Walk this way

The impact of mobile interviews on sensitive research with street-based sex workers

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Introduction

We were commissioned by a small third-sector organization in London in 2010 to conduct an evaluation of the services they offered to street-based sex workers (SBSWs) in the area (Sanders-McDonagh & Neville, 2012). While the organization as a whole worked largely with young people, there was at the time a sub-section within the organization, known as the Women's Open Spaces project (WOS), which worked specifically with this client group. Sex-working women in the area were offered a range of services, including twice-weekly drop-in sessions and outreach support three-four times a week.

The drop-in and outreach sessions were normally co-delivered with other local organizations, which dealt with the same client group, but had a different focus (e.g. drug-specific projects or homelessness projects etc.). A large number of the SBSW client base who engaged with WOS had issues with addiction (e.g. alcohol, heroin, and/or crack cocaine), and many had been street-homeless or had precarious accommodation arrangements (short-term hostel accommodation, couch surfing, etc.). Many women had been in prison for petty offences (soliciting, shop-lifting, etc.), and several were seeking treatment for mental health issues. Some of the women accessed services through *both* the drop-in and outreach, while others used only one or the other (with the most vulnerable clients unlikely to attend drop-in sessions). The main aim of WOS was to support this client group by offering a harm-reduction approach to managing various aspects of their lifestyle – helping them to deal with addiction, providing support for accessing health services (for both mental and physical health), advocating for them with statutory agencies (including prison and probation, local council services, and police), and offering tailored plans to help them stabilize their lives. There was no expectation that women would exit sex work or stop using drugs/alcohol in order to continue to use the service, although if women expressed a desire to make such changes in their lives, the organization worked to support these needs. The drop-in services ran twice a week in the evenings, and were open only to current or former female SBSWs. Women were offered a hot meal as well as other amenities (hot showers, laundry facilities, workshops, and activities), and could also access a range of services (housing/benefits advice and help, drugs counselling, sexually transmitted infections, and health checks, and generalized support services). Many of the women had been attending the drop-in for years, and those who had long-term relationships with the centre spoke of the staff as family rather than support workers. Women who accessed drop-in services on a regular

basis were more likely to be in a stable moment in their lives, and were often engaging with specific harm-reduction strategies (including methadone treatment, safer injecting practices, or other drug treatment services). It was often difficult for women experiencing particularly chaotic moments to attend; their engagement with the drop-in was far more sporadic and they were more likely to be engaging in risky behaviours with regard to drug use and safe working practices.

As such, the outreach team offered an important service to SBSWs who were unable to visit the drop-in, and keeping in touch with them during periods of intense drug-use or mental health crises was incredibly important. While the drop-in services were reserved exclusively for female sex workers, outreach services extended to the wider street population. This was in part because of funding arrangements with other organizations (e.g. homelessness projects or drugs projects would jointly fund outreach with WOS), and in part because it allowed for SBSWs to connect with outreach workers in the first instance without necessarily divulging that they engaged in sex work. As such, the outreach remit allowed for a broader engagement with people who shared many of the same difficulties experienced by SBSWs in relation to health and well-being, which carried with it a range of other benefits. As many of the people living on the streets in this area knew each other, there was a clear sense of community amongst these populations; by working with everyone on the street, it was often easier for the outreach team to locate particular clients through informal networks, and helping the friend or partner of a sex-working woman, for example, might also make it easier for her to access services if this was something they wanted to do together.

The problem with semi-structured interviews

In order to gain a full and varied impression of the complex processes involved in engaging with SBSWs, we employed an ethnographic approach over a ten-month period. We attended drop-in sessions regularly, meeting clients and building relationships and trust with these women. We were able to observe the ways in which drop-in workers engaged with women, and how they constructed and maintained relationships. Towards the end of the ethnographic study, we carried out interviews with all WOS staff, staff from other organizations that worked with WOS (including third sector and public sector organizations), and with some of the SBSWs who were accessing the service. Our initial research design included semi-structured interviews with sex-workers at the drop-in sessions. The drop-in was a safe space for these women, and they often talked about the centre as a caring environment. Having spent a great deal of time in the drop-in before we did any interviews, we were able to build a rapport with many of the women and get to know them.
Our approach to interviews was to avoid asking questions that might cause women to feel uncomfortable or uneasy. However, as we were charged with evaluating the service, this meant that asking some direct questions about sex work

environments, mental health, and addiction were necessary, but we were careful to frame questions in such a way as to focus on the key issues related to service delivery specifically. The interviews consisted of twelve questions (with prompts for each question) and interviews were conducted in a private room away from the main drop-in area. Taking part was completely voluntary, and women could withdraw from the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question. We also gave the participants the option of having their interview recorded on a device, or simply taking notes while they spoke. Some women with whom we had very good relationships decided not to take part, and we felt assured that those who did take part were happy to do so. Interviews were recorded with the participants' permission, and their names and identifying details removed to safeguard their anonymity.

While both researchers had considerable experience researching vulnerable groups, the project presented a number of logistical and ethical issues we had not previously encountered. We would often schedule an interview with a woman on a particular date, but given the complexity of their lives, it was often difficult for them to keep appointments and on several occasions they simply did not turn up. We tried a more relaxed approach to scheduling, asking women as they arrived at the drop-in if they might like to do an interview later that evening. While this approach was more successful, it presented some challenges with regard to informed consent. As many of the women were using drugs and alcohol regularly, they sometimes turned up at the drop-in under the influence. It was sometimes difficult to tell when someone was in an altered state until we were in the interview room with them. In one situation a woman who had agreed to be interviewed asked if she could reschedule because she was on a come-down and felt really awful and did not think she could sit alone in the room and answer questions because: 'I just don't feel myself at all'. The next week when she came back, she seemed more composed, and was happy to do the interview but once we were in the interview room we could clearly smell alcohol. The interview was, once again, postponed.

We also found that our informal interviews on the floor of the drop-in were richly detailed, with SBSWs sharing details of their situations comfortably and without hesitation, and it was clear that the informal space of the drop-in was far more conducive to meaningful exchanges than the formal interview space. While we had some excellent formal interviews with sex workers, we were concerned that we were missing the experiences of SBSWs who did not attend the drop-in regularly or those who felt uncomfortable in the more formal interview space. We decided that we would shadow the outreach team as they worked, getting a better understanding of what life on the street was like for women, trying to make sense of the challenges they faced, as well as trying to understand the different approaches that would be used off-site with sex workers (as opposed to in the drop-in space).

Any research that engages with vulnerable populations has an ethical responsibility to employ methods that seek to reduce power differentials, and strives to create a more egalitarian research relationship. While we recognize that this is not always possible, in this article we argue that the use of mobile methods with this

particular group in some ways disrupted the hierarchical relationship between researcher and participant. We maintain that these methods allowed for a better understanding of risks and dangers that SBSWs face, and suggest, in line with other scholars interested in these innovative methodological approaches (e.g. Myers, 2010; O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010; O'Neill, 2014), that our understanding of hard-to-reach or vulnerable populations is enhanced through creative approaches to research design. This article will focus specifically on the findings from shadowing the WOS team on their outreach walks, thinking about the value that they added to the project both in terms of our understanding of the organization and the impact of its services, but also in terms of creating a more ethical research process for women at the margins of society.

What do we know about walking methods?

We hope to add to the existing literature on mobile methods, and their impact on ways of seeing and understanding the social world. The article sits within a wider growing concern for the importance of place and mobilities in the social sciences (e.g. Casey, 1998; Thrift, 1999; Urry, 2007); with walking itself also receiving renewed attention in geography and anthropology, both as a social practice and as a research method (e.g. Edensor, 2010; Ingold, 2010; Ingold & Vergunst, 2008). Mobile interviews, also known as go-along interviews or walking interviews, can be viewed as a hybrid of interviewing and participant observation. They involve walking with participants as they go about their daily tasks (in this case, outreach), asking questions along the way. To this extent mobile interviewing can be seen as similar to the 'shadowing' technique employed by organizational researchers (McDonald, 2005). Mobile interviewing draws on aspects of naturalistic data-collection methods, and therefore shares a lot of the strengths of this methodology (Brown & Durrheim, 2009). Garcia et al. (2012: 1395) argue that researchers using this technique are thus able to 'explore the context with the participant in real time, with the participant in the role of expert guide explaining the meaning of the environment'. Mobile interviewing is becoming increasingly popular as a methodology to use when understanding an issue or experience relies heavily on knowing how participants perceive their environment (Garcia et al., 2012), as is the case with street-based sex work.

Our reasons for employing this methodology are fourfold. Firstly, we believe that mobile methods allow a depth and nuance to data collection that are not always possible via, e.g., traditional static interviews, especially with a research population like the one we worked with. It was clear that we were not able to reach all the women who engaged with the service by focusing on the drop-in alone, but it was also obvious that the formal interviews with our semi-structured questions were not working as well as we wanted – women were n'ot as comfortable or at ease as they were in the more relaxed and informal environment, and we wanted to see how researching sex workers in the spaces that they knew well might impact the quality of data.

Secondly, walking interviews are an ideal technique for exploring issues around people's relationship with space, as well as for attempting to directly connect what people say with where they say it (Jones et al., 2008), what O'Neill & Hubbard (2010: 51) have referred to as 'walking, talking, and sensing the urban environment.'

This approach is particularly relevant for this project because we were conducting research with a) people who walk as an essential part of their job (the outreach team and SBSWs), and b) people who walk as an essential part of their day-to-day existence (homeless SBSWs). Indeed, the populations the team worked with are often defined *by* their walking; with slang terms such as 'tramps' for homeless people and 'street walkers' for SBSWs emphasizing that these are people who spend a lot of time walking from place to place, moving through the urban environment. Radley et al. (2010: 44) discuss the centrality of walking to the experience of homelessness, arguing it is their 'enforced walking' that in many ways 'confirms their otherness'. Similarly, O'Neill et al. (2008) point out that it is the visible nature of street-based commercial sexual encounters that helps create and maintain the mythology of the SBSW as a dangerous 'Other'.

We accompanied the outreach teams on five outreach walks during the summer of 2011. We recorded and transcribed interviews and conversations where appropriate – recordings were not taken during direct interactions with women as it would have been difficult to obtain meaningful informed consent for this. We were introduced to any client or potential client the outreach team engaged with, and they were asked if they were happy to have us ask some questions and listen to their conversations. We took detailed fieldnotes during the walks, stopping at cafes for brief periods to jot down important details, and writing up full fieldnotes after the walk was over.

It has long been acknowledged that social work and welfare practices are founded on mobilities, as practitioners 'must move between and within the different areas of practice not only to be co-present with service users, but also to understand the safety and well-being of those they are professionally responsible for' (Roy et al., 2015: 155; see also Broadhurst & Mason, 2014). Walking along with outreach workers and meeting sex workers in spaces that they were familiar with gave us a better insight into the benefit of outreach services for this group, and also alerted us to the different issues and problems this group of women faced compared with the SBSWs who were able to attend the drop-in services regularly. We often asked sex workers to show us their local area, walking us around their part of the city so we could see what emerged as important for them.

Our third reason for choosing this methodology was related to research ethics. Places where street-based sex work (and attendant outreach) is done can be 'dirty, inhospitable and even dangerous' (Ng & McQuisition, 2004: 102), and sex workers had to negotiate liminal spaces in the city: deserted car parks, empty canal ways, refuse bin sheds, darkened alleys. We felt it was important to understand the risks and dangers that women faced when selling sex, and for them to be able to *show us* rather than describe. Indeed, it was often difficult for sex workers to articulate the nature of the places they lived and worked in the formal interviews,

so we hoped this would give us a better sense of the issues that they found difficult to put into words.

Finally, while our primary focus was on understanding the needs of sex workers and to assess how well the services they were offered actually worked, it was also important to get a sense of the challenges that outreach workers faced. What strategies did they employ for engaging this hard-to-reach group? How did the organizational ethos come through in their interactions with sex workers? Understanding and observing the outreach team and their interactions was just as important as speaking to the women themselves, as the dynamic and dialogue between the outreach workers and SBSWs reveals a great deal about how trust and rapport are established, and how successful interventions can be implemented and refined to achieve the best possible results for women working on the streets.

Findings

Meeting sex workers on their terms

One of the most important findings, in terms of what using mobile methods offered, was that it gave us the chance to see in great detail the difficulties that women faced in their day-to-day existence that would not have been clear from a standard interview. It also moved us out of our comfort zone, taking us to places that we were unfamiliar with, but that were well known to the sex workers we spoke with. The outreach walks often started late at night or very early in the morning, so even parts of the city that we were familiar with felt different as the temporal rhythms of the area changed. In our first set of fieldnotes from an early morning outreach walk that stretched from 5 am to 9 am, we reflect on how we felt about this initial journey:

> We are both exhausted, having walked over five miles in four hours and meeting dozens of people on the way. Who knew that the McDonald's in [London location] felt so scary at 5am? It was a hot summer morning and there were so many people out on the streets. Areas that we thought we knew well are so unfamiliar at this time, and we were both amazed at how many people were buying sex at this time in the morning. It's not a question that we had specifically asked before, but it's clear that a lot of trade is tradesmen on their way to work in the morning – not something we expected! (Fieldnote 8.2.12, August 2011).

The walks were uncomfortable in many ways (both physically and emotionally) but they gave us insights into the structure of the sex industry that we had not thought to ask, and which only became clear as we were walking along.

Sex workers were also much happier to meet us in their territory, and many were able to speak with authority about what was happening in the area in a way that suggested they were proud of their expert local knowledge and being able to share that with us. In some cases, sex workers that we had formally interviewed were

clearly more comfortable talking to us than they had in the interview setting, and in some cases even at the drop-in. In many ways going *out to them*, meeting them in a space that felt familiar to them, and walking with them as they showed us the places they inhabited seemed to shift the balance of power, giving women more confidence to talk about the issues they were having, or how services could be improved.

While we met a number of new clients on these walks, we were also able to speak with women who had not wanted to be formally interviewed at the drop-in. We asked one woman, who was well-known to us from the drop-in but had refused to be interviewed, why she felt okay taking us around her neighbourhood and being interviewed in this situation. She told us:

> Isabel: I dunno, just easier out here to talk than it is in that tiny room. This is my patch so I know nothing is gonna happen to me here, and I know I can just tell you to piss off when I want (laughs).

Isabel's suggestion that 'nothing is gonna happen to me here' says a great deal about the emotional insecurity she must have felt about doing the semi-formal interview. She did not find the drop-in itself a scary place, but the idea of doing a formal interview in the 'tiny room' made her feel anxious. Meeting her on her 'patch' gave her a stronger sense of emotional security, and gave us the opportunity to understand much more about her life and what she was experiencing than any semi-structured interview ever could.

Effective outreach strategies
Doing outreach work also involves having to work in adverse weather conditions and coming into close contact with people who are in very poor physical health or are struggling with mental health and related self-neglect (Chafetz, 1990), as well as the precariousness of living on the streets. The challenges the outreach team faced in delivering services were far more complex, and often more dangerous than those they faced at the drop-in. While our formal semi-structured interviews with the outreach team highlighted some of these issues, the mobile interviews gave a real-world insight into how these presented, and the strategies used to effectively manage difficult or dangerous situations.

We went out as part of the team, engaging with clients and getting a sense of how the outreach teams built rapport with new clients, how they sought to help clients that were well-known to them already, and also how they engaged with other inhabitants of these spaces, including residents and tenants, police, and statutory or third sector organizations (e.g. hostel workers and managers, community support workers, etc.). Our aim was not simply to observe as impartial outsiders, but to engage as fully as possible with the target client groups they encountered. We recognized, of course, that we could offer little in the way of practical support to sex workers, but where we could offer some form of emotional or personal help we did this. In this way, we were both able to get a sense of the types of spaces and places sex workers inhabited and the issues they faced living and working on the streets.

The clients with whom outreach workers engage are often isolated and disenfranchised, and have minimal resources and poor access to social services (Ng & McQuisition, 2004). Outreach work is therefore based on developing dynamic relationships between outreach workers and their clients in order to provide them with an appropriate range of valuable services (Manfred-Gilham, Sales & Koeske, 2002). This is achieved through frequent and consistent contact with clients on the streets or in other community-based settings, 'meeting clients where they are: both geographically and existentially' in order to help them with immediate needs such as clothing, food, medical care/supplies, emergency shelter, and housing, and gradually persuading them to accept more specialized services through the development of trust (Fisk et al., 1999: 232-233).

As the spaces in which interviews take place can provide a cue for participants' narratives, mobile interviews have the potential to move beyond simply gaining responses to questions, rather, they can offer us the ability to unpick more experiential understandings of these places (Housley & Smith, 2010). Through generating a deeper understanding of movement and the relationship between people and place, we can uncover new meanings and understandings of people's lives that are psychosocial: structural, cultural, and simultaneously 'deeply embedded in subjectivity' (Back, 2014; Frosh, Pheonix & Pattman, 2004: 42; Ingold, 2010). To this extent, mobile interviews may 'help reveal some of the place and practice-based insights of participant observation without the intensity and time commitment ethnography demands' (DeLyser & Sui, 2013: 5). One experience in the field helps makes this process clear:

> We came across Anne-Marie today, a sex worker we had met at the drop-in a few weeks ago. She had been on a methadone treatment plan following a successful stint in rehab, and had been clean for a number of months. Today we saw her dancing and singing and talking to herself in front of a block of flats near [London location], looking very dishevelled. As we approached we could see that she had been picking and scratching her face, and the outreach team told us they thought she was high on crack. They approached her slowly and gently called out her name, she turned and recognized the outreach team, and smiled. She came over to say hello and started talking excitedly, going a mile-a-minute, but was completely incoherently. It was impossible to make sense of what she was saying, and she clearly wanted to go back to her pacing and dancing, so the outreach team put a card in her pocket so that she might remember that she had seen them and spoke to them. We left her to move on, as there was nothing more the team could do for her in that moment. (Fieldnote 7.20.15, July 2011).

It was clearly important for Anne-Marie, even in that state of confusion to come and say 'hello' to the team. She clearly knew and trusted them, and was pleased to see them, even if only for a few minutes. The outreach team, after we left the immediate area, had a more complicated emotional reaction.

> Interviewer: How did you feel about what just happened?
> Karen (outreach worker): It's so disappointing, you know? She'd been doing so well and now we're back to square one. She's going to get kicked out of her hostel as they have a strict no drugs policy and we'll have to start all over again. It happens all the time but she'd been clean for months so I thought she might have turned the corner. It's just really annoying.

For us as researchers, it was hard to see this woman we had met over the past year in such a completely altered state. While some women do attend the drop-in while or immediately after they have been using, it was rarely as dramatic as this moment, and it felt both upsetting and frightening. We were sad for the outreach team who felt they had lost much of the ground they had gained, and sad for Anne-Marie who would likely be made street-homeless again. She had been particularly happy about her progress, so it was difficult to watch that moment. Seeing how the outreach team dealt with her and being able to witness first-hand what it means when a client regresses after making significant progress was far more meaningful than hearing about it as part of a standard semi-structured interview with the outreach team, or hearing Anne-Marie discuss this moment at a later date.

Managing difficult emotions
While this situation was emotional for us as researchers and for the outreach team, there were a number of situations where we experienced clients who were frightening. This particular organization worked with a chaotic, fearful, and sometimes angry group of people, and part of walking with them was seeking to understand how they managed to get this particular group of challenging clients to trust them, with the aim of engaging them in harm-reduction practices. Approaches to these participants tended to involve gentle but repeated contact on different outreach sessions, humour, an openness to physical contact (shaking hands, hugging etc.), and a shared knowledge of, and comfort with, both the spaces they encountered clients in and the street communities surrounding them. This normally worked incredibly well, and it was obvious how a simple handshake or a hug could visibly make someone happy.

Street populations, often with very good reason, are sceptical about interventions, 'treatment', and the work of social services (Levy, 2004). Even particular individuals living on the streets who recognize the potential benefits of the services being offered to them may reject outreach because of past bad experiences with what they see as related services (e.g. social workers, local councils, the police), clinicians (e.g. involuntary hospitalization), or because treatment entails sharing personal details that may evoke powerful feelings such as shame, guilt, or anger (Levy, 2004). On a number of occasions we witnessed (potential) clients initially refusing to engage with the outreach teams, stating their distrust of 'official' agencies that they were scared of, or discuss previous negative encounters with other state officials more generally (e.g. the police, borders agencies). In one particular incident, we came across a sex worker and her male partner who were new to the area:

This afternoon we went to meet a new client. The outreach team had a description of a Scottish female sex worker from a homelessness referral agency. She was known to be sleeping rough in a local park and we had a physical description of her, and some indication of where she was staying in the park. We came across a secluded area of the park and could see a tent in the area described in the referral letter. As we approached, a man emerged from the tent and immediately started shouting at the team to 'fuck off out of here'. The team stopped moving and waited while he continued to shout and swear. It was unclear what the exact issue was initially, but he eventually calmed down as his female partner emerged from the tent and tried to intervene. Eventually she got him calm enough to come over to at least see who we were. The team talked calmly and quietly, explaining who they were and why they were there. As soon as it was clear they were not there to evict them or move them on, the male partner changed demeanour entirely and became friendly and even jovial. He said they had a recent run-in with someone from the council and he was just trying to keep him and his girlfriend safe. He eventually apologized for his behaviour, and the team were able to laugh about it after a few minutes. We were able to give the woman who had been referred details about a range of services, including the drop-in. She then told us that she also had a friend who had moved to London with them, who was sleeping rough in an area not far away, asking could we also help her. She brought us to where her friend was staying, and on the way told us her boyfriend was smoking a lot of skunk and had been aggressive towards her. The team were able to give her help and advice about this issue, as well as key information about how to keep safe in the area when she was working (Fieldnote 8.4.1, August 2011).

Outreach work can provide opportunities to intervene in a timely way with individuals who otherwise would be unlikely to seek help, often because of the fear of judgment or sanctions from police or other formal statutory agencies (Ng & McQuistion, 2004). Street-based individuals often develop their impressions of services from interactions with outreach workers (Lam & Rosenheck, 1999). If initial impressions of outreach workers are favourable, more individuals may be willing to consider developing relationships with service organizations more generally (Levy, 1998; Ng & McQuisition, 2004). The 'most critical ingredient' in 'doing outreach' is therefore not providing resources or even advocacy, but the establishment and maintenance of a trusting and meaningful relationship between the outreach worker and the client (Hopper, Mauch & Morse, 1990: 263).

While our semi-structured interviews provided us with similar data on the nature of the situations that the outreach team faced when meeting new clients, it was only by accompanying the outreach workers that we could see what challenges existed both for them as well as the women engaged in sex work. Developing and maintaining such a relationship was often labour intensive and emotionally and clinically challenging (Morse et al., 1996). James (1992) characterized care work as comprising 'organizational labour + physical labour + emotional labour' and in

many ways outreach work can be seen as a similar combination of high intensity labours. Several encounters with street populations during outreach highlighted the difficulty that WOS workers faced in finding balance – of being able to intervene with vulnerable clients and develop trusting relationships, while at the same time negotiating individuals who were not always easy to work with.

Conclusions

It was only by walking with the outreach workers that we were able to truly understand the emotional impact of working with groups of people who have incredibly high-level needs, and who trust very few people. The fact that the people we came across as we walked with the outreach team knew the workers by name, shared personal stories about their lives, and clearly trusted the team to help them with issues related to sexual health, problems with police and arrests, and other sensitive life events suggests that the outreach team have built meaningful relationships with people who often have very little stability in their lives. This was also evident from spending time in the drop-in centre, and recognizing that the WOS team were seen as family for women who sometimes had few connections with their own biological families.

Working with the outreach team who had already built respect with precarious street populations meant that the data we gathered lead to a more valid and reliable representation of the realities of the difficulties street-based sex workers and other street people faced. We argue that by 'walking with', we learned more than any single semi-structured interview could reveal. By walking and doing, we can 'do' research in a way that ensures that we capture realities that are impossible to understand by interviewing an outreach worker within the safe, quiet enclosure of their office. Mobile research offers the opportunity for more active knowledge (co)production and the chance to 'observe spatial practices in situ' (Kusenbach, 2003: 436; see also DeLyser & Sui, 2013). Kusenbach (2003) suggests that mobile interviews should reflect, as much as possible, 'natural' everyday journeys, which are familiar to the individual, and that researchers should avoid controlling the direction of the interview, which is something we tried to do with this project.

Pink, Hubbard, O'Neill & Radley (2010: 3) argue that walking interviews are not merely an 'attempted short cut to understanding other people's everyday experiences' but can instead act as an 'inspiring route to understanding'. This was certainly the case for our research, and it was only through using mobile methods that we were able to glean insights into the real lived experiences of sex workers. Our attempts at engaging SBSWs in a more formal setting proved far less effective than going out to meet them on their terms and in places that felt comfortable for them. Not only did this allow for research that felt more ethically sensitive and appropriate to this particular group, but it shifted the balance of power away from the 'expert' researcher, to the sex workers themselves, who felt more able to take up that 'expert' position. Carpiano (2009: 267) describes mobile interviews as a 'rapport builder' that helps to circumnavigate potential perceived power dis-

parities between interviewer and interviewee, and allows the researcher to interact with any given group on a deeper level, and this was certainly true for this participant group.

In conclusion, we maintain that our understanding of the lived experiences of SBSWs in the project would have been mono-dimensional without the use of mobile interviews. By moving out of the relatively 'safe' space of the drop-in, to the spaces where SBSWs worked and lived, we were able to meet them on more equal ground. We suggest that this not only enriched our data, and our understanding of the complexity of sex workers' lives, but it also produced a more ethically robust research project that gave sex workers a greater sense of control of their engagement with the research process, and sought to acknowledge their expert role in a meaningful way.

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