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Sex Work and Professional Risk Communication: Keeping Safe on the Streets

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Abstract

Risk communication is traditionally authored by institutions and addressed to the potentially affected publics for whom they are responsible. This study expands the scope of risk communication by analyzing safety guides produced by a hypermarginalized group for whom institutions show no responsibility: full-contact, street-level sex workers. Using corpus-assisted discourse analysis and keyword analysis to reveal patterns of word choices, the authors argue that the safety guides exhibit characteristics and qualities of professional communication: audience adaptation, social responsibility, and ethical awareness. This area of inquiry—the DIY, peer-to-peer, extra-institutional risk communication produced by marginalized people—widens

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technical and professional communication's approach to risk communication.

Keywords
corpus-assisted discourse analysis, marginalized populations, risk communication, professionalization, sex work

Sex workers have a hypermarginalized status that is perhaps best demonstrated by the haunting phrase "no human involved," "a slang term that has been commonly used by police to refer to crimes involving the murder or injury of sex workers, drug users, gang members, immigrants, and transient folks, with Black and Brown populations disproportionately affected" (No Human Involved, n.d.; see also Wynter, 1992). *Hypermarginalization*, which Oprisko and Caplan (2014) defined as an approach to intersectionality, is the condition of "living with multiple identities against which society tends to discriminate" (Brown, 2019, para. 4; see Crenshaw, 1991). We consider many sex workers to be hypermarginalized because of their intersecting identities derived from their criminalized work, race, gender, ability, and other identities. Or as Oprisko and Caplan (2014) put it, they are the "least advantaged of the least advantaged" (p. 35). Given their hypermarginalized status and the inherently risky nature of their work, sex workers have a particular need for risk communication. In this article, we call on professional communicators to expand their discussions of risk communication strategies to consider not just institutionally generated risk communication but also DIY, peer-to-peer work, particularly for marginalized communities. To that end, we looked at guides developed by and for sex workers and their allies—guides that are exchanged outside institutional situations and are considered risky and taboo.

Using corpus-assisted discourse analysis (CADA), we describe and examine three genres of risk communication produced by full-contact, street-level sex workers, a group that is invisible to and stigmatized by society. Using CADA to assist with our examination of written guides created by and for sex workers allowed us to mitigate our own subjective judgment in describing patterns in the guides by presenting empirical evidence of the individual word choices that vary between the different kinds of guides that sex workers produced based on audience. We call for technical and professional communication (TPC) to include these guide genres as forms of professional communication that fall within the scope of social justice issues. Building on the work of scholars who have extended and challenged Faber's (2002) definition of professional communication, we argue that the genres of risk communication produced by sex workers meet the criteria of professionalism, and we discuss how professionalism is particularly significant for sex workers. Through this study, we aim to amplify the cause of sex workers and advocate for the decriminalization of sex work.

To begin with, we present this project as a novel examination of risk communication within a hypermarginalized population. Then we describe our study design, including our research methods. Next, we show that these user guides demonstrate sex worker agency via risk mitigation through communication professionalism. Finally, we conclude by reiterating how TPC and risk communication scholars can benefit from broadening the scope of risk communication to include extrainstitutional communication, particularly within marginalized communication.

Extrainstitutional Risk Communication

Risk communication makes people aware of dangers that could affect them or their property. Organizations such as the EPA, the CDC, and the FDA, as well as corporations that might cause collateral harm to the public through their activities, use risk communication to meet their responsibilities to public health and safety while pursuing their mission. Institutional risk communication has been extensively studied by scholars in communication studies, particularly in relation to crisis communication, which is needed when risks become emergent crises (e.g., Coombs, 2012; Sellnow & Seeger, 2013; Ulmer et al., 2015). TPC has also taken an interest in risk communication (e.g., Boiarsky, 2016; Cheek, 2020; Ding, 2009; Frost, 2018; Grabill & Simmons, 1998; Haas & Frost, 2017; Sauer, 1996; Scott, 2003, 2006). Coombs (2012) defined *risk communication* as follows:

> At its core, risk communication is a dialogue between organizations that create risks and stakeholders that must bear the risk. Risk communication helps risk bearers, those who must face the consequences of the risk, become more comfortable with the risk. Part of the risk communication process is explaining risks to risk bearers and trying to understand their concerns about the risks. (p. 57)

Coombs's definition emphasizes that risk communication traditionally flows from risk makers (or risk monitors in the case of organizations like the CDC), who are themselves likely safe from the risks, to risk bearers—that is, from secure experts to potential victims. In this relationship, the receivers of risk communication, the risk bearers, might express concerns and ask questions, but they are passive and powerless compared to the institutions that issue risk communication and often have control over the risk. As Grabill and Simmons (1998) expressed it, "Risk is determined by experts and communication is the transfer of information from those who produce knowledge to those who consume it" (p. 418). Grabill and Simmons called this process a technocratic approach to risk communication (p. 421), which they contrasted with negotiated approaches that involve the risk-bearing members of the public.

But as Grabill and Simmons pointed out, negotiated approaches might assume that the public has more power and agency in the production of risk communication than is actually the case. They argued for a third alternative, a socially constructed approach: "Rather than a linear flow of technical information from the risk assessors to the public, risk communication becomes a web, a network, an interactive process of exchanging information, opinions, and values among all involved parties" (p. 425). This approach works to balance the hierarchy between experts and nonexperts and blurs the distinction between risk assessment and risk communication. Grabill and Simmons (1998) concluded that a "critical rhetoric locates its energy and hope in this sense of producing citizens by seeking to access user/citizen knowledge by creating the institutional space within which risk can be collectively constructed and more effectively communicated" (p. 437). Our research looks at the kind of interactive network that Grabill and Simmons envisioned but a network that exists outside an institutional space.

We examine risk communication that is exchanged and distributed peer to peer by hypermarginalized members of at-risk communities. Such communities lack access to authorized systems of protection and are therefore responsible for their own safety. This risk communication, then, does not flow from credentialed experts to potential victims; it flows between potential victims who are pooling their collective knowledge and experiential expertise about risks.

As such, we present a social justice study of risk communication within one vulnerable community—full-contact, street-level sex workers. For our study, we use the terms "sex work" and "sex worker" (rather than prostitution or prostitute, respectively) in part to draw attention to the history of advocating for legitimizing the professional labor that sex workers do (see also Strohmayer et al., 2019). We describe our project as a social justice one because this risk communication exists as a necessary response to ostracism and criminalization. In other words, sex workers illustrate what Scott (2003) called a set of bodies identified as inherently risky to the general population because of their perceived deviance (p. 234)—in this case, a criminal deviance that prevents them from benefiting from the same protections as other professionals. Without official endorsement or protection, sex workers must turn to extrainstitutional risk communication in order to keep themselves safe—and, just as important, to keep their clients safe. Here, in a significant and instructive contrast from most forms of risk communication that TPC has studied, we focus on risk communication specifically located within, and in alliance to, a stigmatized and vulnerable community.

In developing this project, we were interested in understanding what constitutes significant risk of harm for sex workers, whose work is inherently risky. Further, we wanted to understand how sex workers communicate with one another about risk (e.g., bodily harms, theft, or arrest) in order to mitigate or manage the risks associated with their professional practice. This line of inquiry led us to explore how risk communication within the sex worker community contributes to a professional sex work identity and how that communication in turn reduces risk.

Sex workers, we argue, are communicating professionally. In describing their work in this way, we draw on Faber's (2002) analysis of professional identity and TPC in which he lists three aspects of professionalism that demonstrate what makes a professional communicator a "professional": "audience relationship," "social responsibility," and "ethical awareness" (p. 312). We recognize, however, that Faber's definition of professionals in 2002 would probably not have included sex workers, so in a sense, we are consciously misreading Faber in ways that we hope are beneficial. We are also influenced by Petersen's (2014) adaptation of Faber's criteria to one extrainstitutional context (mom blogs). Petersen used Faber's framework to argue that mom bloggers are professional communicators (p. 277). Faber himself opened the door for such adaptation when he "recognized the emerging de-professionalization and proletarianization of the professional class" (Faber, 2002, p. 306; Petersen, 2014, p. 280).

Several scholars have taken him up on this adaptation. Black women in TPC have advocated for broadening what it means to act professionally within institutional spaces (Hull et al., 2020; Shelton, 2019), and Petersen identified "mom blogs" as professional spaces outside institutional boundaries. But compared with sex work, mom blog spaces are not particularly risky. Our study extends the critique of how professionalism is traditionally understood by identifying it in sex worker guides. These extrainstitutional genres include detailed discussions of sex and kinkiness, which are considered inappropriate in professional spaces. We want this study to build on the important work done by sex work advocacy groups such as Stella, l'amie de Maimie (hereafter referred to as Stella), Sex Workers Outreach Project, Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network, and local Bad Dates (or Bad Clients) Sheets in order to amplify their cause.

Important to this article and relevant to TPC, professional communication produced by sex workers serves to mitigate risk to themselves and to others. We believe that other marginalized groups might also participate in risk mitigation with communication that has the hallmarks of professionalism. In other words, in this instance, we see professionalism in part as a risk communication tactic because one way to curb risk is to identify normative practices and generalized knowledge that can be shared about how to engage with the profession.

Sex Work, Social Justice, and TPC

How we talk about sex work matters. According to the fact sheet *Language Matters: Talking About Sex Work*, created by Stella (2013), a noted sex worker activist organization,

> American sex worker and activist Carol Leigh coined the term sex work in the 1970s. While before this the term "working girls" was popular amongst workers, creation of the term sex work was a deliberate attempt to unite sex workers of all genders and sectors of work, and to highlight the work, or labour, that sex workers are doing. The term sex work is liberation from the deep-rooted negative and legalistic term prostitute. (p. 3).

In addition to using preferred language in solidarity with many sex worker advocacy groups, we designed our study in line with Jones's (2016) call to consider "research and pedagogical practices as a grassroots way for integrating considerations of diversity… and social justice… into TPC pedagogy and scholarship" (p. 343). She cautioned that a "social justice perspective must not be purely descriptive but actively integrated into the research and pedagogy of our field in a way that promotes social change on a broader level" (p. 343).

Sex Work and Social Justice

We approach this study with a stance toward decriminalization as the most effective path to reducing the violence and stigma associated with sex work because sex workers are frequent targets of client-perpetrated violence (CPV; Conners et al., 2016). Studies have estimated that during a 1-year period, 40–70% of sex workers in Central and South Asia, Europe, and North America experienced physical and sexual violence (Shannon & Csete, 2010; see Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network, 2009; Shannon et al., 2009). Thus, because of dehumanization, racial and gender-based violence, criminalization, and the high rate of CPV, sex workers are clearly a hypermarginalized population.

Stella (2013), one of many sex worker organizations that create informational content for sex workers and related communities, describes the interplay between criminalization and violence, explaining that when sex work is criminalized, risk communication related to sex work is criminalized too: "The steps we need to take for fair and safe working conditions, and to communicate and negotiate with our clients and the people we work with, are illegal" (p. 1). As such, their risk communication strategies, including crafting a professional identity, specifically arise in response to criminalization. In other words, people working in elicit professions do not have the same resources available to them that other workers do, so they improvise and create their own means toward self-sufficiency. In this case, workers preserve their own lives and livelihood by creating peer-to-peer risk communication (disclosing the risks involved) and standards of professionalism. So, because criminalization forces sex workers to develop their own safety schemes, decriminalization would allow sex workers to better control their working environment and thereby manage its risks.

Sex work can occur in many different venues and media (e.g., online, phone, video) and as full-contact physical intercourse, with different levels of risk. In some sex work, all parties are paid (e.g., in some pornography) whereas in other sex work only one party is paid (e.g., in a provider–client relationship). For this study, we limited our scope to full-contact, street-level sex work providers. Although literature about sex workers often frames them simply as "women," sex workers encompass all gender, racial, and ethnic identities, and some identities, such as trans women of color, are even more burdened with intersecting vectors of marginalization and risk (Crenshaw, 1991). So even as we investigate the kinds of technical genres that aid and support their work, we acknowledge the uniqueness and heterogeneity of their experiences.

Social Justice and TPC

TPC has shown a growing interest in supporting and intervening on behalf of minoritized and marginalized groups (e.g., Acharya, 2019; Cox, 2019; Evia & Patriarca, 2012; Jones & Williams, 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2018). Further, researchers in other fields have already shown interest in working with sex worker organizations to support safety and risk mitigation. For instance, Strohmayer et al. (2019) worked with Stella to analyze the use of digital technologies in supporting its work. Other disciplines that have taken up sex work as a legitimate area of concern include sociology (Kontula, 2008), criminology (Gall, 2007; Sanders, 2007), and public health (Cohan et al., 2006; Simic et al., 2006). These growing interests, alongside historical and recent efforts toward decriminalizing sex work (Elletson, 2020), provide clear exigence for our project, particularly when considered together with TPC's growing interest in social justice work and the growing body of literature discussing *extrainstitutional technical communication* (i.e., the communication of specialized information outside institutional contexts).

Social Justice. TPC has long understood that research is "always/already ideological" (Berlin, 2003, p. 679; see also Agboka, 2013, 2014; Evia & Patriarca, 2012; Jones, 2016; Jones et al., 2016). In line with this understanding, TPC has become more engaged in social justice work. Jones et al. (2016) described this move as a shift from a focus on ethics, "which often exist in an individual's character or behavior" to social justice, "which tends to be more collective and action oriented" (p. 211). Calling for a social justice stance in TPC, Jones (2016) argued that a social justice stance for TPC

> is a grassroots way for integrating considerations of diversity (a focus on the inclusion of varied perspectives and viewpoints) and social justice (critical reflection and action that promotes agency for the marginalized and disempowered) into TPC pedagogy and scholarship. (p. 343)

As such, a growing body of work engages in activism and amplification of "traditionally marginalized and excluded perspectives and positions" in research and pedagogy (Agboka, 2013, 2014; Colton et al., 2017; Cox, 2019; Edenfield et al., 2019; Evia & Patriarca, 2012; Haas, 2012; Jones, 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Sun, 2006; Walton & Jones, 2013; Walton et al., 2015, 2017; Williams, 2010, 2012).

Extrainstitutional Communication. TPC scholarship has expanded its focus on documentation produced outside of institutions by "nonexperts" (Carradini, 2018; Ding, 2009; Kimball, 2006; Petersen, 2014), including user guides (Colton et al., 2017; Edenfield et al., 2019; Holladay, 2017; Sarat-St. Peter, 2017). The kind of risk communication that occurs among sex workers that we analyzed for our project fits within this domain: user-produced, extrainstitutional documentation that, according to Kimball (2006), increased "their freedom of agency" (p. 68).

Although TPC has become more interested in DIY, tactical, user-produced technical genres, the field has not fully investigated these genres in the profession of sex work and their implications for social justice work. There has been at least one effort (at the time of writing) to examine communication and design in sex work though in the context of sexual assault prevention. Edenfield (2019) examined "bad date lists," a DIY genre specifically for sex workers in which information on dangerous individuals is collected and distributed in a single document to sex workers in a particular community. He argued that these sex worker genres are tactical forms of technical communication and called for further investigation into the rhetoric and design of communication by TPC professionals on sexual assault prevention. Our goal here is to weave together TPC's work in social justice and extrainstitutional technical communication with sex worker advocacy.

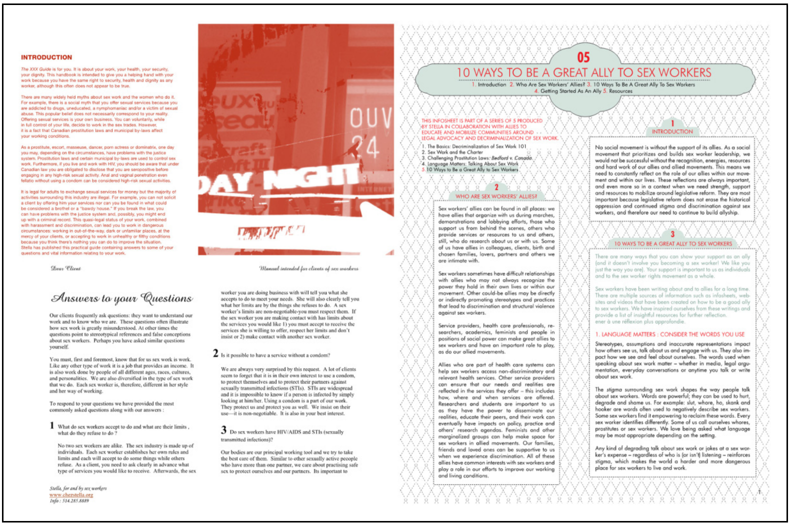
Sex Worker Guides

One way to investigate methods of risk communication among sex workers is through analyzing the guides they create as part of that effort. To begin, we searched online for examples of communication toward mitigating the risks involved in sex work, focusing on explanatory guides shared online between people involved in sex work. In this section, we describe features of the three subgenres of sex work guides we encountered, defined by their different audiences: sex worker to sex workers, sex worker to allies, and sex worker to clients.

These guides shared at least two common characteristics: All take a human rights and work perspective on sex work, and all were designed from the insider knowledge of current and former sex workers. For example, Stella's (2004) *Dear Client: Manual Intended for Clients of Sex Workers* states on every page that Stella is "for and by sex workers." This guide is written as a how-to for clients of sex workers as well as a negotiating tool for sex workers to use with clients. And they do it with style. Rather than consisting of just plain text on a page, these guides all exhibit professional design features (graphic design, layout design, artwork; see Figure 1). Garrison-Joyner's (2019) definition of TPC along with Kimball's (2006) inclusion of extrainstitutional TPC allow us to consider these guides from a professional angle. Garrison-Joyner stated that technical communication is "communication that supports or encourages action. Professional communication is the communication that supports a particular profession or professional in fulfilling the purpose of that vocation" (n.p.). The design of these professional guides demonstrates a high degree of intentionality in conveying information about the ins and outs of the sex work profession. And while the primary purpose of these guides is mitigating risk, we understand their secondary purpose as establishing a professional code of behavior for sex work.

Sex Worker to Sex Workers

The sex worker to sex worker guides in our sample ($n = 16$) cover a wide variety of issues written for a diverse population of sex workers. These guides—also called booklets, info sheets, or handbooks—provide practical



INTRODUCTION

The XXX Guide is for you. It is about your work, your health, your security, your dignity. This handbook is intended to give you a helping hand with your work because you have the same right to security, health and dignity as any worker, although this often does not appear to be true.

There are many widely held myths about sex work and the women who do it. For example, there is a social myth that you offer sexual services because you are addicted to drugs, uneducated, a nymphomaniac and/or a victim of sexual abuse. This popular belief does not necessarily correspond to your reality. Offering sexual services is your own business. You can voluntarily, while in full control of your life, decide to work in the sex trades. However, it is a fact that Canadian prostitution laws and municipal by-laws affect your working conditions.

As a prostitute, escort, masseuse, dancer, porn actress or dominatrix, one day you may, depending on the circumstances, have problems with the justice system. Prostitution laws and certain municipal by-laws are used to control sex work. Furthermore, if you live and work with HIV, you should be aware that under Canadian law you are obligated to disclose that you are seropositive before engaging in any high-risk sexual activity. Anal and vaginal penetration even fellatio without using a condom can be considered high-risk sexual activities.

It is legal for adults to exchange sexual services for money but the majority of activities surrounding this industry are illegal. For example, you can not solicit a client by offering him your services nor can you be found in what could be considered a brothel or a "bawdy house." If you break the law, you can have problems with the justice system and, possibly, you might end up with a criminal record. This quasi-legal status of your work, combined with harassment and discrimination, can lead you to work in dangerous circumstances: working in out-of-the-way, dark or unfamiliar places, at the mercy of your clients, or accepting to work in unhealthy or filthy conditions because you think there's nothing you can do to improve the situation. Stella has published this practical guide containing answers to some of your questions and vital information relating to your work.

Dear Client

Manual intended for clients of sex workers

Answers to your Questions

Our clients frequently ask questions: they want to understand our work and to know who we are. These questions often illustrate how sex work is greatly misunderstood. At other times the questions point to stereotypical references and false conceptions about sex workers. Perhaps you have asked similar questions yourself.

You must, first and foremost, know that for us sex work is work. Like any other type of work it is a job that provides an income. It is also work done by people of all different ages, races, cultures, and personalities. We are also diversified in the type of sex work that we do. Each sex worker is, therefore, different in her style and her way of working.

To respond to your questions we have provided the most commonly asked questions along with our answers :

1 What do sex workers accept to do and what are their limits , what do they refuse to do ?

No two sex workers are alike. The sex industry is made up of individuals. Each sex worker establishes her own rules and limits and each will accept to do some things while others refuse. As a client, you need to ask clearly in advance what type of services you would like to receive. Afterwards, the sex worker you are doing business with will tell you what she accepts to do to meet your needs. She will also clearly tell you what her limits are by the things she refuses to do. A sex worker's limits are non-negotiable-you must respect them. If the sex worker you are making contact with has limits about the services you would like 1) you must accept to receive the services she is willing to offer, respect her limits and don't insist or 2) make contact with another sex worker.

2 Is it possible to have a service without a condom?

We are always very surprised by this request. A lot of clients seem to forget that it is in their own interest to use a condom, to protect themselves and to protect their partners against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). STIs are widespread and it is impossible to know if a person is infected by simply looking at him/her. Using a condom is a part of our work. They protect us and protect you as well. We insist on their use—it is non-negotiable. It is also in your best interest.

3 Do sex workers have HIV/AIDS and STIs (sexually transmitted infections)?

Our bodies are our principal working tool and we try to take the best care of them. Similar to other sexually active peeople who have more than one partner, we care about practising safe sex to protect ourselves and our partners. Its important to

Stella, for and by sex workers
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05

10 WAYS TO BE A GREAT ALLY TO SEX WORKERS

1. Introduction 2. Who Are Sex Workers' Allies? 3. 10 Ways To Be A Great Ally To Sex Workers 4. Getting Started As An Ally 5. Resources

THIS INFOSHEET IS PART OF A SERIES OF 5 PRODUCED BY STELLA IN COLLABORATION WITH ALLIES TO EDUCATE AND MOBILIZE COMMUNITIES AROUND LEGAL ADVOCACY AND DECRIMINALIZATION OF SEX WORK.

1. The Basics: Decriminalization of Sex Work 101
2. Sex Work and the *Charter*
3. Challenging Prostitution Laws: *Bedford v. Canada*
4. Language Matters: Talking About Sex Work
5. 10 Ways to Be a Great Ally to Sex Workers

2
WHO ARE SEX WORKERS' ALLIES?

Sex workers' allies can be found in all places: we have allies that organize with us during marches, demonstrations and lobbying efforts, those who support us from behind the scenes, others who provide services or resources to us and others, still, who do research about us or with us. Some of us have allies in colleagues, clients, birth and chosen families, lovers, partners and others we are intimate with.

Sex workers sometimes have difficult relationships with allies who may not always recognize the power they hold in their own lives or within our movement. Other could-be allies may be directly or indirectly promoting stereotypes and practices that lead to discrimination and structural violence against sex workers.

Service providers, health care professionals, researchers, academics, feminists and people in positions of social power can make great allies to sex workers and have an important role to play, as do our allied movements.

Allies who are part of health care systems can help sex workers access non-discriminatory and relevant health services. Other service providers can ensure that our needs and realities are reflected in the services they offer – this includes how, where and when services are offered. Researchers and students are important to us as they have the power to disseminate our realities, educate their peers, and their work can eventually have impacts on policy, practice and others' research agendas. Feminists and other marginalized groups can help make space for sex workers in allied movements. Our families, friends and loved ones can be supportive to us when we experience discrimination. All of these allies have common interests with sex workers and play a role in our efforts to improve our working and living conditions.

1
INTRODUCTION

No social movement is without the support of its allies. As a social movement that prioritizes and builds sex worker leadership, we would not be successful without the recognition, energies, resources and hard work of our allies and allied movements. This means we need to constantly reflect on the role of our allies within our movement and within our lives. These reflections are always important, and even more so in a context when we need strength, support and resources to mobilize around legislative reform. They are most important because legislative reform does not erase the historical oppression and continued stigma and discrimination against sex workers, and therefore our need to continue to build allyship.

3
10 WAYS TO BE A GREAT ALLY TO SEX WORKERS

There are many ways that you can show your support as an ally (and it doesn't involve you becoming a sex worker! We like you just the way you are). Your support is important to us as individuals and to the sex worker rights movement as a whole.

Sex workers have been writing about and to allies for a long time. There are multiple sources of information such as infosheets, websites and videos that have been created on how to be a good ally to sex workers. We have inspired ourselves from these writings and provide a list of insightful resources for further reflection.
ener à une réflexion plus approfondie.

1. LANGUAGE MATTERS : CONSIDER THE WORDS YOU USE

Stereotypes, assumptions and inaccurate representations impact how others see us, talk about us and engage with us. They also impact how we see and feel about ourselves. The words used when speaking about sex work matter – whether in media, legal argumentation, everyday conversations or anytime you talk or write about sex work.

The *stigma* surrounding sex work shapes the way people talk about sex workers. Words are powerful; they can be used to hurt, degrade and shame us. For example: slut, whore, ho, skank and hooker are words often used to negatively describe sex workers. Some sex workers find it empowering to reclaim these words. Every sex worker identifies differently. Some of us call ourselves whores, prostitutes or sex workers. We love being asked what language may be most appropriate depending on the setting.

Any kind of degrading talk about sex work or jokes at a sex worker's expense – regardless of who is (or isn't) listening – reinforces stigma, which makes the world a harder and more dangerous place for sex workers to live and work.

Figure 1. Examples of sex worker guides.

information about issues related to sex work, such as contraception, pregnancy, drugs, body modifications, how to attract clients, financial concerns, physical intimacy, and health and safety. Each of these guides details how sex workers can keep themselves safe at work, often giving short, bulleted pieces of information targeted at mitigating the risks of sex work. For example, the guide *Protect Yourself: A Personal Safety Handbook for Sex Workers* (Scot-Pep, n.d.) presents these pieces of advice: "Don't wear a scarf round your neck as someone could grab it, possibly from a car, and choke you" (p. 5), and "When going away with a client, wave to the others (or pretend to if you are on your own) and shout out your expected return time" (p. 7).

Sex Worker to Allies

The sex worker to allies guides ($n = 12$) cover issues pertaining to how to be an effective and respectful ally to sex workers—in other words, by understanding sex workers as legitimate professionals. The purpose of these guides is similar to what Mensah (2007) described in *Sex Work: 14 Answers to your Questions,* a booklet that she produced with Stella: "to shed light on some preconceived ideas about sex work and to suggest a few ways to improve services offered to these women and to support them in a respectful and empathic way" (p. 1). The booklet succinctly describes issues of access that sex workers face:

> Whether criminalized or not, sex work is not recognized as work. Sex workers do not have access to the same fringe benefits that other workers enjoy. However, their concerns about health and safety in the workplace are similar. Even if they take care of their health, their security and their dignity, sex workers cannot always escape work-related stress. (pp. 5–6)

These guides cover topics such as allyship, media representations, the preferred language for talking about sex work, health and safety, and general information about sex work.

Sex Worker to Clients

Like the other two guide genres, the sex worker to clients guides ($n = 2$) establish a code of professional behavior. Client guides cover practical issues concerning the acceptable ways to engage in sexual acts with sex workers. The two guides in this sample covered client interactions with sex workers, such as what clients can expect when engaging in sexual acts, how sex workers can best communicate about how to safely engage in sexual acts, and how disabled clients with particular needs can satisfactorily have sex. Stella's (2004) *Dear Client: Manual Intended for Clients of Sex Workers* tells clients to "remember that sex workers are people, like everyone else. Give us the same respect that you give to yourself and to others" (p. 9).

Study Design

Our study uses an exploratory, mixed-methods approach guided by the following research question: How do user guides discuss risk among sex workers? In examining this question, we again acknowledge the diversity of the profession. Sex workers include all genders, class backgrounds, ethnicities, circumstances, and abilities.

Artifact Collection

We limited our artifact collection to only those artifacts available online to anyone with internet access, following Strohmayer et al.'s (2019) findings and recommendations. Strohmayer et al., found that when attempting to innovate information distribution, low-fidelity formats must remain available due to the diversity of sex workers. That is, even though apps and other networked technologies have been and are being developed to allow sex workers to connect with and screen clients and to be alerted when violence has been reported near them, the ability to carry a paper copy or access a PDF online (i.e., from a cell phone) is extremely important in order for information to reach all sex workers.

Locating and Collecting. We included in our study only those guides that fit certain criteria informed by sex worker guides, Strohmayer et al.'s (2019) study, Kimball's (2006) definition of tactical technical communication, and guidelines from sex worker advocacy groups such as Stella. Thus, to be initially considered, the guide needed to be

- downloadable and not housed only on a website or otherwise digital information
- publicly available (i.e., not behind a paywall or other barrier intended to limit access)
- aligned with sex workers and sex worker advocacy

- nonjudgmental toward sex workers and hold no moral agenda against sex work
- prodecriminalization, recognizing sex work as a legitimate profession and not trying to eradicate it or "rehabilitate" sex workers
- advocative of sex worker rights

We collected artifacts by using the incognito privacy feature to conduct a Google query using the search phrase "how to keep safe as a sex worker" and using the first page of results to look for sex worker guides. We used incognito browsing in order to prevent researchers' search histories from influencing results. After testing various alternatives, we chose this search phrase to align our research design with our stance as allies to sex workers (see Jones, 2016) through use of the preferred term "sex worker," as discussed by Stella (2013). This specific search query was selected because it yielded information that was targeted primarily toward sex workers, contained downloadable guides, and related to safety, a concept closely tied to risk mitigation. Further, this search query did not yield advertisements or promoted links. We chose to limit our search to the first page of search results because 94% of search engine users tend to focus on results from the first page of their search (Sharma et al., 2019). The search query "how to keep safe as a sex worker" yielded the following 10 results on the first page: five advocacy websites, four media articles, and one direct PDF download link. The search results from other search queries we tested (e.g., "how to become a sex worker," taken from the Google search suggestions, and "how to become a professional sex worker") primarily brought up personal narratives and general information about sex work geared toward the general public instead of downloadable guides about sex worker professionalization that mitigated inherent risks associated with sex work.

Snowball Sampling. The next phase in our artifact-collection process was to open each link in the Google results and search for downloadable guides. We then scanned each guide we found to determine if it fit our parameters. This *snowball sampling* process—using the initial results to find new results—was time-consuming and at times overwhelming because of the vast amount of information that was presented in some websites, such as the Sex Work is Real Work website (https://www.sexworkisrealwork.com/). That website linked to multiple other websites, which linked to yet other websites, including some that were part of the results in the initial Google search, such as Scot-Pep (http://www.scot-pep.org.uk/). One limitation of using incognito browsing is that our “visited” links are not recorded between multiple sessions. In other words, if we clicked on an embedded link while using an incognito browser window, the color change that otherwise happens to a visited link did not remain if the browser was closed and reopened. Because of this limitation, some links (and potential downloadable guides) might have been inadvertently missed.

One method of searching that would uncover all downloadable materials from websites would be to use a web scraping tool to download all files and information associated with a website. But we decided not to use this tool because it could have yielded material that was not intended for public consumption. For instance, some advocacy websites, such as Ugly Mugs (https://nationaluglymugs.org/), have barriers installed to protect information intended only for sex workers. But website barriers, such as registration requirements, are not always effective in preventing web scrapers from accessing website information (Kuizinas, 2018). We chose not to use or even test such a tool because it risked crossing the sex work community organizations’ clearly defined boundaries (as indicated by the Ugly Mugs website’s inclusion of a registration barrier to accessing website information meant for sex workers), which would violate our team’s research ethics. In other words, as researchers who work in alliance with sex workers, we recognized that web scraping could unnecessarily risk the safety and privacy of sex workers and their advocates by exposing safety schemes and other privileged information.

Screening. Finally, we screened 58 downloadable guides and excluded 28 of these guides from our study. The remaining 30 PDF guides (e.g., manuals, tips, or informational sheets)—written to assist full-contact sex workers in performing their profession—were used in our analysis. We included only guides that were available to anyone online, downloadable, and written for sex workers, clients, and ally organizations in order to help with professional issues related to sex work. We excluded guides that were written to dissuade sex workers from practicing their profession; contained text that was unable to be read by computer programs (i.e., image-only PDFs that could not be analyzed by corpus linguistics software); were unrelated to full-contact, street-level sex work (e.g., video and phone sex work, pornographic media sex work); were primarily meant to inform sex workers, ally organizations, and clients about the legal issues and research pertaining to sex work; and were not available in English. As we screened the guides, we could see that some guides served a dual purpose and had sections written for sex workers and sections written for allies. Thus, to keep the audience boundaries clear, we split these documents into separate guides for each of the targeted audiences.

Analytical Approaches

In our study, we used an adapted corpus-assisted discourse analysis (CADA) technique to assist in generating keywords appropriate to our sex work guides and to determine if the various social contexts of the guides (sex worker to sex workers, sex worker to allies, sex worker to clients) affected how those keywords were used. Our technique was inspired by and adapted from the methods outlined by Ding and Kong (2019), who used CADA to examine keyword use in news articles related to artificial intelligence. Their method, which "[draws] on the techniques from corpus linguistics, corpus-assisted discourse study, employs frequency, keyword, collocation, and concordances to find out the discursive patterns in language" (p. 94) and is useful in determining how language use, in terms of keywords, might differ between guides written for sex workers, allies, and clients. CADA techniques allow researchers to analyze a large body of texts using computer technology. While our sample of 30 guides was small for a corpus study, using corpus analysis software and techniques was useful in creating custom keyword lists for our keyword analysis. Corpus analysis allows researchers to use word counts, keyword lists, concordance tools (i.e., to allow analysis of a search term or phrase in context), word position in individual texts, and word clusters all within a single interface in order to analyze text (Anthony, 2006).

TPC research has increasingly used corpora-based methods to examine a wide range of topics—from analyzing the use of the word "this" in student writing (Boettger & Wulff, 2014) to analyzing the way media discusses artificial intelligence in different cultural contexts (Ding & Kong, 2019)—demonstrating the range of inquiry that is possible with these methods. One strength of corpora-based approaches is that researchers are equipped to take both an overview of a body of work and a detailed, contextual view of keywords and phrases in a text. Further, this mixed-methods approach allows researchers to expand simple statistical descriptions of word usage with rich detail about the contexts of that use in order to reveal patterns for interpretation (Boettger & Lam, 2013). Our study distinguishes how each subgenre of sex work guides reveals its priorities via the word choices within the guides. Our reading of the guides led us to notice apparent differences in word usage based on the varied social contexts between the guides. Using adapted CADA techniques to develop and analyze keywords allowed us to confirm whether our read observations were supported by data. From our perspective as outsiders, we have our own impressions of how sex workers keep safe. Corpus analysis techniques can be a potential corrective to such preexisting biases by grounding our analysis in data rather than impressions (Baker, 2012), but this "objectivity" is also relative to the use of an appropriate reference corpus (Ädel, 2010) in relation to keywords.

So, to complete our study, we first created a study corpus. After downloading and screening the guides, we sorted the remaining 30 guides into three different categories according to their target audience: sex worker guides (16), ally guides (12), and client guides (2). Table 1 provides a breakdown of the data for each subgenre of the sex worker guides. Although the average number of counted words, or tokens, in each subgenre ranged from 3,664 to 8,698 tokens, the large range of word counts in each guide affected those averages. Therefore, Table 1 lists the lowest and highest counts for context. The total number of unique words, or types, in each subgenre reflects the total of the number of types for the subgenre. Individual unique words that appeared in multiple guides were counted just once.

We then created a custom keywords list for the sex worker guides in order to perform our analysis using the open-source corpus analysis software, AntConc (Anthony, 2019). Ding and Kong (2019) used AntConc's keyword feature to automatically generate keywords for their analysis. This process requires an appropriate reference corpus to determine differences in typical word use from the target documents; however, because the guides in our sample use atypical yet professionally relevant words such as "anal" and "fisting" as well as typical words such as "services" and "health," finding an appropriate reference corpus that would yield an accurate set of keywords proved difficult. Ideally, reference corpora are large bodies of text that provide a snapshot representation of typical word

Table 1. Data for Each Subgenre of the Sex Worker Guides.

Subgenre	Number	Total Tokens (Words)	Total Types (Unique Words)	Average Number Tokens/Types	Lowest Number Tokens/Types	Highest Number Tokens/Types
Sex worker	16	70,697	5,968	4,419/373	366/211	16,897/2,708
Ally	12	104,372	7,677	8,698/640	345/234	34,124/3,685
Client	2	7,328	1,485	3,664/743	626/287	6,702/1,360

use in a genre for corpus analysis and for generating keyword lists (Ädel, 2010; Bird et al., 2008). But as corpus analysis is increasingly used to analyze specialized areas, the need for specialized reference corpora has increased. For example, Swarts et al. (n.d.) argued that one issue facing researchers in TPC is the lack of a reference corpus specifically designed for analyzing technical communication. They stated that although corpus analysis is being used with increasing frequency in TPC, "scholars have been stymied by the lack of a suitable reference corpus. Many scholars need to compile their own set of documents before they even start their research" (n.p.). Much as our field has struggled to compile a suitable reference corpus, we faced similar barriers with this study. Because sex work guides are both specialized and limited, we needed to create a method to systematically generate our own keywords that did not make use of a reference corpus.

Creating Keyword Frequency Lists

Keywords are words that distill and represent themes and frameworks in a text and help readers and search engines determine if a text is relevant to their interests. The *Routledge Handbook of Corpus Linguistics* states that "keyword analysis is essentially based on the notion that recurrent ways of talking about concepts and ideas reveal something about how we think about the social world" (Ädel, 2010, p. 597). Thompson's (1999) analysis of keywords in TPC journal articles demonstrated that keywords are rhetorical devices that indicate the overarching themes and an overarching ideology of a document. While we used a technique that was different from the one Thompson used, our recognition that keywords reveal themes and ideology remains the same. As part of our research into the overarching themes within the different types of professionalization guides available to sex workers, their allies, and their clients, we needed to systematically generate ranked lists of keywords for each type of guide in order to conceptualize how each group's needs converged and diverged and to quantify what priorities and values each group demonstrated. Because "authors write from both moderate and radical ideologies under the same keyword" (p. 158), understanding each keyword in the context of its respective list and in relation to its presence (or exclusion) in the other keyword lists helped us understand the underlying ideologies and concerns in each group of guides. For example, the meaning of the keyword "safety" might vary depending on the intended audience for the guide, and that meaning reveals an underlying ideology.

As an alternative to Ding and Kong's (2019) automated keyword method, we used a multiphase process to generate our keywords. In the first phase, we input the guides (broken into the three categories) into AntConc and created a word list of all the words used in the documents ranked by overall frequency, using a "stop-words" list to filter results. Stop-words lists, which are available online and are often included in software packages, are used to eliminate words such as "and" and "the" from being counted in word lists. But all stop-words lists must be carefully screened before generating a word list because relevant words might be screened out of the study. For example, our stop-words list included the word "work," a highly relevant word for our study, so we had to adjust our stop-words list accordingly.

Once the word list was created, we compiled the top 100 words from each category of guides into one master word list, yielding a list of 202 words after we excluded duplicates. Each of us separately rated every word on the master word list for inclusion as a keyword. We acknowledge that each of us, as researchers, come from a variety of positionalities and quite different interactions, experiences, and perspectives regarding sex work. Because we had three separate raters each rating the same materials using the same method, we calculated our interrater reliability score using the Fleiss Kappa (Fleiss, 1971) function in Stata's statistical software (StataCorp, 2019). Our ratings agreement was "substantial" ($k = 0.6163$, $z = 15.17$, prob > $z = p < 0.0001$), and we were able to generate an initial keyword list consisting of 101 words that all three raters unanimously agreed on (reliability > 70%). We then created a "lemma list" based on our keywords to input into AntConc for frequency analysis. A *lemma list* is a word list output that has adjusted frequencies due to *lemmatization*: the collapsing of words that have the same root word (e.g., works, worker, workers, working) into a single "headword" (e.g., work) that accounts for the frequency of use for all variations or concatenations of the original words (e.g., works, worker, workers, working). This process generated a final keyword list of 83 words (see Appendix). Finally, because phrases like "sex work," "sex worker," and "sex workers" overinflate frequencies of the words "sex" and "work," we looked up each phrase using AntConc's concordance feature, adjusting their frequencies according to their use as a concept on their own in each guide category. Table 2 lists the resulting top 15 words from each guide category.

Once we compiled our final keyword lists, we could complete our keyword analysis. We looked for patterns and dissonance (Miles & Huberman, 1994) within and between lists. In conducting this analysis, we looked for patterns of keyword rankings across the three lists and which keywords were clustered together in order to recognize themes. Our rhetorical analysis primarily focused on the top 15 concepts (see Table 2), but we also considered other lower ranked concepts in the word lists. To determine emphasis, we compared those top concepts with the lowest concepts in the same category: If a concept was mentioned more often within a category, we understood it as a demonstration of priority over a concept mentioned fewer times in that category.

As we analyzed, we kept in mind the sample differences between the guides in each category. That is, guides created for sex workers ($n = 16$) and guides created for allies ($n = 12$) considerably outnumbered guides created for clients ($n = 2$) in our sample. We also kept in mind that the boundaries between allies and sex workers were permeable, and at times people moved across boundaries. People sometimes left sex work for a while and returned later or returned temporarily and left again (Horning, 2019). This permeable boundary between sex workers and allies could explain why some ally guides were written using a more colloquial style of language than might be found in typical workplace documentation and in truncated descriptions of risk because of assumptions of personal familiarity with sex work. With these considerations in mind, we analyzed the top-15 concepts in each category, identifying several clear differences between the sets of guides.

Affordances of Professional Sex Work Identity

Our analysis of the patterns of keywords within and across the three categories reveals a keen awareness of the risks, potential harms, and potential for allyship and help that each audience could provide for sex workers both at the individual and collective levels. More specifically, the vocabulary points to a nuanced awareness of the affordances of professional sex work identity. Again, while we recognize that Faber (2002) would likely not have included street-level sex workers among the ranks of professionals in his study, we nevertheless find that each of these guides meets the criteria of professionalism as identified by Faber and adapted by Petersen (2014). Namely, professionalism is evidenced in these collected guides in three ways: audience awareness, social responsibility, and ethical awareness. By adapting CADA techniques (Ding & Kong, 2019) and conducting a keyword analysis, we found that the three subgenres of guides in our study each exhibit different communication techniques according to their different rhetorical situations and demonstrate professionalization and responsibility in various ways.

Table 2. Top-15 Concepts for Each Subgenre of the Sex Worker Guides.

Sex Worker			Ally			Client		
Rank	Count	Words	Rank	Count	Words	Rank	Count	Words
1	499	Work	1	1,188	Work	1	87	Sex
2	246	Sex	2	669	Service	2	63	Condom
3	234	Drugs	3	586	Sex	3	37	Work
4	200	Service	4	379	Law	4	36	Infection
5	196	Condom	5	324	Health	5	26	Respect
6	189	Information	6	302	Migrant	6	25	Service
7	153	Risk	8	245	Criminal	8	24	HIV/AIDS
8	148	Safety	7	243	Safety	7	19	Symptoms
9	147	Police	9	233	Rights	9	17	Limits
10	135	Health	10	224	Industry	10	16	STI/STDs
11	130	Pregnancy	11	208	Legal	11	14	Herpes
12	129	Support	12	201	Drugs	12	13	Body
13	117	Help	13	185	Information	13	13	Contact
14	107	Alcohol	14	174	Violence	14	13	Penetration
15	99	Infection	15	171	Police	15	13	Virus

Guides for Sex Workers

Guides for sex workers displayed considerations of audience in their basic construction. Half of these guides (8 of 16) contained less than 1,000 words (tokens). This finding indicates that sex worker guides were written to be read in a reasonable amount of time regardless of the reader's education level. For example, readers with a 2nd-grade reading level would likely be able to read and understand these materials in less than 10 minutes whereas readers with a 7th-grade reading level would likely be able to read and comprehend these materials in less than 5 minutes (Carver, 1989). Thus, creating relatively short guides increases the likelihood that the materials will be read by a wide audience of sex workers of varying reading abilities. It might also increase the participation of sex workers of varying writing abilities in the creation of the materials themselves.

In sex worker guides, 8 of the top-15 keywords (see Table 2) were also in the top-15 keywords in Ally guides, and 5 were in the top-15 keywords of client guides. Top concepts that were unique to sex worker guides (i.e., not located in the top 15 keywords of the other two subgenres) were "risk," "pregnancy," "support," "help," and "alcohol." The fact that risk is a top concept unique to the sex worker subgenre of guides suggests that sex workers, the authors of these guides, consider risk mitigation to be primarily the responsibility of sex workers themselves rather than the organizations meant to offer supportive services to them. Sex worker guides ranked second in total types of unique word variety (5,968 types; see Table 1), which indicates that the level of description and word choice used to communicate peer to peer was less than what was needed to communicate with allies (7,677 types) but much more than what was needed to communicate with clients (1,485 types). This finding might seem counterintuitive, considering the permeable line between sex workers and allies and the greater overlap in top keywords between sex workers and allies than between sex workers and clients; however, sex worker and ally guides align in two purposes—the decriminalization of sex work and the mitigation of risk associated with sex work—whereas client guides align with the other two guide subgenres in just one purpose (mitigation of risk associated with sex work). The extra alignment of purpose between the sex worker and the ally guides could account for the need for more distinct words: The ally guides had more content to cover than did the client guides. But the significantly lower number of Client guides in our sample likely contributed to this difference; a more robust sample would likely increase the amount of word types in the subgenre.

As Table 2 shows, sex worker guides referred to "work" more than twice as often (499 times) as they referred to "sex" (246 times). Further, compared to the other two subgenres, sex worker guides showed greater variation in the terms used to denote different kinds of risks related to sex work (e.g., "drugs," "condom," "safety," "police," "health," "pregnancy," "alcohol," and "infection"). But terms relating to sexual health did not rank within the top-15 concepts and were located slightly lower on the overall list: "HIV/AIDS" (96 times, ranked 17th), "STI/STDs" (56 times, ranked 27th). "Police" were mostly referred to as potential risks. *XXX Guide: A Sex Worker Handbook* (Stella, 2010) instructs sex workers who experience issues with "aggressive, violent or arrogant police officers" to "take down as many details as you can about the officer(s) involved, especially the time of the incident, the car number and the badge number(s) of the officer(s)" (p. 19). But some sex worker guides frame the police as helpful public servants who should be cautiously obeyed. For example, *Keeping Safe: Safety Advice for Sex Workers in the UK* (UK NSWP, 2008) instructs sex workers to "give the police all the details about the attack, however intimate, including anything unusual you noticed about the attacker" (p. 47). These two different instructions about interacting with the police as a sex worker (rather than just a member of the public) indicate the extra risks sex workers must manage as part of their job.

Guides for Allies

Considerations of audience were also apparent in the guides for allies. Although this subgenre ($n = 12$) has fewer guides than does the sex worker subgenre ($n = 16$), it has 32% more words, or tokens; 22% more unique words, or types; and an average of 49% and 42% more tokens and types per guide, respectively (see Table 1). This distinction indicates that ally guides, in general, were much longer than sex worker guides. Half of the sex worker guides (8) were under 1,000 words whereas only one ally guide (of 12) was under 1,000 words in length. Besides the one short ally guide (345 words) and the one long ally guide (34,124 words), the rest of the ally guides averaged 6,355 words, more than 12 single-spaced pages of text (Dexter, n.d.). One reason ally guides are longer might be because they cover topics that require more in-depth discussion (e.g., the operation of allyship, media representations, legal matters, preferred language for talking about sex work, and issues of health and safety). The breadth and complexity of such topics demand longer guides, and allies tend to be motivated to read them. Although sex worker allies are often former sex workers themselves (Horning, 2019), many allies have trained to be professionals in fields such as social work, law, and medicine, so their training has accustomed them to reading longer documents as part of their professional practice. The high word counts suggest that both authors and audiences would need an increased tolerance for extended writing and reading and the associated skills. The varying lengths of documents demonstrate awareness of the different rhetorical situation for each guide.

Eight of the top-15 keywords in ally guides (see Table 2) were also in the top-15 keywords of sex worker guides, and three were in the top-15 keywords of client guides. Top concepts that were unique to ally guides were “law,” “migrant,” “criminal,” “rights,” “industry,” “legal,” and “violence.” These unique top concepts indicate that along with advocating for decriminalizing sex work and mitigating risks associated with sex work, another purpose of these guides is to assist with navigating the legal system that affects sex workers. Ally guides contained the highest number of unique words among the three subgenres (see Table 1), which tracks with our prior assertion that these guides have more topics to cover and thus contain more distinct words.

Similar to the sex worker guides, ally guides used the word “work” (1,188 times) more than the word “sex” (586 times). Further, the ally guides prioritized and clarified the relationship between sex workers and the institutions around them, as shown by the top concepts: “law,” “migrant,” “criminal,” “rights,” “industry,” “legal,” “violence,” and “police.” The prioritizing of these terms shows a particular interest in the risk associated with legal concerns. Ally guides, then, aim to make institutional practices safer for sex workers to receive services and to make workers aware of the risk that institutions could pose. One way to do so is by honestly discussing the risks incurred by sex workers in dealing with these institutions. *Let’s Talk About Sex Work: Report of the REAL Working Group* (Real, 2016a) states that “police hold a great deal of power and have leverage over sex workers that can sometimes verge on abuse, particularly if the workers are not aware of their rights under the law” (p. 42). For example, a sex worker incurs abuse by police when the police fail to act or even show concern regarding violence perpetrated against the sex worker. The *Let’s Talk About Sex Work: Resource Guide* (Real, 2016b) states that

> predators may or may not present themselves as clients but their intention is to inflict harm not to purchase a service. They may seek out sex workers specifically because they perceive us to be easy targets due to criminalization and

> stigma; we are less likely to report an assault to the police, and if we do, we are less likely to be taken seriously. (n.p.)

Further, sex workers can be victimized by the police themselves. *Let's Talk About Sex Work: Report of the REAL Working Group* (Real, 2016a) indicates that "several of the participants spoke of having police as clients; they explained that they traded sexual services for police leniency—a phenomenon that is certainly not unique to our community" (p. 42). By validating the risks that sex workers face in seeking support from institutions, such as abuse of power by police, these ally guides expose the areas of institutional change that are necessary for effectively supporting sex workers.

Guides for Clients

Although the guides for clients subgenre included only two guides, the difference in length and subject between these two guides indicates that the writers were aware of their audience in designing these guides. The long length of Stella's (2004) *Dear Client* (6,702 words), which is over 12 single-spaced pages (Dexter, n.d.), indicates an assumption that the clients who are willing to take the time to read a general guide about engaging safely with sex workers have a higher level of reading habituation and are comfortable with reading longer texts. And the short length (626 words) of *Tips for Clients* (TLC-Trust, 2006) and its specific scope indicate that this guide is meant to enhance existing knowledge of engaging in sexual activity with sex workers rather than provide general information about this activity.

Five of the top-15 keywords in the client guides (see Table 2) were also in the top-15 keywords of the sex worker guides, and three of the client guides' top-15 keywords were in the top-15 keywords of the ally guides. Top concepts that were unique to client guides were "respect," "HIV/AIDS," "symptoms," "limits," "STI/STDs," "herpes," "body," "contact," "penetration," and "virus." These unique top concepts indicate that the client guides' focus was primarily concerned with issues concerning the interaction between clients and sex workers. The guides' backchanneled inclusion of respect and limits serves to mitigate sex worker risk. In other words, to prevent client-perpetrated violence, sex workers created guides to teach clients about respecting the limits of sex workers as professionals.

Guides created by sex workers for clients also focused heavily on client health, as shown by the top concepts "condom," "infection," "HIV/AIDS," "symptoms," "STI/STDs," "herpes," "body," and "virus." This list also points to an attempt to outline a proper client–provider relationship (e.g., "respect," "limits," and "service.") In contrast to the sex worker guides and the ally guides, the top-15 concepts of the client guides show little criminal concerns or concerns about the relationship between clients and institutions. Words indicating such concerns—"safety" (6 times, ranked 37th), "violence" (2 times, ranked 49th), "security" (2 times, ranked 47th), "criminal" (1 time, ranked 56th), "law" (1 time, ranked 57th), "legal" (1 time, ranked 58th)—appeared infrequently. Although our sample of client guides was small ($n = 2$), neither of them mentions the police, a subject that sex worker and ally guides each discussed at length. But matters relating to crime were not discussed in client guides. As we have stated, client guides are produced by sex workers for sex workers, and the risks discussed in the *Dear Client* (Stella, 2004) guide and the *Tips for Clients* (TLC-Trust, 2006) guide were risks, like sexually transmitted infections, that both sex workers and clients had to bear. But the *Tips for Clients* guide, which is written by sex workers for disabled clients engaging in sex with sex workers, explicitly frames the sex-work environment as a source of risk for clients with a disability:

> If you are disabled … it is important that you hire a sex worker who is highly professional and good at his or her job. … Street based [sic] sex workers often have drug problems and the street environment can pose other problems including opportunities for violence and theft. (p. 1)

This passage demonstrates risk communication from the marginalized to the marginalized, helping clients with a disability to recognize that they risk being victimized in sex worker–client interactions.

The Making of Sex Work as Work

Returning to our research question—How do user guides discuss risk among sex workers?—we found that these guides codify professional standards for sex work and showcase sex work as a professional activity as a way of mitigating risk. In producing these documents, the sex workers are inviting interested parties—stakeholders, allies, clients—to treat them as professionals and thereby partake in mitigating risk. In this way, the professional communication produced by the sex workers in these guides is risk communication in the conventional sense in that it clearly addresses potential risks. But these guides also demonstrate risk communication in a less obvious sense: The very act of writing about these topics is a way of creating safety. In other words, the legitimation of sex work contributes to the safety of both sex workers and clients and is in itself a harm-reductionist strategy.

Part of the process of recognizing a practice as professional is to write down knowledge rather than continue conveying it orally in anecdotes or lore. Writing makes knowledge distributable, tangible, and citable. In societies that privilege writing over orality (Cibangu, 2009; Ong, 1986), professional practices acquire added weight when codified in writing.

Further, drawing from Faber's (2002) criteria, we recognize that sex workers are professional communicators when they demonstrate and draw on their relationship to their audience, acknowledge a broader social responsibility, and exhibit ethical awareness of their work (p. 312).

Relationship to Audience

Faber (2002) argued that "professionals have an integral relationship to a specific and known audience" (p. 312). The authors of each of the three guides in this study displayed a relationship to their audience in terms of document length, design, and targeted content. Each subgenre of the guides (sex worker to sex workers, sex worker to allies, and sex worker to clients) varies in length relative to the audience's needs and focuses on the concerns of its unique audience (e.g., sex worker guides cover a range of risks, ally guides emphasize institutions, and client guides focus on helping clients stay safe.

Social Responsibility

Faber (2002) claimed that "professionals have a social responsibility that transcends their local occupational tasks" (p. 313). The authors of these guides demonstrated a sense of social responsibility to their fellow sex workers by seeking to help each other stay safe, by enabling their allies to care for other sex workers in the world, and by helping clients to be respectful to sex workers they hire. They also demonstrated social responsibility to clients so that clients will be aware of their own potential risk. Each guide speaks from a disempowered vantage point to others who might be disempowered themselves with the goal of self-empowerment. The fact that sex workers create and distribute these guides at all is a sign of their professional responsibility to each other and to society.

Ethical Awareness

In this study, we also recognize that the authors of these guides demonstrated an ethical awareness through their endeavors to legitimize their expertise and knowledge as sex workers. Further, these authors demonstrated their ethical awareness by freely sharing their professional, hard-earned knowledge in order to keep newcomers (i.e., their competition) to the sex work profession safe. These guides, then, serve as evidence of the authors' professionalism because they exhibit an ethical awareness of the different kinds of risks involved in sex work (e.g., sexual diseases, drug abuse, institutional violence, sexual violence).

Also, these guides, in part, demonstrate the formalization or codification of the risks that many sex workers share. Safety comes from talking openly about activities that put sex workers at risk and sharing public resources such as social services so that sex workers can have access to these resources in a manner that is equal to that of non–sex workers. Thus, communicating professionalism is key to mitigating risk for sex workers.

In sum, risk communication traditionally flows from the powerful (corporations, government agencies) to the vulnerable (audience members who risk the consequences of threats to their property or well-being). This study has expanded the scope of risk communication by including documents that are initiated and exchanged extrainstitutionally by vulnerable populations to empower themselves when corporations and government agencies demonstrate little concern or responsibility for their safety and take no action to ensure it. By focusing on sex workers as one group that exemplifies such populations, we argue for expanding the canon of professional communication to include the forms of risk communication produced by vulnerable groups as rich genres for study and topics for scholarly conversation. We argue that some of the most important TPC is done outside institutions by people without formal credentials in their area of expertise. Further, we recognize this legitimation of extrainstitutional risk communication as social justice work because it advocates for the concerns faced by sex workers, people who face the injustice of being denied access to the basic services and rights enjoyed by "legitimate" workers.

This kind of scholarship is still new to our field, so we have detailed our methods, specifically our adaptation of CADA techniques and keyword generation (Ding & Kong, 2019), in order to support others who want to take up similar methods for social justice work with materials produced by or for marginalized groups. By shining a spotlight on sex work, we hope to raise awareness of the precarity of sex workers and reduce the stigma traditionally associated with sex work. To this end, we have taken a stance in solidarity with sex workers, demonstrating how they meet Faber's criteria of professionalism in their risk communication documents and carrying out our research methods with an ethic of care.

Sex workers are professionals—some of them experts in their field—who are rendered vulnerable by criminalization and discrimination yet empowered by their risk communication. If these guides empower members of this hypermarginalized group, they might work as well for others who work at the margins of society. For example, we are aware that some groups—undocumented workers and unlicensed vendors, to name two—are creating and distributing DIY forms of professional risk in order to stay safe and keep each other safe.

We opened this article by citing the phrase "no human involved," the notation used by police forces to indicate that a crime involved victims beyond the pale of society and was therefore not of high importance. We suggest that the professional features of the sex work guides we examined—content customized to specific audiences, acknowledgments of social responsibility, and displays of ethical awareness—not only establish safe work practices and legitimize sex work but also help reassert the humanity of sex workers. In short, communicating professionally legitimizes not just the work but the workers. Of course, people should not have to communicate professionalism in order to be seen as human, but for those who have been denied human standing, professional communication might be one way to reclaim it.

Appendix

Key Concept List (Headwords Indicated With an Asterisk)

access
  activities
  advice
  agency*
  alcohol
  attack
  avoid
  blood
  body
  business
  care
  community
  conditions
  condom*
  contact

control
criminal*
doctor
drink
drug*
education
employees
enforcement
erotic
escort
gloves
gonorrhea
health
help
herpes
HIV/AIDS
immigration
industry
infection*
information*
issues
justice
labour
law*
legal
limits
migrant
money
mouth
pain
parlours
participants
parties
partners
pay
penetration
pill
police
policy
pregnancy*

problems
prostitution
protect
report
resources
respect*
rights
risk*
safety*
security
service*
sex*
sex workers
skin
STI/STDs
stigma
street
support
symptoms
syphilis
test
treatment
violence
virus
warts
work*
worker
workplace

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