Gira Grant. And because of other academic and non-academic allies. And I think it's important to keep that conversation going.

Former DA leadership team member Catherine echoes her sentiment while discussing why she thinks engaging with the public is important to the sex worker rights movement. She proclaims:

Talking to the media is a huge one. You know what, [the Red Umbrella Project] is doing amazing stuff with the Sex Work 101 [media training workshops]. Goddess bless her for having what she's doing. Cuz she trains people in exactly that and it's so important. So so important in the media, how you frame things for media's sake.

Even sex workers with experience talking to the media, like Jana, co-director of SWOP Las Vegas, have attended the Red Umbrella Project media workshop. Jana says:

I did a lot of media before I was involved with SWOP. Just local news and a few CNN gigs, and a FOX gig. Recently I was at a media training conference for sex workers, which was really cool. So I hope that as [our local] SWOP gets going, we're going to be doing a lot more media outreach.

Media engagement is considered a key element of public awareness and education. Sex worker rights activists feel that the movement is becoming more media-aware, and becoming more media savvy through conference workshops and trainings through the Red Umbrella Project.

Part of this means activists work through whether or not they want to “come out.” The decision to “come out” is central both to civic engagement as mentioned earlier, and to media engagement. Sex worker rights organizations are sometimes contacted by media when a news story about prostitution surfaces, or when a researcher wants to study some aspect of sexual labor. Angela cautions media workshop attendees about the consequences of “coming out” publicly. She reflects back on her own process of going public, “For me, I was in a somewhat unique position of having an amount of privilege and being willing to give some of it up.” As a

white cisgender woman with a master's degree, her privilege helped protect her from arrest, from loss of income or home. She goes on to explain that "I do think it's unethical to try to convince people that it's going to be fine [to come out]" with few repercussions. Angela no longer works in the sex industry, and focuses on sex worker rights advocacy. She helps other sex workers think through the consequences of taking on a media presence:

One of the things that I view as a positive outcome of media trainings is that sometimes people come into media trainings really excited about it, and then they leave saying 'yeah, actually, I don't think it's a good idea for me to be out.'

In this way, media trainings are a process of identity development. As Angela notes, "I would rather them think that through than be out, or be outed, and then be like 'uh oh.'" The potential for arrest, violence, and loss of income are real consequences that sex workers who "go public" have experienced.

Hence one of the most enduring aspects of the sex worker rights movement in the U.S. is the use of art, rather than talking to news media or lobbying policy-makers for legal change. Art is an important public face for sex workers and is a main way that sex workers communicate their counter-stories. The Art, Entertainment, and Media track at the Desiree Alliance conference, the travelling Sex Workers Art Show, and the San Francisco Sex Workers Film and Art Festival (held every two years, since 1999 through today) are spaces for sex worker artists—some of whom are accomplished artists and writers, others who are amateur artists looking for an expressive outlet—to share their stories in creative ways.

Sex worker artists have brought their experiences as artists and activists to the Desiree Alliance conferences: Scarlot Harlot, DA leadership consultant and founding member, has created performance art for decades. An Asian American sex worker and performance artist from California headed up the 2010 DA conference Media, Art, and Entertainment Track, aided by Kennedy and Shawn. Author/performance artist Shawn, a white, gay, male sex worker and

former member of Desiree Alliance leadership, spoke at the 2010 conference and led one of the workshops. He said he was “really surprised” to be asked to speak:

Because I don't think of myself as someone who's done a lot in this movement. Just because I haven't, I haven't lobbied in Sacramento [California]. I guess my effort in the sex work movement have been in the arts and individual ways, and through health care.

Shawn worked as a peer counselor at the St. James Infirmary for a number of years, and organized its first men's sex worker support group. Shawn, like many artists within the Desiree Alliance network, has toured with the national Sex Workers Art Show and the queer, sex worker friendly art show, Sister Spit. Kennedy helped organize the 2010 DA conference Art, Media, and Entertainment Track. She, like Shawn, has also toured with Sister Spit and the Sex Workers Art Show.

The impact of the Red Umbrella Project's video interview with sex workers is evident in other art work, as well. Laurenn McCubbin created a series of drawings showcasing the lives of sex workers to build her portfolio as a Master of Fine Arts student. McCubbin interviewed a range of sex workers, men and women, straight and queer identified, in a range of industries from those who sell sex to those who work in adult film or as BDSM professionals.⁵³ She then drew each sex worker with their words written next to them, such as “I make tiny hats and I sew costumes. I build sets, and I'm a sex worker” (see *Figure 4*).

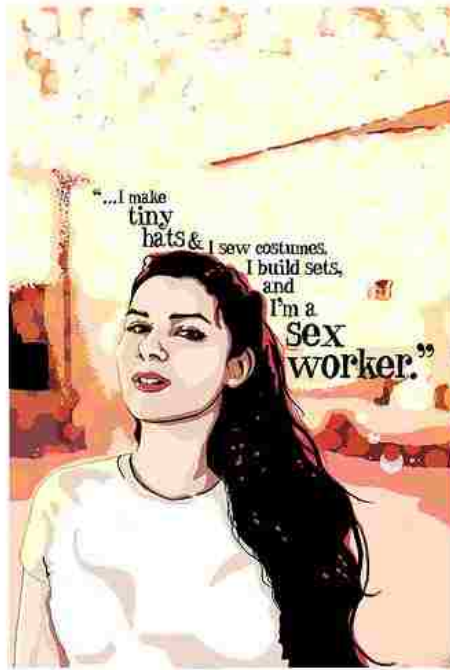


Figure 4: Art piece by sex worker rights activist and artist Laurenn McCubbin. With permission.

Overall, DA trained sex workers create art and engage in public educational outreach in an attempt to normalize sex worker's lives. Those who sell sex describe the impact of trafficking on their lives, or alternatively, share the somewhat banal, mundane, or even quirky parts of their everyday lives in attempts to "connect" with a general audience considered that is assumed to be hostile toward sex workers, or confused about the differences between sex work and sex trafficking. Sex worker media challenges protectionist framing of anti-trafficking laws that situate women as victims in need of protection from the sex industry. Sex workers engage in public education outreach to offer alternatives to assumptions of deviance or victimhood. It is also a strategy that builds community among sex worker artists.⁵⁴

A collective sex worker identity engenders the idea that sex workers can be "legitimate political participants," similar to undocumented immigrant workers learning about the larger structures of worker oppression through worker centers (Gordon 2005). Learning about civic engagement, and engaging in identity affirming experiences like art and public education, means

that sex workers have developed a critical consciousness around structural inequality. In so doing, sex workers are empowered to make informed decisions about how and when to engage the public.

THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING MOVEMENT AND SEX WORKER COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

The Desiree Alliance as an organization emerged as the anti-trafficking movement was building in the U.S. in the early 2000s. As a result, sex worker rights activists have largely built their network and advocacy efforts in opposition to the anti-trafficking movement. I find that anti-trafficking ideology functions as a frame that sex worker rights activists craft their identity both in and around. The conflation of sex work and sex trafficking is one of the main points of the counter-narratives that sex workers promote in their media (and political advocacy work, as I will discuss in the next chapter). Activists active with the DA and member organizations, including Maribel, Catherine, Charm, Jana, Maalik, Kennedy, and others discussed how anti-trafficking ideology impacts their lives as workers and their efforts as activists, and how difficult it is for them to claim voice. They are constructing their own ideology, built around the desire to challenge anti-prostitution narratives embedded in anti-trafficking advocacy.

First, they articulate how the conflation of sex trafficking with the sale of sex creates a universal definition of sexual labor that insists the seller is a victim, coerced, forced, or duped into the business. Alexandra surmises, “everybody wants to paint all sex workers and anybody that does prostitution with a broad brush, saying ‘they’re victimized, they don’t know, they’re poor women who don’t know any better.’ It’s deeply troubling.” Most sex worker rights activists echoed the notion that a homogenized view of all sex work was problematic. For many, it’s problematic because this allows anti-prostitution policy and practices to be implemented.

Correspondingly, Summer feels that a victimizing ideology is embedded in end-demand legislation, a legislative tactic of the anti-trafficking movement that criminalizes the clients/the

purchase of sex, but not the work/the sellers of sex. This tactic is gaining popularity with U.S. state level anti-trafficking coalitions. To Summer, an end-demand approach situates sex workers as powerless and helpless:

When you get in this argument about 'well you have sex workers that- this might be there only option.' Or if they're talking about kids that are homeless, 'oh, ok, well then, instead of going after these *poor* sex workers, we'll go after the purchasers of the sex work, so let's just go after all the johns.'

End demand is a protectionist policy that assumes that sex work is a form of violence against women. To Summer, this effectively silences the voices of sex workers who say they are not victims.

Kennedy conveys with annoyance the responses she gets when discussing her art on sex worker and sex worker rights: "it is the first thing that everybody says when I talk about sex worker rights, is 'what about the poor trafficked babies?'" Although she has been creating sex worker/rights art for over 15 years, her art professors often questioned her topic:

I'm going to introduce this idea that hookers are people too, and the first reaction I got was 'well, what about sex slaves? What about the street hookers?' And, 'you are not presenting a fair representation because you are not showing those people.' And I feel like those people get all the fucking representation. I could be missing something, and I'm totally willing to look and see if I'm missing something, but I don't...it's easy to talk about trafficking. And it's lazy. And that's the thing that infuriates me. It's tabloid ready, and perfect with a bow on it. To talk about the sex slave, and the trafficked woman, and the victim.

Kennedy is frustrated by this common response, because it does not represent her lived experiences.

I don't want to talk about victims, because I have not yet met a victim. I have met women who do work that other women don't want to do. I find that gap in understanding is something that I find fascinating. Whenever I say I find something fascinating, I really mean I find it fucked up.

She is unsure how sex worker rights activists can “introduce shades of grey to that conversation.” Sex worker rights activists form a resistant ideology in response to the impact that the conflation of sex work and trafficking has on their lives and on their activist efforts.

Perceived Impact on Sex Workers Lives

Second, sex workers articulate the perceived impact of trafficking policies and practices on their lives. Sex worker and non-sex worker organizations are working to “decode” anti-trafficking legislation and implementation because, as Summer stresses, “it’s spun to try to take rights away from people who are in the business consensually.” A lawyer with a non-profit agency that assists sex workers and sex trafficking victims contends that the application of anti-trafficking laws to the sale of sex “does a huge disservice to, first and foremost, survivors of trafficking:”

When you say ‘your experience is the same as somebody who is choosing to do this.’ I mean, it’s sort of horrifying to think that somebody—and I had to write affidavits and motions for survivors of trafficking—it’s horrifying to think that.

She argues that this similarly does a “disservice” to those in the sex industry:

I also have many, many friends and clients, and allies, that engage voluntarily in sex work, so if I’m going to contrast a Ph.D. student who is escorting out of her home twice a week to make ends meet, with somebody who at 16, is being brutally raped and forced to stay out on the street all night, it’s really demeaning and horrific to both of them to say ‘you’re experiencing the same thing,’ or, ‘we can put you under the same rubric of trafficking.’ It’s incredibly belittling to both of their experiences of what they’re doing. And it removes agency from both of them, really, by denying their own experience of what they’re going through.

Many DA leadership and member organization leadership create educational materials to draw attention to the impact of criminalization on their lives, or work with university researchers or non-profits to do so. Charm, Astrid, and Nadine are “going to try to create a survey on trafficking within the industry to be distributed through people, workers, clients,

people who've worked in the industry in some capacity," as Charm describes it. They are working with a social worker and are in the pre-testing phase with a website and sample survey.⁵⁵ The survey will assess sex workers beliefs and experiences with sex trafficking.

State-level anti-trafficking laws are increasing the penalties for sex work across the country. Therefore, some leaders are engaging in community based research and publishing academic work such as an article that appeared in the 2012 inaugural issue of the peer-reviewed *Anti-Trafficking Review* journal. The article argues that anti-trafficking policies and practices are a "new abolitionism" that allows for state sanctioned violence against sex workers. The authors conclude that this is why it was so important for U.S. sex worker voices to be included in the U.N.'s review of the U.S. human rights efforts and violations.⁵⁶

In Chicago, the Young Women's Empowerment Project released a study called "Denied Help!" in May 2012, detailing "how and why young people in the sex trade and street economy are being turned away from social services and helping systems."⁵⁷ In 2008, Different Avenues published a report on the impact of policing D.C.'s "prostitution free zones" called "Move Along: Policing Sex Work in Washington, D.C." The community research and report was conducted by nine sex worker activists including Different Avenues founder and DA Strategic Committee member, Penelope Saunders. These by-and-for the community assessments and materials are attempts to intervene with popular anti-trafficking narratives. Sex worker rights activists offer an alternative assessment of the impact of anti-trafficking and anti-prostitution policies and ideologies on the lives of sex workers. Sex workers do not feel rescued or protected.

Perceived Impact on Activism

Finally, each sex worker rights advocate seemed to tirelessly reiterate to me that sex workers are anti-trafficking. My field notes and interview transcripts alike reflect how sex workers question the efficiency and ethicality of anti-trafficking efforts, which they see as thinly

veiled anti-labor efforts. Maribel wondered, “How you can understand that what we do is not all trafficking?? It’s not pimping.” Summer similarly proclaims:

We’re not saying, ‘oh yes, traffic more people into the business!’ We’re about consensual sex work. And I mean, consensual is only as much as it’s consensual to work any kind of job. I mean, so, everything’s constrained, all choice is constrained by something. So there’s definitely ‘choosing’ is whatever, but it’s, in the same way that you ‘choose’ any other job, given your circumstances.

In constructing a counter-story, sex workers draw on the trafficking narrative to position themselves and their identities. Sex workers find it difficult to do so sometimes. It is tough to articulate structural constraints and inequalities when the dominant framework dictates that sex work is never a choice.

Sex worker rights activists argue that the protectionist framework, built on the conflation of sex work and sex trafficking, prevents sex workers inclusion in anti-trafficking efforts, impedes the ability to press political claims, and limits the ways in which sex workers engage in educational outreach. Jana, head of a local SWOP, conveys:

The conflation of trafficking and sex work is problematic [and] I think one way to separate those two things is to be a sex worker who is anti-trafficking. To show we do this because we have agency, these people do this because they are in slavery. These are *two* different things.

Many brought up the then timely example of the celebrity anti-trafficking campaign, Demi Moore’s and Ashton Kutchner’s “real men don’t buy girls” fundraiser and educational advertisements. Maalik, a black queer cisgender man who has experience with queer adult film, is also an HIV counselor who works with a range of people, including sex workers and clients of sex workers, indicates that the campaign is an example of both whore stigma and the conflation of trafficking and sex work, remarking:

It’s a distraction. [...] He [Kutchner] gets to point a finger by saying ‘real men don’t buy girls’, but real men might buy

women. But even the language, even just the language of it, it disallows any conversation about sex work as a service economy. It just completely circumscribes any conversation about that, and about agency, and about the issue actually being, not really being about sex or the selling of sex, but about the real serious cultural and social problems that people have with women having agency, their bodies. That's a much larger, sexual health and women's advocacy, conversation.

Maribel worries about campaigns like this, suggesting that they impact the ability of sex workers to

engage in political advocacy:

We have to nip that frenzy in the bud because you get mouthpieces like this where you have a big media outlet and, you know, who you going to believe? So when you have those media outlets, you can do a lot more harm than good and it seems to be harming us more--with end demand shit...

Therefore, sex workers find that their counter-stories consist of basic knowledge and definitions, rather than complex ideas about the intersections of sexism, racism, government policy, and poverty. For example, DA and SWOP members are often invited to speak on sex trafficking panels. Charm said that last year, "I was invited to be on a panel on trafficking at that had several people from different organizations, including [a local anti-sexual exploitation organization] and [a national immigrant rights organization], and a couple youth organizations." She asserts that "A lot of times when I'm lecturing at colleges and things about trafficking, it's really your basic 101 thing because a lot of people don't understand what this term trafficking means." She discusses why SWOP is "opposed to end demand and some of the measures that have been taken," and how anti-trafficking organizations are funded, and how statistics are, as of yet, unreliable. To her, such engagements are opportunities to challenge people's preconceived notions of trafficking and sex work. Many are open to it, she feels, they just have not heard anything else: "That's what I think is kinda dangerous here, this trafficking thing is being thrown around, this term, as the new national hysteria. It really seems to be."

Charm, who in the past has assisted with the Media, Art, and Entertainment Track for the DA conference, points to a public service announcement video showcasing activists from Desiree Alliance, SWOP, and the St. James Infirmary. Called *Sex Workers Want to Stop Trafficking*, the screen flips from sex worker rights activist to sex worker rights activist as they jointly read a script declaring that it's a "fallacy" "to think all sex workers are victims of sex trafficking and abuse." Alexandra and other interviewees often proudly discussed this video. The video pointedly remarks that "sex workers can educate anti-trafficking advocates and policy-makers about the difference in perspectives between choice, circumstance, and coercion among those performing sexual labor." The YouTube video has been viewed 11,000 times.⁵⁸

The Emotions of Ideology

Many sex worker activists are frustrated. Catherine, who organized an anti-trafficking and sex work panel at a West coast campus in the late 1990s, sighed when I asked how sex worker rights advocates can interject themselves into the anti-trafficking conversation:

It's more of an evangelical argument than an actual logical argument. And I think they're very much like evangelists in that sense because you can't really--it's like arguing god with somebody. You can't really argue god. You can't argue anything but their point of view.

Charm attended a "trafficking forum at a mega church" in a mid-western city a month before our interview. She reflects on the "emotional reaction" people have to sex trafficking stories compared to labor trafficking stories in other industries like agriculture or domestic work:

They don't get as obsessed over the labor trafficking issues because, especially because it's a lot of religious people or it's a lot of these repressed, radical feminist types that like, sharing these salacious details of someone's horrific sex trafficking experience. There's just...It's like, it doesn't sit right. Yes, it's getting such an emotional reaction out of them, that this idea of labor trafficking just does not...possibly the food on your plate or the shirt on your back could be made by a trafficking victim. But that just doesn't bring as a visceral reaction as the girl down

the street was kidnapped and was trafficked, you know, for some pimp or whatever.

Catherine is sympathetic to the emotionality of trafficking ideology and people's "armchair philanthropist" response. She reasons that everyone's gut reaction is to stop the sale of sex in order to end sex trafficking because of the way the issue is framed:

Well the specter of somebody chained to their bed having to service somebody, that they don't [want to], or being drugged to do it, that specter is frightening and horrific for anyone concerned. So that immediately gets the attention of the public. Any person who has a heart, a pulse, is gonna be concerned about that.

Charm, with a local SWOP chapter, argues that the anti-trafficking organization is well organized and has a strong message impacts the ability of sex workers to share their own messaging. She comments on their media presence:

This [anti-sexual exploitation] organization, and I have to say they're very effective in what they do because they really have launched...they very good about getting their message out there. They do have a lot of money.

For example, the organization funded two plays that, to Charm, "were pretty offensive in a lot of ways." Charm critiques the script writing process:

They hired two playwrights who had very...I actually had an email conversation with one of the playwrights. He had literally no experience, he had never really met sex workers or johns, he'd never met a self-identified john before. He just read a couple books, he read these books by uh, are you familiar with those books by [Canadian journalist] Victor Malarek? One of them called *The Natashas* [2005, subtitled: *Inside the New Global Sex Trade*]. One of them's called *The Johns* [2009, subtitled: *Sex for Sale and the Men Who Buy It*]. He just read a couple books. He used those to write a play.

Charm attended the plays. She felt that the ideological opposition to sex work was palpable:

At the end of the plays, they start posting these statistics on a screen. And one of these statistics said 100%, I mean literally, 100% of prostitutes have reported being kicked, punched, or beaten, not even in the line of work, just kicked, punched, or

beaten. And I was just like, how could you hold up these statistics like that??

The victimization of “the prostitute” resonated with the audience. Charm was appalled, “it's like this pornographic obsession over this sex trafficking thing.” In this way, sex workers are responding to how anti-trafficking ideology constructs sex work. Their sense of identity is constructed in defense.

Catherine, who completed her master's thesis on the politics of India's sex worker rights movement, cited Gail Pheterson's academic discussion of “whore stigma,” and went on at length about the sexism of anti-prostitution advocacy, where sex workers “have to battle this prescription of how we should behave as women, sexually,” where “transgender people are completely silenced.” Catherine sighed:

This whole whore stigma is millennia thick, millennia thick. We have been dealing with this as women, and other genders, against men for millennia. This very gendered battle, it's been, it's not, and I say ‘women against men’ only because historically men have held all the power. But when women get the chance, they certainly hold up that very same paradigm. They're no saviors of women in that sense.

For sex worker rights advocates, anti-trafficking ideology attempts to define women as victims in need of protection from sexual labor. There is no solidarity based on a shared identity as women. Instead, there are two categories: stigmatized and criminalized women, and those women who are trying to protect them. DA leadership and DA member organization leadership articulate their activism and their work in conversation with the protectionist framing of anti-trafficking policy and advocacy.

DISCUSSION

Like worker centers, the Desiree Alliance network addresses issues of criminalization on work and worker identity through community building efforts. DA conference workshops focus on two major aspects of community building: activist training and worker training. These trainings

deconstruct stigma, and the DA network offers a social support system to fight isolation. Worker development is a form of labor rights at work, just like the worker courses offered at worker centers for undocumented immigrants. When sex workers engage in advocacy efforts, they are forming a collective identity both against criminalization and in conversation with it. Sex workers are marginalized and criminalized, which means that organizational goals focus as much on worker development and support *within* the community, as they do on external or collective actions *for* the community.

The Desiree Alliance network has played a role in politicizing a handful of core activists across the country. Further, although the DA has a seemingly small membership compared to the mass of workers need for traditional forms of collective bargaining or political protest, sex workers are building collective identities both as legitimate workers, and as activists. I conclude that sex worker rights activists construct community in response to criminalization, similar to the organizational model of worker centers for undocumented immigrant laborers. Labor support, whether informal through friendships and sharing of business advice, or formal workshops on everything from contract writing to know-your-rights trainings, are forms of resistance to criminalization.

I argue that constructing community out of criminalization is one of the most important outcomes of becoming involved with sex worker rights efforts. First, these forms of identity building are ways to resist and challenge the master status of “trafficking victim.” Sex worker rights activists must contend with a conflated identity of victim/criminal. Protectionist policies have conflated sex work and sex trafficking, conflating the criminal master status with a victim master status. Community building and identity construction are crucial considering the individual and structural impacts of carrying a dualistic ascribed status. (Even workers in legal

jobs, like erotic dancers, are often assumed to engage in prostitution, and are the target of police raids and of anti-trafficking organizations.)

Community building efforts increase worker safety and wellbeing, and develop solidarity. The interpersonal outcomes of being involved with sex worker rights activism also influence the ways in which sex workers engage in public education through art and media, and as I will show in the following chapter, political advocacy. Finally, sex worker rights activists reject a victim status by seeking rights rather than protection.

CHAPTER 6

PROTECTIONIST POLITICS, CRIMINALIZATION, AND POLITICAL ADVOCACY

This chapter examines the second major organizational goal of the Desiree Alliance, political advocacy. I provide an overview of several specific campaigns and actions reported by individual activists. These actions were not always directly organized or officially sponsored by the Desiree Alliance (DA), but typically resulted from DA networking and conference workshops. At DA conferences and throughout the year, sex worker rights activists are concerned about the anti-trafficking movement. They perceive most anti-trafficking efforts as harmful to their ability to work and work safely. Because anti-trafficking efforts are built around the idea of protecting women and girls from sexual labor, those in sexual labor are left out of the “charmed circle” of government protection (Rubin 1984).

As such, sex worker rights activists with the Desiree Alliance try to intervene in three ways: they campaign against anti-sex trafficking laws, they try to collaborate with anti-trafficking groups, and/or they engage in decriminalization efforts.⁵⁹ What decriminalization looks like, and what activists believe it should look like, is a point of disagreement. Decriminalization today can either be a demand for full removal of all criminal codes, for example, attempts to decriminalize the sale of sex in a particular city. Or decriminalization can be a partial demand for the removal of a single criminal code, as I will show. Overall, I argue that efforts to decriminalize sexual labor are attempts to achieve citizenship.

Scholars have noted the similarities between governmental and public concerns about sex work and sexual slavery today and the white slavery panic at the turn of the 20th century (Doezema 2000, 2010). Similarly, today’s protectionist politicking results in a conflation of worker and victim. While much DA political advocacy is rooted in grievances over working conditions—conditions that are often the result of restrictive prostitution and adult oriented

business regulations—most recently, these conditions were largely created under the auspice of protection (and now, we interpret anti-prostitution laws through the anti-trafficking lens of protection).

There are three important points I want to make in this chapter. First, DA political advocacy, two key characteristics of social movement unionism: the political advocacy is diffuse and decentralized, rather than being centrally managed and coordinated. DA member organizations undertake local level efforts that target a state or city government or agency. While activists share ideas and strategies at the conference and throughout the year, they do not coordinate local efforts or share their intent with the larger DA network. The DA Strategic Committee does not decide what issues to focus on for the year or dictate proper advocacy procedure. Rather, political advocacy is more grassroots, centered on local politics. Interestingly, there is no nationally targeted political advocacy, and instead efforts remain at the city or state level, or are internationally focused. There is evidence of international political outreach. The Desiree Alliance and Best Practices Policy Project have co-authored calls for justice for the human rights abuses experienced by U.S. sex workers. By necessity, these efforts are more coordinated. The international advocacy efforts have garnered attention from the United Nations and international NGOs.

Second, while the specific campaigns and actions varied, political advocacy efforts generally fall into one of two frameworks: labor rights or protectionism. Labor rights emphasize the rights and needs of people *in* the sex industry, as workers. It constitutes traditional worker protections. Labor rights frames include harm reduction efforts such as workplace health and safety, the right to carry condoms, or the right to work free from fear of arrest or violence.

Alternatively, protectionist frames emphasize the protection of women and girls *from* prostitution and trafficking. It is very interesting that any sex worker rights political advocacy

efforts would use a protectionist frame at all. These strategies align with a contemporary “prostitution mythology” (Weitzer 2010) that emphasizes the need to “protect” women and girls from being victimized by increasing the power of criminal justice institutions to define trafficking and sexual labor. The current anti-trafficking movement is built on this frame. Sex workers spend a lot of time and effort fighting against this frame, as I began to show in the previous chapter, as well as using it to meet their own needs.

Interestingly, decriminalization can be framed either using a labor rights perspective or a protectionist perspective. Desiree Alliance leadership and member organizations today argue for decriminalization using either framework. Although advocacy for decriminalizing prostitution has historically been a main (stated) goal of sex worker rights movement (Jenness 1990, 1993; Weitzer 1991), what that looks like in practice today is complex. Now, instead of demanding labor rights through the removal of all criminal codes, DA leadership and member organizations take a fragmented approach that targets specific laws and cases. This “chipping away” strategy, as they refer to it, has mixed results. They might “chip away” at laws requiring convicted sex workers to register as sex offenders (protectionist) or argue for decriminalization at the city level (labor rights).

Third, one of my main points is that sex worker rights political actions centered on a protectionist frame tend to be the most successful, while labor rights framed actions are mostly unsuccessful. The chipping away at decriminalization strategy appears to be successful only when using a protectionist framework that does little for people who are currently in the sex industry and want to continue to work. Sex worker rights efforts that align with anti-trafficking protectionist ideology are more likely to pass and have public support. But using a protectionist frame, even for their own efforts, still prevents sex workers from achieving full citizenship. Sex workers who do not want “protection” are left with little legal recourse. In effect, I argue the

criminalization of sex work, like the criminalization of underground economies and undocumented immigrant labor, effectively shifts struggles for labor and workplace rights into the criminal justice arena. The fight for labor rights in a globalized economy is a fight for citizenship (Fine 2006, Gordon 2005).

I end this chapter with a discussion of the logic of trafficking politics. As Gordon (2006) points out about undocumented immigrant workers organizing, political actions “by people legally excluded from our political system suggest some further thoughts about the possibilities and limitations of rights talk” (268). Who is “entitled to do the work of citizenship” when they are politically excluded (Gordon 2005: 272)? Social movement unionism is a hybrid of identity and labor efforts precisely because workers are denied something larger: the right to citizenship.

PROTECTIONIST IDEOLOGIES AND THE U.S. *TRAFFICKING VICTIMS PROTECTION ACT* (2000)

U.S. sex worker rights activism gained new momentum at the turn of the 21st century, around the same time that the federal *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* was enacted in 2000. In the past decade sex workers are fighting against many of the laws and efforts undertaken in the name of ending sex trafficking—such as the increasing criminalization of the sale of sex, massage parlors, and erotic dance clubs (Bernstein 2010 and 2012; Kempadoo, Sanghera, & Pattanaik 2011; Lee and Persson 2012).

The three pillars of the TVPA, prevention, protection, and prosecution, inform U.S. anti-trafficking efforts. The TVPA empowers (and funds) local entities, both law enforcement and non-profits, to engage in prevention efforts such as educational and public awareness campaigns. Protection efforts include re-integration programs, assistance programs for victims, immigration relief and victims’ relief funds, and the issuing of T-visas, temporary visas allowing a victim/survivor of trafficking to stay in the United States. Prosecution revolves around increasing

law enforcement efforts to find traffickers and trafficking victims, redefining crimes and creating new criminal laws at the state level around trafficking and forced labor.

Prosecution efforts continue to evolve over time at the national and state levels. Subsequent reauthorizations of the TVPA have included a critique of the emphasis on sex trafficking over trafficking in other U.S. labor sectors like agriculture or domestic work. In 2005, the re-authorization of the TVPA explicitly stated that it can be applied domestically, so that law enforcement and social services can focus on the trafficking of U.S. citizens across state lines or county lines.⁶⁰ The TVPA also now defines anyone under the age of 18 engaging in sex work, U.S. citizen or non-citizen, as a trafficked person, regardless of movement. This further means that anyone who would traditionally be prosecuted as a pimp is now prosecuted as a trafficker, and trafficking carries a longer sentence.

Further, after the passing of the federal TVPA in 2000, states were tasked with creating their own anti-trafficking legislation and engaging in their own anti-trafficking efforts (Bernstein 2010, 2012; Kempadoo, Sanghera, & Pattanaik 2011). State-level coalitions and taskforces draft and campaign for the support of tougher prostitution and trafficking legislation. Currently, there are 22 state taskforces on human trafficking, and 14 are mandated by state statute.⁶¹ Non-profits and law enforcement work together in coalitions in 27 states to build support among state legislators and the general public. Social services are mainly tasked with prevention and protection.

For example, anti-sex trafficking coalitions like End Demand Illinois and the Prop 35 campaign in California have successfully garnered support from state legislators and the general public to pass new anti-sex trafficking laws. Often these trafficking laws include new regulations that increasingly criminalize the sale of sex, and more tightly regulate or outlaw erotic dance clubs and massage parlors. Since 2003, 43 states and Washington, D.C. have passed laws

against trafficking under the TVPA, focusing almost exclusively on sex trafficking, and several continue to refine them.⁶² In this way, prosecution and social service prevention efforts go hand in hand.

Anti-trafficking organizations and existing organizations committed to anti-trafficking efforts such as the Salvation Army, women's shelters, and law enforcement agencies, and researchers, receive millions of dollars in funds to research trafficking, arrest traffickers, stop domestic and international trafficking, and assist trafficking victims, largely with a focus on sex trafficking. This is often focused on a city or state level. In 2010 alone (the most recent fiscal year for which statistics are available), over twenty-two million dollars was distributed to U.S. based and domestically focused organizations, researchers, local governments, and law enforcement agencies, according to the U.S. Department of Justice fiscal year report. This is in addition to millions of dollars already awarded every year. Sex worker rights organizations receive none of these funds.

Many studies are showing that trafficking regulations, and subsequent enforcement and outreach, result in more dangerous conditions for sex workers, creating legal obstacles to agency and safety as police raid, arrest, and detain, courts prosecute and deport, and social service agencies rehabilitate sex workers and sex trafficking victims (Agustín 2005, Musto 2010, O'Connell Davidson 2006). Research on the TVPA has shown that most funding and legislation focuses on tougher criminal penalties, not social services (Andrijasevic 2010). In 2010, the U.S. Department of Justice undertook just 71 cases of sex trafficking. Other scholars note that the TVPA is largely focused on curtailing immigration by creating the illusion of protection and rescue while arresting traffickers, sex trafficking victims, and sex workers alike (Agustín 2005; Chapkis 2003; Parrenas 2008; O'Connell Davidson 2006; Weitzer 2007). Temporary visas, called T-visas, are available to trafficking victims if they can identify their trafficker and agree to go to

court. Chapkis (2003) argues that the TVPA creates mutually exclusive categories of “deserving innocents” and punishable migrants:

The law justifies offering protection to the former and punishment to the latter through the use of three sleights of hand. First, it relies on a repressive moral panic about "sexual slavery" created through slippery statistics and sliding definitions. Second, despite offering symbolic support to the notion that all prostitution is sexual slavery, the law carefully differentiates between "innocent" and "guilty" prostitutes and provides support only to the innocent. And third, by making assistance to even "deserving" victims contingent on their willingness to assist authorities in the prosecution of traffickers, the legislation further seals U.S. borders against penetration by "undeserving" economic migrants. Protections offered to the innocent help to reinforce the suggestion that the punishments meted out to the "guilty" are justified.

It has proven difficult for any immigrant to meet the requirements of innocence. Similarly, Bernstein (2010, 2012) argues that the domestic focus of the TVPA on U.S. citizens is premised on ideals of criminalization as a form of protection, but actually works to punish sex workers by increasingly criminalizing the sale of sex. State lines, county lines, and age are used as determinants of domestic trafficking. (Desiree Alliance conference organizers have expressed concern that they may be considered “traffickers” as people come from out-of-state.)

LOCAL POLITICS: ENGAGING IN ANTI-TRAFFICKING ADVOCACY

At the national Desiree Alliance sex worker rights conferences, how to counter trafficking and anti-trafficking efforts is the subject of many workshops and panels. There is no formally coordinated counter-taskforce through DA leadership or the network of member organizations. Instead, DA activists and member organizations strike out on their own.

In my interviews, the anti-trafficking movement provoked emotional and lengthy responses. Many sex worker rights activists spoke passionately about anti-trafficking efforts: about what sex workers should do to assist anti-sex trafficking efforts, particularly about engaging anti-trafficking advocates to show them that not all sex workers are trafficking victims,

and about how the TVPA negatively affects their lives. They spoke about the importance of being engaged with anti-trafficking efforts, even if they were not currently doing so themselves. Sex worker rights activists may be networked with each other, but report being under-networked when it comes to partnerships with criminal justice entities and with anti-sex trafficking efforts.

Maribel, active with Desiree Alliance leadership, concedes, “Basically I think we've been approaching it from the defense part of it and so I would really like to get off that defense fence.” She laughs, “You know, the fighting fence. And get involved in how we can collaborate and work with these groups.” Many DA political advocates discussed the need to join state-level anti-trafficking coalitions, and noted that they are not welcome on taskforces. Taskforces are criminal justice centered, with FBI, police, and less so, victim services, brainstorming ideas around prosecution and prevention. Sex workers are excluded entirely from law enforcement taskforces because they are engaging in, or have engaged in, illegal activities.

Anti-trafficking coalitions and organizations exist in 27 states, with the Polaris Project—a D.C.-based organization that runs the only national anti-trafficking hotline—reporting allied agencies in every state, often local arms of the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, and domestic violence and sexual assault centers.⁶³ Anti trafficking coalitions are social service oriented, comprised of non-profits, NGOs, and related stakeholders who focus on all three pillars of the TVPA: how to help shore up prosecution, how to encourage prevention, and how to protect victims.

DA activists argue that they are perfect members of these coalitions because, as one activist put it, they are on the “front line” and, she argued, willing and more capable of identifying trafficking victims than police or the general public. These activists consider themselves uniquely situated to identify and assist victims/survivors of sex trafficking because

they may occupy some of the same spaces. Whether or not this is true is another empirical question not undertaken here, but what is of interest to this research is how sex worker activists desire to participate in anti sex trafficking efforts.

Labor v. Protection: Challenging Anti-Trafficking Efforts

Desiree Alliance member organizations are also particularly interested in influencing state-level sex trafficking laws before they go on the books. Interviewees told me that they are trying to get across the idea that these laws rely on broad definitions of trafficking and commercial sex that, they argue, may increase the criminalization of everyday life for women of color, transgender people, and poor youth of color. Their concerns are grounded in a critique of protectionist policies. Activists further argue that increased prosecution under anti-trafficking policies constrains their ability to make labor rights claims.

For example, the Desiree Alliance, largely through the DA leadership based in California, and DA member organizations in the state, were very involved in opposing California's recently passed Prop 35 in 2012, a proposition that focused heavily on youth trafficking and on expanding the sex offender registry. It re-defined a "commercial sex act" as "any sexual conduct on account of which anything of value is given or received by any person" (Chapter 8 "False Imprisonment and Human Trafficking," SEC 6, Section 236.1 (h)(2)). The Desiree Alliance and many member organizations such as the St. James Infirmary, BAYSWAN (Bay Area Sex Workers Advocacy Network), Best Practices Policy Project, Different Avenues, and SWOP NYC, were joined by non-sex worker organizations, like Black Women for Wellness, California Coalition For Women Prisoners, and the American Civil Liberties Union of California (ACLU) in opposing Prop 35, also known as the Californians Against Sexual Exploitation Act, or CASE Act.

Through grassroots public educational campaigns and outreach to key legislators, they attempted to show how this new legislation could be applied to something as simple as paying

for a dinner.⁶⁴ DA sex worker rights activists created a website that hosted statements from several sex worker and non-sex worker organizations. They wrote op-eds for local newspapers and engaged in social media blitzes on Facebook and Twitter. The website they created linked to research and statistics that supported their claims.⁶⁵ It also listed and linked to 40 organizations and media endorsements against the CASE Act.⁶⁶ For example, the website included a two page statement issued by Black Women for Wellness. The statement critiques the proposition as part of this coordinated “No on 35” campaign, reading:

We oppose Prop. 35 for the following reasons: Anyone that associates with a person under the age of 18 who trades sex could be criminalized and considered a trafficker even if there was no force, fraud, or coercion involved. This includes: young people in the sex trade who have combined efforts to share housing, food, resources and increase their personal safety; people of color, queer, immigrant, and low-income communities that are already unfairly targeted by the criminal justice system for prostitution could be inappropriately and maliciously criminalized with this proposition.⁶⁷

Prop 35 passed by a wide margin, receiving 81.4% of the vote. It should also be noted that 3.7 million dollars was spent to promote the anti-trafficking bill, whereas the opposition had no funding to advertise their opposition and relied on media attention and grassroots networks.⁶⁸

In general, members of the Desiree Alliance network find their ability to join anti-trafficking coalitions is limited, and it is likewise difficult to be included in anti-trafficking discussions. They were not part of the main organization in California that campaigned for Prop 35, “Californians Against Slavery.” It is common for coalitions to take an abolitionist stance toward prostitution as part of their anti-sex trafficking efforts (Bernstein 2010, 2012). This makes it difficult for sex worker activists to join them, as I will show in the next section.

At issue is the meaning of violence against women. Sex worker rights activists perceive anti-trafficking advocacy as anti-prostitution. The U.S. and other North World countries have long histories of legislating feminine sexuality as both in danger and dangerous, as something to be

protected and feared (Corboz 2009, Petchesky 2000).⁶⁹ Along these lines, prostitution is framed as another form of violence against women, a commodified form of violence that exploits, harms, and hurts those already most vulnerable to oppression: women, especially young women, poor women, and women of color (Farley 2004, 2007; Jeffreys 2002; Raymond 2004, 2005). Therefore it makes sense to reduce prostitution to reduce sex trafficking. Abolitionist feminists in these organizations argue that any effort to separate sex work from coercive trafficking perpetuates violence against women and are often antagonistic or hostile at best to sex workers (Barry 1979; Farley 2004, 2007; Jeffreys 2002; Raymond 2004, 2005; see Chapkis 2003; Weitzer 2007 for critiques).

Joining Coalitions: Labor Rights in a Protectionist Setting

Collaborations are difficult enough given the stigma of prostitution, but they are almost impossible with trafficking coalitions. Interviewees reported that they experienced hostility, discrimination, and stigma when trying to engage with anti-trafficking organizations and coalitions. If sex work and trafficking are understood as the same experience, it makes sense that organizations would be wary of sex workers. As I will show, this suspicion goes both ways. DA leadership and member organization leaders are also apprehensive about the intent of anti-trafficking advocacy efforts.

Despite the obstacles, a few DA activists are involved with anti-trafficking coalitions. Astrid, part of the leadership of a Midwestern SWOP, attended an early meeting of a statewide Task Force on Human Trafficking. She felt that they did not have “a lot of real facts,” but they had a lot of support: “And it was huge, state police, the FBI , and a lot of different church organizations, but also a lot of labor organizations and that's a table that I ended up falling into.”

At this meeting, the labor table, which included the state level Agricultural Labor Society, was tasked with discussing whether to approach the legislature about shutting down

massage parlors, due to a concern that trafficking victims were forced to have sex with men in them. The labor table decided to warn against a “blanket” effort to close massage parlors to stop sex trafficking. Crysta recounts:

The owner from the agricultural community, the Agricultural Labor Society, also spoke up and said ‘well then we'd have to close down every farm , because agricultural is the leading source of revenue in the state right now, and obviously there is labor trafficking going on, but we can't just close down every farm!’ So it was good to hear that support from the agricultural community, which is something that no one would ever tie together--strippers and agriculture!--but that was interesting to find that in an anti-trafficking meeting.

Here, labor rights acted as a point that unified them with other labor groups. The Agricultural Labor Society president stood in solidarity with massage parlors over concerns of violating someone’s right to work. For Astrid, it appeared that he understood that labor rights cannot be won from a protectionist standpoint.

Nadine, in a different Midwestern state, is active with a local anti-trafficking coalition. Although she participates in the Desiree Alliance conferences, she feels her efforts are best focused on reaching out to external organizations, rather than focusing internally on worker empowerment. She, like Astrid, is a white cisgender woman with some college experience, but no degree. In our interview, she was sure to explain to me that she is practiced at speaking to those who oppose sexual labor. Nadine has worked as a self-described high-end escort for over twenty years and as an independent activist for many years. Nadine feels that sharing her experiences as an escort can help anti-trafficking coalitions conceptualize the differences between sex trafficking and sexual labor. In the course of her anti-trafficking advocacy, Nadine recounts with confidence, “I’ve certainly talked to people involved in the trafficking movement. Some of which are police officers, and Polaris Project, and places like that, that are not necessarily what other sex workers consider to be friendly places to be fraternizing.”

The Polaris Project, for example, is a national non-profit that runs a national trafficking hotline and supports anti-trafficking legislation built upon end-demand policies to reduce prostitution.⁷⁰ It is an organization that many sex worker rights advocates are wary of due to their anti-prostitution stance. Nadine consults with the project, and tries to bridge this gap. This is especially salient considering that the Polaris Project provides the only non-law enforcement place to report suspected trafficking. Nadine explains, “I talked to the Polaris Project about coming up with specific protocols for the sex work community, about reporting and identifying and things of that nature, and trying to work with them on, and actually they're open to doing it.” She felt that if the Polaris Project had a guideline for taking calls from sex workers, and assuring sex workers that they will not be reported, arrested, or deported, that they may be more likely to call in potential trafficking if they see it.

Nadine identifies obstacles on both sides, with the Polaris Project mislabeling all sex workers as trafficked, especially if they work for someone. On the other side, she says that sex workers fear arrest if they report trafficking on the Polaris hotline. In terms of reporting suspected trafficking, Nadine says, “I know that a number of the sex workers rights people don't believe that the Polaris Project Hotline is a safe place to report suspected trafficking. [...] But at the same time, what other alternative is there?”

Three years ago, a statewide anti-trafficking coalition invited Nadine to join them. Someone on the committee had heard her speak at a conference on trafficking, prostitution, and sex work.⁷¹ Although Nadine was invited, her ability to sit on committees was limited. Nadine attempted to join the John School Committee “because I am a big proponent of non-shame based [efforts],” and wanted “to give a different perspective of the clients that I have met who are not predators,” she explained. But, she sighed, “the person that was running that

committee is a very staunch end-demand abolitionist. And would not allow me on; would just ignore me, you know.” Nadine feels part of the problem is the mix of ideologies,

They don't have any definition of exactly where their lines fall. Like, they'll let *me* come on board, but they're letting the abolitionist, end demand come on board too. And it's really difficult to figure out what the goals of the coalition are. It's all about human trafficking, but again, they still spend a lot of time focusing on sex trafficking and not other labor trafficking.

Nadine is unsure if they even wanted a sex worker voice on the coalition, or if they were just tokenizing her participation. To Nadine, it appears that a few in the coalition are torn between wanting to support workers, and wanting to push for increased criminalization as a form of protection.

Nadine, as the only (out) sex worker, was allowed on a Legislative Sub-Committee, somewhat by happenstance. When that committee began to discuss advocating an erotic dancer licensure bill to suppress trafficking, she intervened. With Megan's sex industry connections, she brought a couple of adult business owners to a coalition meeting. Licensing is an issue that many sex workers rights activists in the DA spoke against in conferences—having a specific license marks the worker, creating a public trail that stigmatizes the worker, endangers opportunities for future employment, and impacts her family. As a result of Nadine and the two other sex industry owners describing what licensing would do to their businesses and employees, the coalition dropped the idea. Nadine reflected that the licensing bill was short sighted in its goals:

Oh, of course, to like, prevent underage trafficking at the strip clubs-- there's 11 strip clubs in my city. It's not really that difficult to stay on top of what's going on at the strip clubs in my city. And of course, it's not going to stop trafficking. It's not going to stop trafficking! It's a ridiculous way to spend time and money and all it does is harm workers, as we know, cuz workers don't want to have to go and get licensed. And they're going to try to get away with not getting licensed.

The proposal was based on assumptions that all forms of erotic labor are prostitution, and that prostitution and trafficking are one and the same. Nadine was able to successfully show the differences between sex trafficking and sexual labor. Not everyone was happy with the coalition's decision to drop the bill, Nadine shared, especially the FBI and police department representatives from the Toledo Human Trafficking Taskforce who supported licensure. Law enforcement were coming from a protectionist framing, arguing that licensing legal sex workers like erotic dancers allows the government to verify the age of a worker, rather than rely on businesses to do so. A labor rights frame, like what Nadine brought forth, argues that licensing, as a public government process, actually creates the conditions for violence and harm.

It is interesting that the two sex worker rights activists who had some involvement with an anti-trafficking coalition were white, cisgender women. Astrid is tall and thin with long, straight blonde hair, and Nadine is similarly thin hegemonically pretty. It may be that unearned privileges around race and gender afforded them entry into a mainstream political arena closed off to other sex worker rights activists. Astrid has two years of college, and Nadine, some college, which may also have increased their cultural capital. Interestingly, Charm's experiences with an anti-trafficking organization are quite different, as I outline below. Although she too is a white cisgender woman, Charm's appearance—tattoos, facial piercings—may have influenced how others perceived her. Although I cannot say with certainty that gender, class, and racial privilege influences inclusion based on just a few activists' experiences, it does resonate with research on normalization as a pre-requisite for acceptance into mainstream activism (Seidman 2001).

And few have found the level of success and integration as Nadine has into an anti-sex trafficking organization. Charm, part of the leadership of a Midwestern SWOP chapter, and a member organization of the Desiree Alliance, explains the relationship she tried to build with

her city's anti-sexual exploitation organization in 2009. The two got together and spoke a few times. Charm said that she thought "we both have the same goal: ending violence against sex workers," and was hoping that the two organizations could work together on campaigns and outreach. Charm invited the anti-sexual exploitation group to attend SWOP's event in honor of the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. She did not hear from them and finally heard that they would not attend:

A member of that organization got back to me and said "I'll spread the word about it, but I don't think we should work together, it's too early in our relationship with one another to work together on something like this."

Charm said she was disappointed, but it became clear why they did not attend a few months later, explaining, "not that much longer after that, they launched the end demand campaign, which we were very opposed to." At the DA conferences, the end-demand model is often criticized for doing little to enhance sex workers labor rights. End-demand policies target clients for arrest, but not sex workers. It is a classic protectionist policy framework based in the assumption that sex work is a form of violence against women. At the DA conferences and through member organizations, activists argue that an end-demand model does little to help with harm reduction efforts. Clients may pressure a sex worker for a quicker session, increasing the likelihood that safe sex practices will be compromised and potentially placing the sex worker at an increased risk for physical and sexual violence.

Charm goes on to say that she attends events where she runs into the anti-sex trafficking advocates she began to work with, commenting, "I run into them, they're always very nice to my face, but they know we're opposed to a lot of the measures they've been taking, the legislation." She mistrusts their intent now. She is also frustrated by people, like myself, who ask how sex worker rights organizations are trying to get involved with anti-trafficking coalitions:

Like I said, back then our meetings with [the anti-sexual exploitation organization], they went really well. They were nice. But then we started to realize these people...their goal is to abolish this industry. So in the end, they're never really gonna be our allies. They're going to be nice to our face and whatever. I felt like...other people have asked me that: [*taking a mocking tone*]: "Well have you tried to work with these organizations?" And in the end, it's like, no! I don't... yes, we have tried. But now that I know what I know, I don't think I would ever do it again, until I find out exactly what their stance is: Are you trying to abolish trafficking? Or are you trying to abolish the whole [sex] industry?

Charm's experience with the anti-sexual exploitation organization has left her quite hesitant to engage with anti-trafficking organizations. She finds that mainstream anti-trafficking advocacy makes it difficult for SWOP Chicago to engage in political advocacy and directly shapes the content of their public educational outreach. Charm says, "They have a lot of money, and they have a lot of power. They have law enforcement on their side. So it's really tough."

Just as Nadine believes it is her job to train anti-trafficking organizations to be open to sex workers, so to do sex worker advocates recognize that they often have stereotypes of anti-trafficking organizations. At the 2010 Desiree Alliance conference and in my interviews, many sex worker rights activists were quick to emphasize that there are grassroots anti-trafficking efforts, not funded under the TVPA, that emphasize immigrant rights and worker rights, rather than protection. These organizations offer an intersectional critique of immigration policies, including the TVPA, and labor policies for being racist, citizenist, sexist, and classist. Such organizations argue that the law produces poverty, violence, and inequality. Desiree Alliance member organizations are more likely to find points of shared interest with these organizations, such as the New York Anti-Trafficking Network or the National Immigrant Justice Center in Illinois, as both organizations similarly critique the effects of criminalization on the lives of immigrants and poor people. But these organizations tend to be smaller, less popular or visible

in media and policy-making circles, and/or less funded than mainstream anti-trafficking organizations.

Angela gives the example of the New York Anti-Trafficking Network (NYATN):

[It] is a group of a bunch of different organizations that work against trafficking, both sex trafficking and other forms of labor trafficking; and they work on issues of migration, and labor and all that kind of stuff. They're really awesome. They do pretty great stuff and they create really good conversations around migration and trafficking and all these related issues of class, and justice, and stuff like that.

Currently, the NYATN Steering Committee includes two people affiliated with the Sex Workers Project, a member organization of the DA, as well as a range of race and class based organizations like the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund's Anti-Trafficking Initiative and the Immigrant Women and Children Project.⁷²

Similarly, Charm shared that their SWOP chapter is working with an immigrant rights organization instead of local anti-sex trafficking organizations. SWOP and the national immigrant rights organization, along with local university researchers, have created materials to distribute to workers around trafficking and rights.

Overall, while DA activists are not very active in most anti-trafficking coalitions, more and more activists are organizing campaigns to amend existing anti-trafficking bills at the state level, or oppose new ones each year. Negotiating collaborative relationships is made all the more difficult by the protectionist framework. Taking a labor rights framing, as activists try to do when engaging with anti-trafficking advocacy, does not work. The conflation of labor and exploitation makes it difficult for sex workers to argue for civil rights and inclusion. Because if one is not a victim, then one is a perpetrator: a pimp, as Robyn Few, founder of the Sex Workers Outreach Project, and other sex worker rights activists have been labeled.⁷³ In this way, a protectionist framing impacts sex workers political advocacy efforts.

TAKING A FRAGMENTED APPROACH TO DECRIMINALIZATION

Decriminalization is arguably the clearest path to citizenship rights. Full decriminalization would mean that sex work and sex trafficking would have to be de-conflated. That is, there would have to be clear demarcations in the law differentiating between consensual labor and trafficking. The question becomes, can a chipping away approach to decriminalization, tackling one law or court case at a time, effectively de-conflate sex work and sex trafficking?

At the Desiree Alliance conferences, workshops and panels address how laws criminalizing (or, if legal, unfairly targeting them as trafficking hotspots) sex workers' labor are violations of civil rights. At the 2010 conference, there were several workshops on the relationship between policy and violence experienced by sex workers. DA leadership talk about the potential possibilities for worker rights and safety if all criminal code around the sale of sex and other consensual, commodified sexual activity were repealed. Decriminalization is a very appealing path toward worker rights.

The sex worker rights movement historically has focused on decriminalization (Weitzer 1991). However DA activists today are taking a slightly different approach that they describe as a "chipping away" strategy. What makes this strategy unique today is that each "chip" can embody a labor rights frame or a protectionist frame. How do sex workers use a protectionist frame, and to what end? A chipping away strategy can only go as far as a protectionist framing will let it—as I will show, extending only to bills and advocacy that align with anti-trafficking ideology. These efforts affect those who do not want to be in the sex industry, but little advocacy for the health and safety of those *in* the industry is successful.

Decriminalization Ideology

Decriminalization is complex. On one hand, sex worker rights activists somewhat automatically responded to my question, “What is the goal of the movement?,” answering, “decriminalization.” Decriminalization is the “holy grail” of sex worker rights activism. On the other hand, at conferences and in interviews, it is clear that DA activists do not agree on the path to decriminalization. It is not a universally agreed upon or simple goal among DA leadership, member organizations, or conference attendees. Some activists have felt the fall out of attempts to decriminalize sexual labor on their advocacy efforts. Many do not agree on what decriminalization should look like, or if it is feasible. The most recognizable legal strategy is also one of the most contentious among sex worker rights activists.

There is a clear decriminalization ideology at work at the DA conferences and in the efforts of member organizations. Many sex worker rights activists shared the anticipated material benefits they would have if their labor were not criminalized, benefits around work, health, well-being, legal assistance, and gender equality. Some emphasize health and safety. Others discussed how their labor would be impacted. Summer, who works occasionally now as a professional dominatrix, reflects on how she would personally benefit if the laws all changed, and sexual labor was all decriminalized, musing, “Hmm...well I might be able to advertise!!” She laughs, adding, “Maybe pick up a little bit of extra money! I can throw it out without even worrying about getting arrested!”

For Astrid, an escort, decriminalization would address many issues around labor, safety, and legal aid, entailing:

If people could operate in sex work without stigma of being a criminal, at whatever level, then they would be more open to reporting robberies, rape, other crimes against them. They’d be less likely to feel trafficked by a pimp, because they wouldn't think that they couldn't speak out against them without being prosecuted.

Sex workers would have their legal rights restored, and, she argues, “they wouldn't be necessarily looked down on or ignored, because of their criminal status.” She believes legal work gives workers “a better voice.” Additionally, access to health care would also improve. She reasons:

Also, health services, the fact that because you're in sex work, you're not supposed to donate blood. Or that if you go to a clinic, and they always ask if you, what kind of occupation you have, are you exposed to different things, have you been involved with anyone that's in sex work; so I think a lot of those stigmas would be taken away if it were seen as all sex work was more of a profession. [...] In the law's term, in a broad sense, that stigma would be taken away from a lot of things. And then I think more sex workers would feel open to being honest with their health care providers. Which I think is really important!

Others discuss how decriminalization would help to identify sex trafficking victims.

Alexandra works with a legal aid non-profit that helps sex trafficking victims. She explains the impact of criminalization on sex trafficking victims:

I have had numerous clients who are trafficked as minors, domestically, who escaped because of clients. [...] They told clients, ‘I'm 15, I don't want to be here.’ And they [the man] either put them [the victim] in a cab, or dropped them in a precinct. So I think we really demonize clients of sex workers in our culture.” She believes “decriminalizing voluntary prostitution” would help end sex trafficking and violence because more people would be “willing to come forward- sex workers *and* clients.

For her, decriminalization is preferable to what she calls “end-demand, johns are bad” legislation.

If that man, that client--thank god he did that--but he didn't feel comfortable enough to go to law enforcement and say ‘this is where I met this girl, this is the location,’ cuz it was actual a location where a lot more stuff was going on. But of course, I'm sure he didn't feel comfortable doing that! You can't blame him considering the environment that we have around criminalization. And not only about criminalization, but the culture, the social culture we have around being a john. Of course he wasn't going to run to the police and share.

Shawn reflects of the meaning of decriminalization based on gender and venue. As a gay man who sells sex, he is acutely aware of the gender privileges he has in the industry, and the sexism of criminalizing prostitution, relating:

I think that decriminalization would impact all street workers. In terms of indoor workers, it might impact [them]. I just think that men fly under the radar in ways that women never will. Even in places [...] where women don't get arrested as much as they might in some other places where there's a more vindictive vice presence... women still live with that, not that I'm going to speak on behalf of women, this is just my observation. Women are forced to live with a level of anxiety and surveillance that men don't. I don't pick up the phone and think "is this a cop?" I've been working for 13 years, and I never think that. I've never had a brush with vice cops. I don't screen people. I don't tell a friend where I'm going. I have the privilege of just freedom around that. [...] I want everyone to have this privilege: picking up the phone and not fucking worrying. I want everyone to be able to conduct their business without fear and anxiety, cuz that, god that anxiety!

On the whole, research has shown that decriminalizing prostitution improves health for sex workers (Harcourt et al. 2010) and does not negatively impact access to services or community health.⁷⁴ For example, since New Zealand decriminalized the sale of sex has in 2003, government reports show no increase in sex trafficking and increased access to services for many, though not all, sex workers.⁷⁵ Some will benefit more than others from the removal of criminal code (Abel et al. 2010). Usually this means that marginalized workers or people assumed to be sex workers—youth, transgender people, undocumented people, homeless, poor people—are less likely to benefit from decriminalized statues, and they may have less access to services or legal assistance, even if the labor itself is legal.

Decriminalization is a motivating ideology for sex workers, not a concrete expectation. Some dislike the ways in which other sex worker rights activists talk about it at conferences and in public education outreach. Angela, a former sex worker who oversees media trainings and

legislative trainings for sex workers, is “not a fan of [decriminalization] as a goal” because “I don't think most people understand how dismantling criminalization works.” Angela operates from the position that decriminalization is unlikely, sharing, “It's unlikely that we're going to be able to get rid of all those criminal codes. But we can chip away at them. And that's actually what decriminalization looks like, it's identifying specific laws that cause harm and taking them down, piece by piece.” Angela feels that a lack of understanding of the governmental level of criminalization “makes us look stupid:”

So for example in, I want to say 2008, for December 17th [International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers]..., there was a march on Washington [D.C.] to demand decriminalization, which is just mis-directed. Like, the president couldn't sign a thing that says ‘prostitution is decriminalized.’ That's just not possible, because criminal code is on the state level.

Overall, DA leadership and member organization leadership believe that decriminalization carries many material benefits. But the process of decriminalization is fragmented, and some activists are unsure of the potential of decriminalization, or are wary of the consequences of pushing for decriminalization.

Examples of Decriminalization

Interestingly, there have been only two attempts for full decriminalization of prostitution in the last few decades, both at the city level. And both have been met with resistance from other sex worker rights activists. “Prop K” was the most recent attempt to decriminalize prostitution. It was a 2008 measure to remove all the criminal code against prostitution in San Francisco, California; it did not pass. There was another failed attempt a few years earlier, in 2004, called Measure Q, in Berkeley, CA.

Instead, DA activist leaders across the U.S. brought up smaller “chipping away” efforts during our interviews. Many admired, for example, a 2011 federal lawsuit that challenged a Louisiana state law requiring people convicted of prostitution to register as sex offenders. To

them, this law was clearly a violation of basic citizenship rights. Angela, Alexandra, and others held up this action as “decriminalization in action,” a means of restoring citizenship rights to former sex workers. Deon Hayward is an alternate member of the Desiree Alliance Strategic Committee and the director of the New Orleans group, Women with a Vision (WWAV). Working with the Center for Constitutional Rights, WWAV brought forth a federal lawsuit to challenge a local law that required people convicted of prostitution to register as sex offenders.⁷⁶ They argued that the law—a nineteenth century felony law defining oral sex and anal sex as “unnatural copulation”—was used to unfairly target poor women of color, and gay and transgender people, engaging in survival sex work.⁷⁷ A registered sex offender must abide proximity restrictions around to children, including residency restrictions, and may lose rights to raise their own children. The lawsuit was won in 2011. Now if someone is convicted of prostitution, they no longer have to be entered in Louisiana’s sex offender registry, though those already on the registry have to go to court to be removed.⁷⁸

A few DA activists are also very interested in ensuring that trafficking victims are not re-victimized through arrest. They frame this as another example of “chipping away” at criminalization. For example, the Sex Workers Project (SWP), a sex worker and sex trafficking victim rights program with the Urban Justice Center in New York City, provides legal services for sex workers and trafficking victims/survivors in New York. The project also advocates for national and local policies that differentiate between sex work and trafficking to best assist trafficking victims and those who sell sex.

In 2010, the SWP advocated for a bill to remove a prostitution arrest from the record of someone found to be trafficked at the time of arrest. After being arrested for prostitution, it would become clear during court hearings or meetings with a lawyer that several women were

actually victims/survivors of trafficking. A local attorney describes the efforts around the anti-trafficking laws:

We passed the Vacating Convictions law last summer, which was the first in the country—now there’s a slew of others that have passed, which allows survivors of trafficking to vacate prior convictions for prostitution and loitering for the purpose of prostitution while they’re victims of trafficking.

SWP issued a memorandum:

After the passage of the landmark New York Anti-Trafficking Law in 2007, the Sex Workers Project brought to the attention of lawmakers the fact that some survivors of trafficking. . . continued to be punished by discrimination and stigmatization long after their escape from trafficking because of their criminal record. In partnership with Assembly Member Richard Gottfried, SWP wrote a bill to correct this injustice. SWP united a network of organizations to campaign for this bill, including the New York City Bar Association, Brooklyn Defender Service, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, The Door, Safe Horizon, Sex Workers Outreach Project, and Girls Education and Mentoring Services. On August 14, 2010, New York became the first state to pass this legislation (hereinafter “Vacating Convictions Law”) that allows survivors of trafficking to vacate their convictions for prostitution offenses.⁷⁹

Since then, many organizations, including SWP and a local legal aid agency, successfully filed motions that have vacated a person’s record who was found to be trafficked at the time of arrest. After passing in New York in 2010, Nevada, Illinois, Maryland, and Vermont have since passed similar bills, and Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Hawaii, California and Colorado are in process. As one interviewee noted in reference to this law, “Again, it’s not decriminalization, but it is an act of decriminalizing specific crimes for specific people.” Angela lamented that some activists did not celebrate this as a victory for sex workers rights:

When we were celebrating that victory, there were people from the national sex workers rights movement who were saying, ‘well, that’s great, but really we should just get rid of all those laws,’ and I agree; however, like, this is a piece of the criminal code that we were able to get gone. So that is worth celebrating!

It was unclear if she was referring to the Desiree Alliance when she says “the national sex worker rights movement,” but it is inferred.

Though I did not come across anyone who was critical of these efforts in this way, it is an interesting point. On one hand, this illuminates a tension among activists in terms of what decriminalization should look like. On the other hand, this reveals how sex worker rights activists use a protectionist framing and are aware that it works. This particular legal effort appears to be a success because it aligns with the anti-trafficking language of protection and victimization.

However, protectionist legal successes may do little to alleviate labor violations for sex workers who are currently working. It remains to be seen how much, and what kind of, impact international pressure will have on U.S. and state policies and practices. Currently, the state and federal governments are one of the main sources of labor rights violations for sex workers. Can the “chipping away” process ever restore citizenship rights for all sex workers, current and former?

INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

Finally, the Desiree Alliance calls on international pressure as a form of political advocacy. In 2010, the Sexual Rights Initiative, along with the Best Practices Policy Project (BPPP) and the Desiree Alliance, filed a report under the United Nation’s Human Rights Commission’s new “Universal Periodic Review” process. For sex worker rights activists, this represented a milestone in their organizing efforts. The process reviews the human rights efforts and violations of U.N. member countries. The U.S. was under review for the first time in 2010. This was a much more coordinated effort than the local level efforts of individual activists and member organizations.

In November of that year, two BPPP members went to Geneva as part of the submission. Catherine, a long-time sex worker and founding DA sex worker rights activist, proclaimed, “It's

the first time we've [the U.S.] ever been involved in that process, as a country. . . .We [sex workers] jumped on it the first time, we were there and we kicked ass.” Maribel echoes this sentiment, “seeing it all come together and [I’m] just amazed at how far we've come in this movement. Just amazed! We're sitting there at the U.N.!” For Maribel, this is a sign of the movement gaining momentum and “realistically chang[ing] the way our work is perceived.” She excitedly explained, “Five years ago, who woulda thought that we'd be at the UN?? We've got hustlers--we're all hustling for something, and we've got hustlers there in Geneva, and got someone to recognize us; and then the United States acknowledges that recognition!” Astrid too thinks this is a “very effective” way to get heard, “having that on a major international legal document!”

It appears to have gotten attention using a labor rights perspective. Since the 2010 review, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) conducted a study in four U.S. cities on the informal police practice of using unopened condoms in a person’s possession as enough evidence for a prostitution arrest.⁸⁰ The HRW report concluded that the U.S. is in violation of an U.N. agreement to protect sex workers. Usually, this practice occurs when police interact with someone previously arrested for soliciting, or someone suspected of soliciting. The 2012 Human Rights Watch report, entitled, “Sex Workers at Risk: Condoms as Evidence of Prostitution in Four US Cities,” assessed the practice in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco. The report called on the U.S. government to consider this as part of an overall effort to recognize sex worker rights as human rights under the United Nations: “Most importantly, the US recently pledged at the United Nations Human Rights Council to protect the human rights of sex workers, a commitment that should begin without delay.”⁸¹

The call for international attention is grounded in a labor rights framework. And the response from the international community is grounded in health and safety for people *in* the

sex industry. The question becomes, can sex worker rights activists reconcile labor rights demands for health and safety with a protectionist framing? If they can, DA activists may win labor rights for currently working sex workers.

LABOR RIGHTS: RECONCILING HEALTH AND SAFETY WITH PROTECTION

These few examples of successful legislative advocacy are tempered by failed or so-far-unsuccessful legal efforts. For example, several states and cities, including activists in New York and San Francisco, are working to introduce bills or protocols to reverse the police practice of using condoms as evidence of intent to solicit prostitution. The informal practice is a public health concern, disrupting HIV/AIDS prevention efforts protected under federal law and international agreements.⁸²

As Alexandra discusses the eight-year attempt to institute a “no condoms as evidence” bill in New York State, she stresses that they are not fighting against a formal law:

Condoms clearly are not criminalized. But it is used as evidence. So where you're searched or arrested and then you are searched, whether it's lawful or not— most of the time it's pretty ridiculous—if you're loitering for the purpose of engaging in prostitution, [...] police can use condoms as evidence. And it's a really, a horrible terrible public health practice. It's not a law; it's a practice that police engage in.

For her and others, the use of condoms as evidence is a clear example of why sex workers target the government, not an employer. The police, as state actors, are the problem, not clients or a boss. Alexandra explains that, if their bill were to pass, “it's not decriminalizing, but it is chipping at the criminalization.” The bill has been introduced again for the 2013 New York State Legislative session.

Patty, part of a West Coast based member organization of the Desiree Alliance, describes herself as “all about decriminalization.” Yet she was not in favor of the 2008 decriminalization measure, personally. Internally, their organization debated whether or not to

publically support Prop K (see *Figure 5, Prop K advertisement*). There were concerns that doing so would damage the collaborative relationships that they had built with the District Attorney's office, law enforcement, and local policy-makers.

Patty felt that her organization has a strong working relationship with the District Attorney's office. They often give sensitivity trainings to their office. And in an effort to increase the reporting rate for sexual assault, the District Attorney's office agreed to create an electronic seal to be displayed on sex worker websites. The seal includes verbiage letting sex workers know they can press charges for sexual assault, even if it was on the job. Prop K targeted both the District Attorney's office and a powerful anti-trafficking non-profit, Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE), for reform and funding re-distribution, as Naomi explains:

Patty: I mean, we [the organization] had a really hard time supporting that. It took us three months of decision making process and voting and surveys, and meetings, to finally decide to support. I didn't want to support it.

Interviewer: Because you think it drew too much attention away from other, more serious issues?

Patty: Well because it went after SAGE's funding.



Figure 5: “Prop K” advertisement, 2008, San Francisco, CA

SAGE, Standing Against Global Exploitation, is a well-established anti-sex trafficking organization in the city that is explicitly anti-prostitution. SAGE receives federal dollars to engage in educational campaigns and sex trafficking survivor assistance.⁸³ Going after SAGE, Patty felt, solidified the position of anyone who might otherwise be on the fence about the issue, sighing, “Unfortunately, when we tried to meet with the supervisors [San Francisco Board of Supervisors] around the smaller issues that we were working on, there's been a backlash around Prop K.” To Patty, Prop K “ended up pissing them [DA’s office, SAGE] off and alienating a lot of potential support”—support that she and others had worked hard to build. Patty believes the ballot measure was confusing and divisive for all involved, contending:

And everyone who supports SAGE is going to not support this. They have a lot of supporters [SAGE]. And then the district attorney! Like, fuck you!, and it made the board [San Francisco

Board of Supervisors], it gave them a lot of problems, cuz different Board of Supervisors, who wanted to come out and support it [Prop K]: it was like they had to pit themselves against the DA [District Attorney's Office].

The city wide decriminalization ballot measure negatively affected the organization's long-standing but delicate collaborative relationships with government entities and non-profits. Patty has felt it difficult to reconcile a harm reduction approach with a labor rights approach. An attempt at labor rights somewhat ironically hurt the harm reduction efforts that the organization had built. The organization has found it difficult since then, Patty reports, to "get away from that legacy." In this way, demanding citizenship can actually harm sex workers who, through a social movement unionism model, have focused on worker empowerment under existing laws and practices.

Pushing for decriminalization, while a motivating ideal, is not something that activists agree upon in method or in practice. Activists have not won demands that would improve worker safety, wellbeing, or support harm reduction, on their own terms. Interestingly, a labor rights perspective has been successfully deployed by sex worker rights groups in other North World countries to alleviate the effects of criminalization (mostly recently, see Canada, New Zealand, and territories in Australia). The United Nations and the World Health Organization have noted that criminalization negatively impacts public health and recommend decriminalization as the best course of action.⁸⁴ Yet the two city-level decriminalization efforts have failed in the U.S., and sex worker rights activists themselves are uncertain about the effectiveness and impact of a direct call for full decriminalization.

For sex worker rights activists in the U.S., a labor rights framework has produced little success, whereas a protectionist frame has produced some successes. Instead, DA member organizations and activists approach decriminalization as a fragmented, localized process. Sometimes activists use a labor rights frame, such as the campaign for the right to carry

condoms, and other times they use a protectionist frame. As sex worker rights activists use the protectionist frame they help win concessions for people no longer in the industry. But for those in the industry, this is how criminalization acts as a form of labor control. The needs of people currently working are left unmet.

DISCUSSION

While decriminalization is held up as a main goal of the movement, and criminalization is considered a violation of citizenship rights, the incentive to focus solely on large scale political strategies wanes in the face of local legal maneuvering, community building, and educational outreach. Desiree Alliance member organizations and activists focus their political advocacy efforts on the criminal justice system, not government labor oversight bodies. In seeking labor rights from state or local governments, sex worker rights activists attempt to challenge the notion of sexual labor as deviant labor.

In general, decriminalizing prostitution and harm reduction efforts are responses to sex worker's lack of citizenship rights. If sexual acts, behaviors, and identities are at the crux of many citizenship claims, as scholars have claimed (Bell and Binnie 2000, 2004; Hubbard 2001; Payne and Davies 2012; Sabsay 2011; Seidman 2001), then outlawing sex work, and increasing penalties to stop sex trafficking, are impediments on sex workers citizenship rights. I argue that state-sanctioned violence against sex workers, and restrictions on their labor and movement, can be understood as issues of sexual citizenship. Thus protectionist frames that focus on criminalizing aspects of sex work are ultimately about limiting sex worker citizenship.

Within social movement unionism, citizenship rights and labor rights are linked. Their political advocacy efforts are focused on governments, rather than employers. Further, I find that protectionist policies remove the likelihood of achieving citizenship, as evidenced by the partial achievements of DA activists' decriminalization efforts. Ideologically, full

decriminalization is ideal. In practice, attempts for full decriminalization have failed, and have damaged harm reduction outreach efforts.

A larger question emerges, then, about the possibility of reconciling a labor rights framework with a protectionist framework. Perhaps with continued international involvement and pressure, activists may be able to challenge anti-trafficking and anti-prostitution laws. As it stands now, the “trafficking victim/prostitute” master status is only partially challenged in a protectionist framework.

As sex workers discuss worker autonomy, social integration, and the role of the legal system, only discussions of violence and coercion have attained political traction. I argue that a protectionist logic of trafficking politics shifts the foci of sex worker political advocacy into the criminal justice arena. This protectionist logic prevents activists from articulating their activity as work. Sex workers are experiencing a form of social control through labor rights violations. Federal and state governments ensure the continued economic and social marginalization of people in the sex industry, especially cisgender and transgender women, poor women, immigrant sex workers, and women of color. It is exactly the intersection of labor, sex, legislation, gender, and class that impedes sex worker rights activists’ attempts to develop strong political advocacy. Anti-trafficking and anti-prostitution efforts keep this particular “shadow economy” in the shadows, and workers without citizenship.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRIMINALIZATION, CITIZENSHIP, AND NEW FORMS OF WORKER ORGANIZING

Look, the anti-trafficking people, they're going to win, they're gonna win, they're gonna win, they're gonna win, they're gonna win, but then eventually, we're going to win! Because this is a narrative of truth. Because we know that we're right, and we know that the human rights of people who are sex working from all those communities are not served by the conservative anti-trafficking agenda. So we will win. But we need these extra pieces, which is staffing, being allies with the different organizations, and we need the immigrant organizations.
-Trish, involved with the Desiree Alliance and with East Coast based sex worker rights organizing

In the U.S., new forms of worker organizing for poor and working class workers have grown as low-wage, contingent labor overtakes traditional long-term, production-based jobs. Few scholars have examined the relationship between citizenship and worker rights for forms of contingent, criminalized worker organizing outside of undocumented immigrant rights efforts. Through my ethnographic study of the Desiree Alliance, I have shown how this particular group of legally and socially marginalized workers organizes. Examining the organizing efforts of “non-traditional” and seemingly “un-organizable” workers clarifies the dynamics of post-industrial worker organizing. Further, studying a group of workers in an underground economy like sex work illuminates the nature of neoliberal labor control.

The Desiree Alliance is a critical example of contemporary forms of worker organizing, particularly for a group of workers rarely studied for their activist efforts. On one hand, the Desiree Alliance reflects key elements of social movement unionism. As the DA’s organizational structure and organizational goals reflect a hybrid of social movement and labor rights characteristics. The organization focuses on worker empowerment, activist development, and, to a lesser but growing extent, political advocacy. The DA cultivates new leaders internally. I

posit that the strength of sex worker rights organizing lies in politicizing sex workers through collective identity and solidarity. Peer-to-peer worker empowerment, leadership development, and activist development are paramount not only to internal identity building and warding off of social stigma, but are part and parcel of social movement unionism maintenance. Because the federal government and local governments have not provided worker protections, workers provide them to each other instead. They train each other, sharing strategies and tips for safer, more lucrative work, building social support networks, sometimes even sharing clients.

On the other hand, there are aspects of the DA that do not fit with the social movement unionism model. What does it mean to organize criminalized workers? What exactly is the Desiree Alliance?

RE-THINKING WORKER RIGHTS

For sociologists who are theorizing new and different forms of worker organizing, looking to low-wage contingent workers provides a fresh perspective on the changing nature of work, inequality, and social control. I question how sociologists conceptualize a wide range of new forms of worker organizing as social movement unionism (SMU). While many worker rights efforts today are couched in demands for both worker rights and citizenship rights, this looks very different based on class, type of labor (blue collar versus white collar, working for a business versus working independently), legality, and worker demographics.

I find that the term “social movement unionism” has not been fully theorized yet to account for the changes in worker organizing today. SMU is quite broad, covering a range of classes. SMU literature has yet to fully explain the relationship between citizenship and worker organizing, and criminalization and worker organizing. “Social movement unionism,” as a concept, is still couched in the union-as-labor-organizing ideal. I appreciate the use of the suffix “-ism” to indicate that social movement unionism is not a union per se, but contains properties

or conditions of a union, it is a process and practice, rather than a thing. I question, at what point does worker organizing fall completely away from union characteristics? Is there such a line? Does it make sense to still use union-inspired terminology in a late capitalist economy where millions of workers work part-time, with no permanent workplace, and no permanent boss? Even the term used by labor scholars and activists, “alternative worker organizing,” is problematic. Contingent work is the norm now. This is not an alternative form of organizing, it is the new norm. And these are not alternative workers, as contingent work becomes a reality for large parts of the U.S. population.

I compared the Desiree Alliance with a particular form of SMU, immigrant worker centers, to show how a group of criminalized laborers engage in a multi-faceted approach to worker organizing. As immigrant workers are shut out of legitimate worker rights claims because of their citizenship status, I argue that sex workers are similarly shut out of the labor rights arena because of their criminal status. I believe that worker organizing for criminalized workers is a qualitatively different experience than organizing other contingent workers.

SOCIOLOGICAL RELEVANCE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In this section, I develop three areas that are not fully addressed in the social movement unionism literature, and discuss the related policy implications for sex worker rights organizing. As a form of organizing for gendered and sexualized workers, sex worker rights efforts can illuminate shadowed corners of low-wage contingent worker organizing. Overall, my research has strong ethical and political implications for anti-trafficking advocacy and policy, and the role of community support among low-wage, contingent workers.

First, I argue that criminalizing labor is a contemporary form of labor control. It is obvious that criminalization shapes the organizational model, goals, and political advocacy of sex worker rights organizations. One major consequence of criminalizing sexual labor is that

worker rights efforts are relegated to the criminal justice arena. Second, I argue that the overarching logic of trafficking politics informs the development of a counter-ideology, which shapes collective identity, educational outreach, and political advocacy efforts of sex workers. Third, I argue that sex worker's political advocacy efforts are embedded in changing meanings around sexual citizenship.

Impact of Criminalization on Worker Organizing

Sexual laborers are subject to repressive practices in the form of policies, social control, and stigma that create a dichotomy between the sex worker and non-sex worker, between the victim (of sex trafficking) and the deviant criminal (prostitute). State oppression in the form of arrest, conviction, and police brutality continue to be key mobilizing grievances for sex worker rights activists. The structure of sex worker rights organizing has responded to structural changes in policy and regulation as a result of the federal *Trafficking Victims Protection Act*. In addition to being an anti-prostitution, anti-immigrant neoliberal apparatus, as scholars have already concluded (Agustín 2007; Bernstein 2010, 2012; Chapkis 2003; Doezema 2000, 2002, 2010; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik 2011; Weitzer 2007), I argue that the TVPA is as also a form of labor control, and therefore represses worker organizing.

First, sex workers status as outlaws, plus the unique abolitionist anti-trafficking ideology embedded in U.S. politics, forces workers to argue for labor rights through the criminal justice system. This is why a social movement unionism model, rather than a traditional union, is more effective in resisting and challenging the effects of criminalization. In an underground economy, peer-driven worker support and advocacy is a form of worker organizing.

Second, labor control is one new face of the social control of deviance. Anti-trafficking and anti-prostitution laws are a form of labor control through the regulation of sexual deviance. It is clear that sex worker rights advocates are at the nexus of social norms that dictate

appropriate economic sexual behavior, especially as it is gendered, classed, and racialized. As governments refuse to engage in worker health and safety, it becomes clear that a neoliberal desire to control women's bodies trumps the realities around public health, equality, and protection. For example, crimes committed against sex workers—sexual assaults, theft, stalking—often are not reported due to fear of arrest or simply not being believed.

Overall, then, my findings problematize the effects of mainstream trafficking politics. Trafficking is the dominant framework through which people understand sex work today. But the trafficking framework of protection, prosecution, and prevention rests on the social construction of a perfect victim (Doezema 2002, O'Connell Davidson 2006, Weitzer 2007). Further, the systematic marginalization of sexual labor is built on a socio-legal construction of victimization and protection, one that is attuned more toward the interests of the legal system and the non-profit industrial complex than to worker rights (Musto 2010).

This protectionist logic supersedes the ability of sex worker rights activists to articulate their sexual labor as a complicated, meaning-creating activity. This logic supports the strategic expansion of the non-profit industrial complex in the U.S. (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2006, 2009). This aligns with what sex work scholar Elizabeth Bernstein (2010) refers to as militarized humanism and carceral feminism. Together, as humanitarian efforts rely on military intervention and feminists pursue criminalization as the answer to women's experiences of violence, a negative sexual rights framework dominates the political landscape. To wit, the criminalization of sex work has increased and the non-profitization of sex trafficking assistance has grown under the TVPA (Agustín 2007, Bernstein 2010). Hence anti-trafficking efforts keep this particular underground economy in the shadows, and workers without protection from violence at the hand of clients and the state.

In sum, U.S. sex worker rights efforts have not had as much success as organizations have in other countries. After decades of legal and activist efforts, it remains difficult for U.S. sex workers to participate in the civil sphere because of shifting categorizations of them as deviants, criminals, and victims. The real need for sex worker safety has increasingly been translated into a demand for incarceration and social services.

The Development of a Counter-Ideology

This case study of the Desiree Alliance network shows how sex worker rights activists face unique challenges to organizing efforts as they negotiate a state-created victim identity, an identity that has been shaped by over ten years of TVPA influence. The socio-legal construction of the “prostitute” is changing in part because of anti-trafficking ideology. Sex workers within the Desiree Alliance form a counter-ideology in response to criminalization. They attempt to de-conflate sex work and sex trafficking, and in so doing, attempt to re-frame the meaning of victimization.

The nation-state and state governments situate sex work as a social problem rather than labor, opting to criminalize rather than regulate labor. I have shown how the political-social production of the “sex trafficking victim” indeed includes and impacts sex workers. This identity conflates sex workers as criminals and victims, a confusion that limits their ability to speak for themselves, impacting their ability to argue for labor rights or engage in anti-trafficking advocacy. A protectionist logic of trafficking politics impacts sex workers political participation and shapes peer-to-peer worker support. Sex worker rights activists engage in both internal community building and identity-making strategies in response to social stigma and oppression.

In a late capitalist era of flexible heterosexuality, a protectionist politics defines who deserves protection. As sex work and trafficking continue to be conflated under the law, sex workers are constructed as victims in need of saving, and sex work itself is constructed as

undesirable at best, and violent at worst. This makes sense following neoliberal state politics that individualizes the worker—the worker becomes an all-encompassing identity, a master-status. This is very different from regulating work itself as an action or activity. Work becomes an identity. This is true across a range of contemporary workers, especially those in underground economies like undocumented immigrants.

Further, the popular belief that the majority of sex workers are women, ignoring the numbers of men and transgender women who engage in sex work, helps maintain a “prostitution mythology” (Weitzer 2010). This mythology is gendered, premised on the idea that women and children are victims of sexual labor. In so doing, a gendered mythology shrouds the fact that sex workers are indeed arguing for labor rights *in* sexual labor, not protection *from* the sex industry. Arguing for the protection of women and girls *from* sexual labor draws a clear line between acceptable behavior as a sexual citizenry, and deviant sexual behavior as consensual sex workers. Sex workers develop a counter-ideology by participating in worker empowerment and activist development projects—focusing on being *in* the industry, and on protection from structural oppression.

Additionally, using a human rights framework in their activist efforts does not resonate with the federal government here as it has with other countries, like New Zealand. The particular gender and sexual politics in the U.S. are steeped in a conservative backlash to perceived civil rights gains (immigrant rights, diversity in the White House and the Supreme Court) and a sense of American exceptionalism. The sex workers’ rights movement is at the crux of sexual politics in the United States: a fear over women’s control over their own sexuality and bodies, an invisibility of men and transgender people in sex work, the fear of public displays of sex, and the moral disapproval of commodifying sex itself.

Citizenship: Decriminalizing Sex Work and Sexual Rights

Citizenship studies have theorized the relationship between law and work, and what this means for women, immigrants, or other groups lacking full citizenship (Bosniak 2002; Glenn 2002; Lister 2003). Studies find that understanding the shape and meaning of civic inclusion and exclusion, and rights and participation today, is crucial to theorizing the relationship between state power and labor. If citizenship is conceptualized as the material experience and discursive construction of belonging under the law, then civil inclusion is what sex workers are working toward. Many low-wage contingent workers in a global economy must fight for citizenship rights at the same time as they fight for the right to work, which effectively limits arguments for the right to work to the criminal justice system. For contingent, criminalized laborers, the erosion and re-structuring of worker power means targeting governments, not just employers.

Sex workers are one of the least protected and most prosecuted groups of people in the country. Anti-trafficking ideology, institutionalized in the TVPA and subsequent state policies and outreach, has indeed dampened sex worker's labor organizing efforts. Under the pretext of protection, state and federal governments have done little to address issues of labor violations or health and safety of sex workers. Hence state and local governments are one of the main targets of sex worker rights political advocacy efforts. Sex workers target both public opinion and policy at the state and local levels. Yet their political advocacy is often road-blocked by the TVPA. Sex workers demand resolution to the disparities caused by the neoliberal relationship between citizenship and work. This is why sex workers push for decriminalization. If criminalization is a violation of civil rights, then decriminalization—the removal of all criminal policies—is a path to restoration of citizenship status.

The state's neoliberal approach to labor and trafficking has removed responsibility from both employers *and* the state, placing it on the backs of the workers. The federal government has left it to the states to regulate prostitution, defaulting obligations to citizenship. Said

another way, the nation-state, has defaulted on any labor responsibilities for a large segment of sex workers.

The federal and state governments have a role in labor responsibilities: ensuring wage payment, setting worker safety standards, and so on. Alternative forms of worker organizing have arisen to target the state and to fill the void through empowerment and support. In a sense, non-traditional worker organizing efforts have stepped in where the state has left off. Sex workers rights organizations provide worker skill building, legal aid, know your rights, and leadership trainings, media trainings, and other forms of training to help develop workers. Friendships, skill sharing, and business assistance are indicative of both internal identity building efforts and alternative forms of labor support. In an economy marked by informal, part-time, and criminalized labor, this may be what workplace camaraderie and identity look like.

ACTIVIST RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving forward, the test now is whether sex workers can pinpoint any leverage they have as workers. Then, they can do as immigrant worker centers have done and “develop a consciousness about that leverage within their organizations, and implement strategies that take full advantage of it” (Fine 2005:1). Part of this will depend on an assessment of political strategies. If legal strategies are only successful in a protectionist framework that aligns with trafficking politics, what legal tactics are available to ensure the safety of sex workers currently working? It will be interesting to see how and in what ways sex workers political participation develops with continued trainings and workshops at the DA conference and through DA member organizations.

On the other hand, it is clear that the feminist sex wars never went away, they just re-focused from pornography to sex trafficking. As sex worker rights activists continue to look for ways to engage in anti-sex trafficking efforts, it is clear that the tactic of joining anti-trafficking

coalitions, publishing their own anti-trafficking materials, and campaigning against anti-sex-trafficking bills, has had very little influence so far on trafficking politics. Searching for alternative points of unification around poverty, violence, and other issues that resonate with a protectionist politics may be a way to gain voice in mainstream conversations.

FUTURE RESEARCH

If I had more funding and time for this research project, I would have travelled to observe the activities of member organizations and done interviews with the politicized core members of those organizations. Widening my ethnographic focus in this way would have helped me flesh out the organizational model of the DA, and helped me map the ways that a loose network of independent actors functions. Interviewing more leaders and core activists of member organizations would also provide more in-depth understanding of the ways in which community building occurs. It would have helped me overcome the skewed racial and class dynamics of my interviewees, who had a certain amount of class privilege with a consistent phone number and e-mail access. I believe that interviewing more people, beyond leaders, would also support the centrality of worker development for low-wage, contingent workers.

If I had a larger pool of interviewees, I could also include more questions and information about those who continue to work illegally while also engaging in activism, and assign all the interviewees a pseudonym. Because of the focus on activism in this project, many interviewees asked I use their known names (sometimes their given names, other times a retired work name). For ethical reasons, I did not include much information about actual criminalized activities because I have so few interviewees. I used some interviewees' real names, which left a small number of interviewees whom I did not want to "other" or inadvertently provide clues to their identity.

In the future, I hope to engage in research with key member organizations on the East Coast, such as the Best Practices Policy Project, HIPS (Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive), SWOP-NYC, and the Urban Justice Center's Sex Worker Project and related organizations like the Red Umbrella Project. Additional research into the relationships between policymakers, law enforcement, anti-trafficking organizations and coalitions, and sex worker rights activists would also provide new insights into the social location of sex worker rights activists. This may elucidate points of unification and the process of gaining allied organizations. Finally, future research into the global network of sex worker rights organizing may help us understand how U.S. policy impacts sex worker organizing efforts in other countries. This would also illuminate the transnational aspects of sex worker community building efforts. In general, more research is needed to map the complex relationships between the protectionist logic of trafficking politics, citizenship, and nontraditional labor organizing for a range of workers in underground economies.

CONCLUSION

My study of U.S. sex worker rights organizing is one part of the larger sociological imperative to map the changing dynamics of worker organizing in light of the changing nature of labor in a post-industrial, late capitalist society. I have shown how a particular group of gendered and sexualized workers respond to and shape their organizing efforts around criminalization and stigma. In general, more research is needed into the diversity of low-wage contingent workers and how they organize. Who are the workers? What are their demands? How do they organize—does a social movement unionism model fit or not? What other ways are there to discuss the complexities of worker organizing in the post-industrial economy?

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

OPENING QUESTIONS

How do you refer to yourself when people ask you what you do with the sex worker rights movement?

Do you identify as a sex worker? *If no* → Sex worker ally?

How long have you been a sex worker / sex worker ally (*use their phrasing*)?

ACTIVIST ACTIVITIES

Tell me about your involvement in the DA. What drew you to being active? When did you get involved with DA/how long have you been involved?

What sort of everyday activities do you do to help with the DA?

Have you helped with conference? Other stuff?

What do you think are the goals of the DA?

Do you think these _____ goals have been achieved? *If no* → Why not? Are they achievable?

What's the hardest thing you've faced as an activist? The easiest?

What's worked within the movement?

What hasn't worked for the movement?

Do you think things important to the movement get overlooked by media or researchers, but are important to the movement? Can you give me examples?

What do you think you have gotten out of being involved with Desiree Alliance?

Do you think the DA leaves out anyone, makes it uncomfortable for someone to be involved?

Does it matter who is in charge of the DA? How? Why/why not?

How would you personally benefit from the goals and societal changes of the sex worker rights movement?

Indirectly, as a member of society (does changing prost beliefs and laws change society? If so, how?) Directly, to you as a worker?

If goals achieved, would you continue to be an activist? Why?

Do you think the DA has affected public policy? Public perception? Media coverage?

Do you write or blog about sex work? In what capacities? (*op-eds, blogs, about sex work as business, about sex worker rights, fiction, etc.*)

-audience? (other sex workers? Policy makers? General audience?)
How does that support your beliefs as an activist?

Do you create art about sex work, like for the annual Sex Workers' Art Show? *If yes* → How does that support your beliefs as an activist?

Do you talk to the media to advocate for sex workers? *If yes* → in what capacity? How did it go?
If no → Why not?

What do you think about DA as an umbrella organization that hosts the annual conference?

Describe your relationship to other folks in the DA, friends? Associates? Family?

Do you feel like you've gotten business support or built your business skills through the DA?
Legal advice or support?

What role, if any, do you think research plays in advocating the goals of the sex worker rights movement?

LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE

Are there people within the DA who do the DA fulltime? What does that entail?

Do they get paid for it?

How does the DA manage membership?

How did the DA start? How do they recruit new members?

OTHER ADVOCACY, INTERSECTING ISSUES

Are you part of another sex worker right org other than DA? (if so, which? Where you involved with them before DA? How are you active in each?)

Where you part of another activist org, like one for worker's rights, women's rights, or LGBTQ rights? (if so, do they work with DA? What do you bring to DA as a ____ activist?)

What do you do to advocate for other causes/what do you do with this other organization?

Have you mimicked any of those strategies from other causes/organizations in the DA? Have they have brought results?

Which other organizations or movements inspire you?

Has the DA attempted to connect with other pressure groups and organizations outside of sex work? Do you think that's a good idea? If so, which? And how? What does that relationship look like now? Were there any goals that were reached because of this collaboration?

Does your family know that you're an advocate/activist? Do your friends? Why did you decide to come out to them about your advocacy work?

- How has being part of an activist movement helped your business? (or if a researcher ally → your research?) (Since DA conference has a business stream, helpful BUSINESS STRATEGIES?: advertising, rate setting, client contact, risk management and bad client lists. Market to a certain type of client?)

OPPOSITIONAL FRAMES

What do you think about sex trafficking in the U.S.?

What do you think of people who say that all sex workers are trafficked?

What do you think about other activists who argue that prostitution is a social problem, a form of violence against women? That prostitution is sexual abuse of women? Can you describe and reflect on their activist tactics, their goals, as you see them?

LAW

Can achieve legal change, why or why not? How do you think legal change would make your life as a sex worker different?

Have you ever required legal assistance, like from a lawyer or court advocate?
(If yes) → For what? Has it been resolved? How did you find that person?

What experiences have you had with law enforcement? (*prompt with on the job*)
(ask, when? Where? So you have an arrest record?)

Did your experiences with the police affect how you do business?
(If yes) → In what ways?
(If no) → Why not?

Are you familiar with the laws around (*their particular form of sex work*)?
In general, what are your thoughts on the regulation of (*their particular form of sex work*)?

WORK

Tell me about your work. Do you work independently?
Who helps you with your work (booker, appt setter, etc)?

Have you ever worked in a collective or group with other sex workers?

Would you call yourself an entrepreneur? Why or why not?

What does job security mean to you?

If it is not clear yet:

-Is the type of sex work you engage in legal or illegal, or both?

-Do you ever think about doing (*the opposite legal status*) of sex work?

-How often do you work? (*depending on how often, ask* → What is a typical *week/month/year* like for you? (*prompt with: balancing sex work with another job, or with family responsibilities?*))

NON-ADULT ORIENTED JOBS

-Do you have another job(s)?

(if yes) → -Doing what?

-Do you plan on continuing to do sex work *and* work here?

(if no) → Do you want to have a “straight” job? Why or why not?

How do you balance working and activism? Is it difficult?

DEMOGRAPHICS

What is your ethnic or racial identity?

I am going to read a range of ages, please stop me and tell me which one applies to you:

Are you:

18 to 22 years of age?

23 to 27 years of age?

28 to 32 years of age?

33 to 37 years of age?

38 to 42 years of age?

43 to 47 years of age?

48 to 52 years of age?

53 to 57 years of age?

58 to 62 years of age?

63 to 67 years of age?

Older than 67 years old?

Where are you from?

How long have you lived there?

Are you a U.S. citizen?

(If yes) → What state where you born in?

(If not) → What country(ies) are you a citizen of?

Why did you come to the U.S.? How long ago did you come to the U.S.?

Do you want to become a U.S. citizen?

(If yes) → Have you begun the application process? Why/Why not?
(If no) → Why not?

What is your gender identity?

(If transgender) → How long have you identified as (the gender they indicated)?

How do you identify your sexuality?

CLOSING QUESTIONS

Is there anything you would like to tell me that you think is important, that I have not asked?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for talking with me! I may contact you in the future for a follow-up interview, if you are agreeable. Finally, if you have any recommendations for other people who might like to be interviewed, please let me know.

APPENDIX B ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY INVOLVEMENT

Types of advocacy that sex workers engage in (current and former)	
Sex worker rights advocacy	Other activist efforts (note that many of these are intersectional, I do not mean to indicate that they are mutually exclusive by listing them.)
<p>--Desiree Alliance: Interviewees had attended at least one Desiree Alliance conference, some had attended four</p> <p>--Many had assisted with one of the five tracks: the Business Development Track, the Art and Media Track, or helped coordinate volunteers for DA, or sat on the strategic committee for the DA</p> <p>--Involved with local or national support organizations like the Sex Worker Outreach Project</p> <p>--Media trainings and media outreach for sex workers</p> <p>--Leadership development for sex workers at the DA and other organizations</p> <p>--Legal support for sex workers</p> <p>--Sex workers engaging in artistic efforts like the Sex Workers Art Show</p>	<p>--Activism through art</p> <p>--Animal rights</p> <p>--Anti-poverty efforts</p> <p>--Anti-racism efforts</p> <p>--Anti-trafficking efforts (state-wide and local)</p> <p>--Domestic violence crisis assistance</p> <p>--Educational rights including secondary education</p> <p>--Gender rights, feminist activist, riot grrl</p> <p>--General sexuality rights, sex-ecology and the ecosexual movement</p> <p>--Health: mental health rights, needle exchange, pro-choice (local and global), gay men’s health, HIV counseling, cancer issues anti-war, anti-death penalty</p> <p>--Injection drug user rights</p> <p>--LGBT rights, queer rights, transgender people’s rights</p> <p>--Prison and felon rights, rights for pregnant women in prison</p>

APPENDIX C ENDNOTES

¹ This is taken from the Desiree Alliance 2010 conference schedule, which is publicly available at <http://www.desireealliance.org/conference/schedule10.htm>

² “Denied Help!: How Youth in the Sex Trade and Street Economy are Turned Away from Systems Meant to Help Us & What We are Doing to Fight Back” *Bad Encounter Line Participatory Action Research Project, Young Women’s Empowerment Project*, Chicago, Illinois, <http://ywepchicago.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/bad-encounter-line-report-2012.pdf>, also see policy analysis from the Best Practices Policy Project on D.C.’s “prostitution free zones,” <http://www.bestpracticespolicy.org/tag/pfzs/>

³ I began working with the Desiree Alliance in early 2006, leading up to the first conference that July. I have worked with them whenever the conference is in Las Vegas (2006, 2010, 2013), and I have been active with local level sex worker rights work since 2006. My continued involvement with sex worker rights efforts informed my interest in this topic. It has also fostered a deep sense of the key strategies and development of the DA, beyond the IRB approved 2010-2012 research. However, I do not systematically include my observations of the 2006 conference.

⁴ <http://www.scarletalliance.org.au/who/> and http://www.scarletalliance.org.au/library/subact_2011/

⁵ And through COYOTE’s involvement in international sex workers’ rights, the movement spread from North America to the rest of the world (Carol Leigh has had a global influence).

⁶ <http://www.normajeanalmodovar.com/mybio.html> She authored a book, *From Cop to Call Girl* (Avon Books, 1994). She spent three years in prison on prostitution related charges. Norma Jean is a well-known sex worker rights activist in the movement.

⁷ “Robyn Few: SWOP beginnings,” by P.J. Starr. <http://vimeo.com/37137526>. Also see <http://robynfew.com/index.html> for a collection of stories and photos organized by friends after Robyn fell ill with cancer.

⁸ “Farewell to a Visionary Leader,” Best Practices Policy Project, September 14, 2012, <http://www.bestpracticespolicy.org/2012/09/14/farewell-to-a-visionary-leader/#more-26>

⁹ “Hookers unite! San Francisco sex workers are on a mission to decriminalize prostitution here and across the country,” SF Guardian, by Ann Harrison, on Carol Leigh’s Prostitution Education Network website, http://www.sfbg.com/38/18/cover_hookers.html

¹⁰ Scholars discuss cultural ambivalences around sexuality that have fostered strip-aerobics at the gym and the success of cultural portrayals of sex work and non-normative sexuality like BDSM (e.g., *Fifty Shades of Grey* phenomenon) while ostracizing and oppressing the actual people involved in these activities.

¹¹ <http://www.ontariocourts.ca/decisions/2012/2012ONCA0186.pdf>

¹² The only exception is Nevada’s legal brothel industry, see Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck 2010.

¹³ Luker, “Sex, Social Hygiene, and the State: The Double-Edged Sword of Social Reform”, Gilfoyle, “Prostitutes in History: Form Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity,” 134.

¹⁴ Such precedents have been set by several court cases: *Roth v. United States* (1957) whereby the US Supreme Court established a “community standards,” *California v. La Rue* (1972) that address nudity and alcohol in a commercial establishment, and the 1991 US Supreme Court case *Barnes v. Glen Theatre, Inc.* where the court decided that governments may regulate “morality” and that “nudity itself is not expressive conduct” under the First Amendment. Yet in 2000, in *Erie, PA v. Pap’s A.M.* (2000), the Supreme Court defined nude dancing in strip clubs as a form of expression, but a form of expression that may lead to negative secondary effects (Linz et al. 2000, 2004), see Linz, Daniel, Eva Blumenthal, Edward Donnerstein, Dale Kunkel, Bradley J. Shafer, and Allen Lichtenstein (2000) ‘Testing Legal Assumptions Regarding the Effects of Dancer Nudity and Proximity to Patron on Erotic Expression’, *Law and Human Behavior* 24: 507-533, and Linz, Daniel, Kenneth C. Land, Jay R. Williams, Michael E. Ezell, and Bryant Paul (2004) ‘An Examination of the Assumption that Adult businesses are Associated with Crime in Surrounding Areas: A Secondary Effects Study in Charlotte, North Carolina’, *Law and Society Review* 38(1): 69-104.

¹⁵ This report, “Immigration Enforcement Actions 2008,” is the most current report from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Immigration Statistics. http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/enforcement_ar_08.pdf

¹⁶ Scholars argue that the current political conceptions of “consent” in United Nations anti-trafficking regulations are “inadequate to serve as the basis for political strategies to protect the rights of sex workers and migrants,” so that even the Human Rights Caucus reproduces the very issues its fighting against by creating this either/or paradigm as sex worker/trafficked prostitute, reifying the South World prostitute as the Other by which to measure “real” sex work (Doezema 2002:20). Changes in the construction of the law do not automatically create different outcomes. While the 2000 U.N. Trafficking Protocol: “makes an implicit

distinction between ‘coerced’ and ‘non-coerced’ migration for prostitution, it offers very little in terms of human rights protections for trafficking victims, and nothing at all for (migrant) sex workers who were not coerced. If the Protocol leaves the way free for governments to treat sex work as labor, it also in no way prevents governments from persecuting, criminalizing, and denying equal protection of the law to sex workers in the name of fighting trafficking” (Doezema 2002:24).

¹⁷ See the gender neutral pronoun chart, <http://forge-forward.org/2010/02/gender-neutral-pronouns/>

¹⁸ See *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, Routledge, 2006, and *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, Julia Serano, Seal Press, 2007.

¹⁹ This is both an academic and an activist debate that garners a bit of media attention, see Carol Liegh’s treatise “The Strange Relationship Between Feminism and Sex Work”,

http://www.alternet.org/story/98645/the_strange_relationship_between_feminism_and_sex_work

²⁰ In 2000, economists surmised, “service industries now employ three quarters of the workforce, with many workers trapped in low-wage, dead-end jobs.” Herzenberg, Alic, and Wial 2000

²¹ “Shadow economies all around the world: Model-based estimates,” *Vox*, Ceyhun Elgin, Oguz Oztunali, <http://www.voxeu.org/article/shadow-economies-around-world-model-based-estimates>

²² Also see “Deregulation of the Labor Market,” <http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/cgi-bin/fact17.php> and Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson. Union Membership and Coverage Database from the CPS.

<http://www.unionstats.com>;

http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/labor_force_employment_earnings/compensation_wages_and_earnings.html

²³ Boudin and Scholtz (2010) argue that worker centers are “a necessary prerequisite for all most labor organizing within the low-wage immigrant workforce” (92).

²⁴ In scholarship, a particular sub-field of critical education research and critical race theorists emphasize paths to social justice, drawing on Paulo Freire’s (1994) foundational work on overcoming dehumanization, teaching and learning consciousness as a process (Berta-Avila, Revilla, and Figueroa 2011; see also critical race theorists on multidimensional consciousness).

²⁵ National Labor Relations Act, <http://www.nlr.gov/national-labor-relations-act>

²⁶ “Overview,” ICE, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, <http://www.ice.gov/about/overview/>

²⁷ This economy is considered underground because the workers are often hired temporarily by a person or even a company, paid under the table; they are often undocumented immigrants who cannot find other forms of work due to their citizenship status.

²⁸ See attached addendum.

²⁹ Other sexual deviance liberation movements have had numerous successes, like gay rights. Sodomy laws were overturned in the U.S. in 2003 (*Lawrence v. Texas* overturned *Bowers v. Hardwick*, effectively decriminalizing sex between people of the same gender), and the country is experiencing a slow wave of relationship rights (marriage, civil unions, domestic partnerships).

³⁰ Studies have singled out the U.S. as one of the most penal countries in the world, with a racist and classist criminal justice system, resulting in, for example, large numbers of black male youth and women of color in prison, serving long sentences for non-violent crimes like drug possession, see Evans, Linda and Eve Goldberg. 2009. *The Prison-Industrial Complex & the Global Economy*. Oakland, CA: PM Press and Angela Davis. 2003. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Seven Stories Press.

³¹ Also see “A Good Year for Red Umbrellas: Advances in Sex Workers Rights in 2012,”

<http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/article/2013/01/13/good-year-red-umbrellas-advances-in-sex-workers-rights-in-2012>

³² The U.S. TVPA is based on United Nations anti-trafficking protocol. Scholars argue that the current political conceptions of “consent” in United Nations anti-trafficking regulations are “inadequate to serve as the basis for political strategies to protect the rights of sex workers and migrants,” so that even the Human Rights Caucus reproduces the very issues its fighting against by creating this either/or paradigm as sex worker/trafficked prostitute, reifying the South World prostitute as the Other by which to measure “real” sex work (Doezema 2002:20). Changes in the construction of the law do not automatically create different outcomes. While the 2000 U.N. Trafficking Protocol “makes an implicit distinction between ‘coerced’ and ‘non-coerced’ migration for prostitution, it offers very little in terms of human rights protections for trafficking victims, and nothing at all for (migrant) sex workers who were not coerced. If the Protocol leaves the way free for governments to treat sex work as labor, it also in no way prevents governments from persecuting, criminalizing, and denying equal protection of the law to sex workers in the name of fighting trafficking” (Doezema 2002:24).

³³ The evolution of anti-trafficking laws to include domestic trafficking is an interesting one as law enforcement imbue other borders (state, county) with the ability to declare “trafficked.” The TVPA and other responses to trafficking originally framed trafficking as a unique problem to globalization—a new globalized world, so now we have globalized slavery. But the focus via media and police efforts anecdotally appears to have turned to “domestic trafficking” of children and women into “sexual slavery.” Concerns about the trafficking of South World women into the U.S. are now overshadowed by concerns of the trafficking of U.S. citizens across state or county lines.

³⁴ The evolution of anti-trafficking laws to include domestic trafficking is an interesting one—as law enforcement imbue other borders (state, county) with the ability to declare “trafficked.” The TVPA and other responses to trafficking originally framed trafficking as a unique problem to globalization—a new globalized world, so now we have globalized slavery.

³⁵ On one hand, it is difficult to gain trust unless one comes out as a sex worker. There are many academics in the movement who are or were sex workers; I have observed negative comments toward them, forcing them to come out to gain acceptance or, even if they are out, swipes at the work that they do as disconnected from activist goals. This exclusion, or belief of exclusion, has shaped my quietness on email list serves, and my ability to follow up for interviews with people who indicated they would like to be interviewed. “How many times should I contact someone who puts off the interview to another day? Is it really that they are busy or are they blowing me off?” These are some of the things I think through as I attempt to be an ally, not exercise privilege, or come off as overbearing or annoying.

³⁶ I am not a sex worker; therefore I am not part of the oppressed group that is articulating their needs and desires economically, civilly, socially, and legally. I will not benefit directly from the achievement of their goals, as sex workers (ideally) would. I am the member of privileged groups—categories that receive masked, unearned privileges in society which work to maintain inequality. I am a white, cisgender woman with education privilege; I am an academic who benefits from the research I undertake with publications, which hopefully lead to jobs and prestige, etc., while those I research may not benefit directly from the research.

³⁷ There was discord among members as to how to best do this: some wanted full inclusion, others wanted only “proper” artists to lead the protest. The local ACLU was contacted to be on-hand in case of police intervention (sidewalks on the Strip are often contested public space), and they agreed.

³⁸ I have not marked who is using a pseudonym and who is not. For some, the name used is a known name among activists, but is not their real name—a pseudonym in the truest sense of the word, but it could also be considered a nickname that some of had for many years. For this reason, it does not make sense then to mark which are “real” and which are “fake” names. And this also acts as to not out those with completely new pseudonyms that I created for them, marking their words as potentially “other.”

³⁹ Broadly, I use “postmodern” as an adjective to describe the type of feminism enacted. Rosenau (1992) recognizes the inherent contradictions of a postmodern feminism where “embracing a relativist form of post-modern philosophy and combining it with a very real commitment to challenge an objective reality” is seemingly irreconcilable (115). Postmodern feminists are most like “affirmative postmodernists” in that neither perspective radically rejects reason altogether (Rosenau 1992:130). Postmodern feminists critique identity politics and offer new praxis perspectives. Rosenau, Pauline Marie. 1992. *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

⁴⁰ Weitzer (2007) refers to the need for “counter-evidence” to counter anti-prostitution research. Counter-stories are largely found in social justice, educational research addressing the issues of students of color. See Tara Yosso, *Critical Race Counterstories Along the Chicana/o Educational Pipeline*, New York, Routledge, 2006 and also Covarrubias, A. and Anita Tijerina Revilla’s 2003 article, “Agencies of Transformational Resistance,” *Florida Law Review*, Vol 55, 459-477.

⁴¹ In this sense, radical feminist assessments of prostitution can be viewed as violations of feminist methodological principles that argue that deception or withholding information actually reproduces inequality. For example, feminist methodologies rarely employ deceptive data collection practices (Fine 1993, Olesen 1994 & 2005; also see Rollins (1985) study where she posed as a domestic worker to learn how white women employers treated domestic workers) or studying the native (Minh ha 1989, Anzaldúa 1987). Such practices are viewed as exercises of academic (and often white and heterosexual) power and privilege. Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books. Fine, Gary Alan. 1993. “Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 22: 267-294. Olesen, Virginia. 1994. “Feminisms and Models of Qualitative Research.” *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Eds. Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications. Olesen, Virginia. 2005. “Early Millennial Feminist Qualitative Research.” *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Eds. Norman K.

Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications. Rollins, Judith. 1985. *Between Women: Domestic and Their Employers*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

⁴² The activist struggle for rights is often intertwined with overcoming stereotypes. These are gender based stereotypes, as interviewees note people's surprise at men and transgender people's involvement in the movement. Several shared people's reactions to their activist work: "you're so well spoken" (read: for a sex worker).

⁴³ For a critique of Farley, see Brents <http://deepthroated.wordpress.com/2007/09/17/review-of-prostitution-and-trafficking-in-nevada-making-the-connections/> "Review of Prostitution and Trafficking in Nevada, Making the Connections, September 17, 2007, Barbara Brents. In an analysis of Melissa Farley's (2007) self-published book on the Nevada legal brothels, sociologist Barb Brents concluded Farley could not have meant it to be academic in nature: "There is no systematic explanation of research methods, a rather unclear set of research questions, and it is difficult to generalize from the data presented here to the findings." Brents explains that Farley's tendency to "discount comments" and "rely on secondary sources" taken out of context from their original meaning is not methodological sound. Additionally, the book was published by Farley's Prostitution Education & Research non-profit organization (Farley 2007:vi), not a peer reviewed source.

⁴⁴ See the revised policy in 2008 to differentiate between prostitution, commercial sex work, and trafficking: "For the sake of this policy, NASW recognizes a difference between prostitution which is involuntary, and commercial sex work which is voluntary. Prostitution is defined as involuntary or forced sexual activity in exchange for remuneration. Commercial Sex work is a term coined within the past two decades that is inclusive of many activities in which resources are voluntarily exchanged for sexual stimulation, gratification, or other sex acts (World Health Organization, 1994). Trafficking is another term often used interchangeably with prostitution, although trafficking is much broader than sexual trafficking and is defined by the United Nations as the illegal or illicit

movement of people through force or coercion (2000)" p. 1-2, *Prostituted People, Commercial Sex Workers & Social Work Practice*, National Association of Social Workers, <http://www.socialworkers.org/da/da2008/finalvoting/documents/Prostituted%20People%20%202nd%20round%20-%20Clean.pdf>

⁴⁵ See "Forever Priceless" and "Second Chance" at <http://www.prostitutionconference.com/>

⁴⁶ From SEE's website, <http://www.saveourplanet.org/WhatIsFiscalSponsor.html> "Fiscal sponsorship is a formal arrangement in which a 501(c)(3) public charity sponsors a project that may lack exempt status. Fiscal sponsorship refers to the practice of non-profit organizations offering their legal and tax-exempt status to groups engaged in activities related to the organization's missions."

⁴⁷ "About SEE," Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs, <http://www.saveourplanet.org/aboutus.html>

⁴⁸ I reference the Desiree Alliance 2010 program for titles and descriptions of workshops, panels, and keynotes. The schedule is publicly available, but the descriptions are not in order to protect the identity of presenters. <http://www.desireealliance.org/conference/schedule10.htm>

⁴⁹ Although Catherine feels that her involvement in the movement has not helped her business, which was already well-established, she feels that her business has helped the movement—several of her clients donated money to Desiree Alliance, for example.

⁵⁰ For one example outside of the Desiree Alliance conference, see member organization BPPP's efforts: <http://www.bestpracticespolicy.org/capacity.html>

⁵¹ Counter-stories are largely found in social justice, educational research addressing the issues of students of color. See Tara Yosso, *Critical Race Counterstories Along the Chicana/o Educational Pipeline*, New York, Routledge, 2006 and also Covarrubias, A. and Anita Tijerina Revilla's 2003 article, "Agencies of Transformational Resistance," *Florida Law Review*, Vol 55, 459-477.

⁵² The activist struggle for rights is often intertwined with overcoming stereotypes. These are gender based stereotypes, as interviewees note people's surprise at men and transgender people's involvement in the movement. Several shared people's reactions to their activist work: "you're so well spoken" (read: for a sex worker).

⁵³ See <http://www.laurenmcubbin.com/> for more examples of sex worker rights-oriented art by McCubbin.

⁵⁴ And tension as well. Professional or accomplished sex worker artists and authors worry about the messaging that comes from amateur artists and "bad art."

⁵⁵ Survey can be found here, pre-test phase, along with details of the study: <http://adultindustrytruth.com/>

⁵⁶ "Using Human Rights to Hold the US Accountable for its Anti-Sex Trafficking Agenda: The Universal Periodic Review and new directions for US policy," http://www.antitraffickingreview.org/images/documents/issue1/TheReview_article5.pdf

⁵⁷ See <http://ywepchicago.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/bad-encounter-line-report-2012.pdf>

- ⁵⁸ Sex Workers WANT to Stop Trafficking, last accessed February 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ct5K4-Y4AA>
- ⁵⁹ Member organizations of the Desiree Alliance also collaborate with other non-sex worker organizations, like local health clinics, trans organizations, and LGBTQ organizations. For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on attempts to collaborate with anti-trafficking organizations.
- ⁶⁰ <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/laws/61106.htm> “TITLE II--COMBATTING DOMESTIC TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, SEC. 201. PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS.”
- ⁶¹ “Fact Sheet on State Anti-Trafficking Laws from US PACT [Policy Advocacy to Combat Trafficking],” *Center for Women Policy Studies* <http://www.centerwomenpolicy.org/documents/FactSheetonStateAntiTraffickingLawsFebruary2011.pdf>
- ⁶² Ibid. Also see state resources and map “Total NHTRC hotline calls by state,” <http://www.polarisproject.org/state-map>
- ⁶³ See the Polaris Project for state by state information on coalitions, taskforces, and allied organizations around sex trafficking, <http://www.polarisproject.org/state-map>
- ⁶⁴ CASE Act text: http://www.bayswan.org/CASEAct_InitiativeText.pdf
- ⁶⁵ <http://www.againstthecaseact.com/research.html>
- ⁶⁶ <http://www.againstthecaseact.com/opposingprop35.html>
- ⁶⁷ <http://www.bwwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/No-on-Prop-35-Organization-letter1.pdf>
- ⁶⁸ See here for voting report and funding report: [http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/California_Proposition_35,_Ban_on_Human_Trafficking_and_Sex_Slavery_\(2012\)](http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/California_Proposition_35,_Ban_on_Human_Trafficking_and_Sex_Slavery_(2012))
- ⁶⁹ Basic concerns about rape, physical assault, and emotional abuse (i.e., interpersonal violence) are highlighted in what scholars call a sex negative framework, rather than emphases on the need for physical, emotional, and sexual autonomy (what would be considered a “positive” sexual rights framework).
- ⁷⁰ See the Polaris Project website, www.polarisproject.org
- ⁷¹ See the conference website, <http://www.prostitutionconference.com/>
- ⁷² For a complete list and description of NYATN committee members, including sex worker rights and non-sex worker rights members, see <http://nyatn.wordpress.com/nyatn-steering-committee-members/>
- ⁷³ Within the “feminist sex wars,” anti-prostitution feminists point out that many sex worker rights leaders have been arrested for running an escort agency or pandering, and consider the sex worker rights movement to be a farce: <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdfs/Myths%20&%20Facts%20Legal%20&%20Illegal%20Prostitution%203-09.pdf>, <http://secretlifeofamanhattancallgirl.wordpress.com/tag/robyn-few/> A response from a sex worker rights activist after Robyn Few passed away in 2012: <http://veganvixen1.wordpress.com/2012/09/19/madams-management-pimps-and-hypocrisy/>
- ⁷⁴ See the governmental review of New Zealand’s Prostitution Reform Act “What did it change and what has happened since” <http://espu-ca.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/new-zealand-prostitution-reform-act-2003-what-it-changed.pdf>
- ⁷⁵ New Zealand Parliamentarian Tim Barnett’s 2006 report, <http://myweb.dal.ca/mgoodyea/Documents/New%20Zealand/PRA%20update.pdf>
- ⁷⁶ WWAV is not a sex worker rights organization per se, they work with marginalized women, particularly women of color, including those who sell sex.
- ⁷⁷ Ronald Weitzer (2010) argues that the survival sex work is the main lens through which we understand prostitution today. Survival sex work refers to people who are social isolated and experiencing violence: people who have no other options, who are selling sex to pay for drugs, and who are assumed to be in an abusive relationship with a pimp. Interestingly, survival sex work fits within a protectionist framing.
- ⁷⁸ <http://depthroated.wordpress.com/2011/06/30/help-women-with-a-vision-wwav-raise-5000-to-continue-the-fight-against-louisianas-crime-against-nature-by-solicitation-statute/>
- ⁷⁹ “VACATING CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS FOR TRAFFICKED PERSONS, A Legal Memorandum for Advocates and Legislators,” Sex Workers Project, <http://www.sexworkersproject.org/downloads/2012/20120422-memo-vacating-convictions.pdf>
- ⁸⁰ “Sex Workers at Risk: Condoms as Evidence of Prostitution in Four US Cities,” Human Rights Watch, 2012, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/us0712ForUpload_1.pdf
- ⁸¹ Ibid. p. 4.
- ⁸² Ibid.
- ⁸³ In 2007 alone, they received almost \$122,000 for the second year of a three year grant under the TVPA. “Attorney General’s Annual Report to Congress and Assessment of U.S. Government Activities to Combat

Trafficking in Persons Fiscal Year 2008,” June 2009.

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/125840.pdf>

⁸⁴ *Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific*, 2012, United Nations Development Programme

<http://www.snap-undp.org/elibrary/Publications/HIV-2012-SexWorkAndLaw.pdf> The WHO report, *Prevention and Treatment of HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections for Sex Workers in Low- and Middle-income Countries*, was a joint project between the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNAIDS, and the Global Network of Sex Work Projects, published by WHO, December 2012, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77745/1/9789241504744_eng.pdf

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VITA
Crystal A. Jackson

Department of Sociology & the Women's Studies Program
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

EDUCATION

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

- Ph.D., Sociology, expected 2013
- Graduate Certificate, Women's Studies, 2009
- Master of Liberal Arts, Sociology, 2007
- Bachelor of Liberal Arts, Psychology, 2003

PUBLICATIONS

Brents, Barbara and Crystal Jackson. 2013. "Gender, Emotional Labour and Interactive Body Work: Negotiating Flesh and Fantasy in Sex Workers' Labor Practices." In *Body/Sex/ Work*, edited by C. Wolkowitz, R. Cohen, T. Sanders, and K. Hardy. U.K.: Palgrave MacMillan.

Jackson, Crystal. 2011. "Revealing Contemporary Constructions of Femininity: Expression and Sexuality in Strip Club Legislation." *Sexualities* Volume 14(3): 354-369. (*peer-reviewed*)

Brents, Barbara, Crystal Jackson and Kathryn Hausbeck. 2010. *The State of Sex in Nevada: Tourism, Sex, and Sin in the New American Heartland*. New York, NY: Routledge.

BOOK REVIEWS

Jackson, Crystal. 2012. Review of Eileen M. Otis, *Markets and Bodies: Women, Service Work, and the Making of Inequality in China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. *Choice Online*. July 2012.

Jackson, Crystal. 2012. Review of Gillian Abel, Lisa Fitzgerald, Catherine Healy, with Aline Taylor (eds), *Taking the Crime Out of Sex Work: New Zealand Sex Workers' Fight for Decriminalisation*. Bristol, Great Britain: The Policy Press. *Gender & Society* Volume 26(2): 349-350.

Jackson, Crystal. 2011. Review of Susan Dewey, *Neon Wasteland: On Love, Motherhood, and Sex Work in a Rust Belt Town*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. *Choice Online*. September 2011.

ACADEMIC AWARDS & HONORS

Regents' Graduate Scholar Award, Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents. 2009.

Beth B. Hess Memorial Scholarship, Sociologists for Women in Society, with the Society for the Study of Social Problems and the American Sociological Association. 2007 - 2008.

Soroptimist International of the Americas, Sierra Nevada Region Fellowship for Graduate Women in Doctoral Programs. 2007.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

- Graduate & Professional Student Association, Graduate Student Merit Award. 2010.
- College of Liberal Arts, UNLV
 - Outstanding Ph.D. Student, Sociology, 2009 - 2010.
 - Outstanding Master's Student, Sociology, 2006 - 2007.
- Graduate College, UNLV
 - Summer Session Scholarship, \$2000, Summer 2009.
 - GREAT (Graduate Research Training) Scholarship, \$6000, Summer 2008.
 - GREAT (Graduate Research Training) Scholarship, \$6000, Summer 2007.
- Graduate Student Alumni Associate Scholarship, \$1000, 2005-2006.

RECENT INVITED LECTURES AND PRESENTATIONS (2011 – 2013)

"How the Anti-Trafficking Movement Impacts Sex Worker Activism." Invited paper for a Presidential Session at the Pacific Sociological Association annual meeting, Reno, Nevada. March 2013.

"Authors Meet Critics: The State of Sex." Presented at the Society for the Study of Social Problems annual conference, Las Vegas, Nevada. August 2011.

RECENT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT (2011 – 2013)

"Nevada Brothels." September 2012. Pre-recorded for "Live from Las Vegas: An Interview with Tracy Quan, author of *Diary of a Manhattan Call Girl*." Syndicated radio show *Philosophy Talk*, San Francisco, California. Edited show aired in October 2012.
<http://philosophytalk.org/shows/prostitution-and-sex-trade>

"Womyn-torship." July 2012. Voices of NEW Leadership Nevada video series, *Women's Research Institute of Nevada*. <http://wrinunlv.org/new-leadership-nevada/voices-of-new-leadership-nevada/crystal-jackson/>

"Sex & Vegas." June 2012. Panel discussion, *CineKink* national film festival tour, Las Vegas, NV.

"Gender equity in the sex industry -- Interview with Crystal Jackson." July 2011. NortonSOC youtube.com Channel. *W. W. Norton and Company*. <http://tinyurl.com/NortonCJsexindy>

- Featured on *The Sociological Weekly* online, "Sex Work in Las Vegas," NortonSOC clip, <http://paper.li/pratichsociali/sociological/2011/10/25>
- Featured on *Sociological Images* online, "Sex Work in Las Vegas," NortonSOC clip, <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/10/22/sex-work-in-las-vegas/>

"Scholars of Legal Brothels Offer a New Take on the 'Oldest Profession.'" 2011. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. September 18. <http://chronicle.com/article/Scholars-of-Legal-Brothels/129047/>

RECENT PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS (2011 – 2013)

“Gender, Sexuality, and Insider/Outsider Status in the Field.” Presented at the Pacific Sociological Association annual meeting, Reno, Nevada. March 2013.

“Is it Ever Really a Choice?: How Sex Worker Rights Activists Engage Anti-Sex Trafficking Advocacy.” Presented at the National Women’s Studies Association annual meeting, Oakland, California. November 2012.

“‘They’re Always Nice to My Face:’ Sex Workers, Power, Resistance and Anti-Sex Trafficking Ideology.” Presented at the American Sociological Association annual meeting, Denver, Colorado. August 2012.

“Sex Worker Organizing” (with Jennifer Heineman). Presented at the Society for the Study of Social Problems annual meeting, Denver, Colorado. August 2012.

“Sex/y Activism Panel.” Discussant at the Society for the Study of Social Problems annual meeting, Denver, Colorado. August 2012.

“Desiring Change: Narratives of Normalization and Respectability in the U.S. Sex Worker Rights Movement.” Presented at a roundtable of the Sociologists for Women in Society annual meeting, St. Petersburg, Florida. February 2012.

“Sexual Assault Advocacy: Moving from Rescuing to Supporting Sex Workers” (with Andrea Sundberg and Susan Lopez-Embury). Presented by Sundberg and Lopez-Embury at the National Sexual Assault Conference/La Conferencia Nacional de Agresión Sexual, Baltimore, Maryland. September 2011.

“The U.S. Sex Workers’ Rights Movement: Sexual Politics, Community, and a Lack of Legal Change.” Presented at the American Sociological Association annual meeting, Las Vegas, Nevada. August 2011.