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## Sex Worker Organisations and Political Autonomy

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### Statement of Intent Paper 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2013



*Scarlet Alliance and Empower Foundation, Perth PRIDE Parade, Northbridge, Western Australia, Oct 07.  
Photo by Elena Jeffreys*

## 1. Background and Research Problem

I am a sex worker, a leader of the transnational sex worker movement, I have worked in a range of sex worker led peer education funded projects and I have published on both the sex worker movement and public policy relating to sex work. In this PhD research project I am looking at **how sex worker organisations maintain the capacity for autonomous political action while also receiving external funding (from governments and private donors).**

Right around the world today, sex workers are organising. This is occurring locally, nationally, regionally and transnationally (Doezema and Kempadoo 1998; West 2000). The literature often describes the development of the sex worker movement in three phases or 'waves' starting in the 1970s (Hardy 2010:91; Cora interviewed in Beer 2010:62-63). Of course sex workers engaged in a variety of political activities even before this (Gall 2011:11-15), but something new clearly began in the 1970s.

The first wave of sex worker activism began in North America (1973) and France (1975) (West 2000:106) where strong public campaigns were undertaken by workers against the criminalisation of sex work and against police intervention into sex workers' lives (Jenness 1993:1). These campaigns were inspirational for sex workers in other countries who began organising throughout the global north (Jenness 1993:3-5). In Australia, the first sex worker collective was also formed in the 1970s.

The second wave of sex worker organising began in the 1980s and followed from both a global problematisation of HIV/AIDS and the identification of sex workers as a community affected by HIV (Fiche in Pheterson 1989:110, Hunter 1992:113). Right around the world sex workers began mobilising for human rights – by fighting for condoms to be available in sex industry workplaces, by establishing strong networks for peer education, by forming autonomous sex worker organisations and lobbying for legal and policy reform (West 2010). In some parts of the global north, sex worker organisations started to be funded by government for prevention work associated with

HIV (Saunders 1999). This led to the appearance of some new tensions (Beer 2010:62). On the one hand, state funding enabled the consolidation of the sex worker movement via the establishment of funded sex worker organisations (Beer 2010:61). On the other hand, state funding threatened the potential for autonomous political action by sex worker organisations, particularly in their ongoing campaigns for law and policy reform and against state intervention in the lives of sex workers (Perkins 1994:158).

By the end of the 1990s a third wave of sex worker activism was becoming evident (Hardy 2010:93-94). This occurred as sex worker organisations were funded to attend international HIV conferences which provided new opportunities for global networking and activism (Doezema and Kempadoo 1998:21-22). Sex workers took full advantage of these opportunities to forge strong links between worker organisations in the global north and the global south. By the end of the 1990s sex worker organisations from the global south dominated the international sex worker movement (Doezema and Kempadoo 1998:23). The movement proceeded into the 2000s – and continues to the present - with a politics that embraces optimism, inclusion, anti-racism and anti-imperialism (Kempadoo 1998:23).

However, the issue of political autonomy and funding for sex worker organisations remains challenging. In many parts of the world (including in Australia) governments continue to both fund sex worker organisations and criminalise the activities of sex workers (Fawkes 2009). The political tensions associated with funding have also moved into the international/transnational realm as governments in the global north (most notably the USA) as well as private donors have become powerful actors in the funding of HIV aid projects in the global south. The politics associated with this funding has created significant new pressures for sex worker organisations globally.

It is widely acknowledged that sex worker organisations, and peer education programs in particular, provide the best and most cost effective way of preventing HIV (Fawkes 2013; Reynaga 2008). Consequently, funding for HIV prevention work has often been targeted for services delivered via sex worker organisations. At the same time, this funding can be driven by (even contingent upon) deeply problematic attitudes to sex work and sex workers (Beer 2010:67). For example, in the 1990s, the US government

stepped up to become a leading force in the prevention of HIV globally. Funds to support this program were delivered via PEPFAR (Presidential Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief) and flowed directly and effectively to many sex worker organisations in the global south (Dittmore and Allman 2013). However, with the election of George Bush, PEPFAR was amended to include a requirement for funding recipients to sign an anti-sex work “Pledge,” and affirm an anti-sex work stance in the policy of their organisation. The international sex worker movement has mobilised resistance to this pledge, because it excludes many sex worker organisations from receiving USAID and PEPFAR funding. There have been protests at large international HIV conferences (Kidd 2010). Governments have been lobbied to reject US aid funds because of the “Pledge,” and have subsequently refused to take the funds (Kaplan 2005). Sex worker organisations have also turned down funding because of the requirements of the “Pledge” (Manzano 2006; Bandhopadhyay, Seshu, and Overs 2009). The High Court in the USA has now overturned the “Pledge” (Grant 2013).



*Sex workers protest the “Pledge” at Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Sydney, 2007*

This is just one example of how the politics of funders can impact globally on sex worker organisations. The critical evaluation of relationships between organisations and funders is a major concern across a range of non-government sectors (Mooney 2005:276) throughout the world. Many organisations fear criticising or challenging their funders (Harmer et al. 2012:5; Onyx et al. 2009:229). In the current day it is relevant to ask sex worker organisations how they are managing these pressures and how they work to establish and maintain their capacity for autonomous political action.

## 2. Research Question

How do sex worker organisations manage the pressures associated with external funding and work to establish and maintain their capacity for autonomous political action?

I use the term 'organisations' to encompass a range of sex worker organisations, including unions. Some of the literature differentiates between sex worker organisations that are explicitly established as unions and those that are not (Gall 2006; Bucknall 2010) and argue that to be truly autonomous and to organise effectively an organisation must be structured like a union. I have argued previously that sex worker organisations funded by external funders are an example of labour organising in the same way that unions are (Jeffreys et al. 2011). Research in Argentina on Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de la Argentina (AMMAR) supports this conclusion (Hardy 2010).

## 3. Existing Approaches

There is almost no literature that directly explores the same research question as this proposed project. A recently completed PhD thesis (Beer 2010) and two publications (Campbell and Cornish 2009; Campbell and Cornish 2011) do broadly engage with the same issues but with some significant differences. I explore this literature in Section 3.1. In Section 3.2 I examine a range of other literature that is closely related to the concerns of this project: looking at the sex worker movement generally, assessments of the successes and failures of this movement, and some specific examples of the conflicts sex worker organisations' currently have with HIV funders. None of this literature directly investigates the capacity of sex worker organisations to achieve and maintain political autonomy, although it is broadly indicative of the challenges involved. In Section 3.3 I map other relevant literature: looking at how the same issues are managed in sectors outside of sex worker organisations. Specifically I look at the womens movement, the HIV sector, the global justice movement, post-soviet and post-socialist countries in Europe, and some research in Australia. This offers some insights into what issues may

arise in the investigation of the question when applied to sex worker organisations.

### 3.1 Directly Related Research

Sarah Beer's (2010) thesis on sex work law reform campaigns in Canada raised many complex issues about the history and influences of funding upon Canadian sex worker organisations. She argues that sex worker organisations' ability to establish and maintain capacity for autonomous political action was hampered by funding, and that this had an affect on the organisations' law reform campaigns.

In Canada sex worker organisations first received HIV funding in the 1980s. As the provision of HIV services became a priority for the organisations, campaigns for law reform were put on hold (Beer 2010:62). The HIV services, while vital for sex workers health, put the staff of sex worker organisations in direct conflict with law enforcement, creating a relationship with police that Beer labels as "paradoxical" (Beer 2010:64). The paradox is concerning the aims of the organisations, which includes law reform, and the organisations' capacity for autonomous political action, which Beer concludes is hampered by receiving funding from the Government they are trying to influence (Beer 2010:68). "Fanny", in interview with Beer explains "You can't get money from the Federal Government and then use that to battle them.." (2010:65). Beer summarises "... sex worker organisation reliance on state funding situates them in a way that undermines their political potential and efforts to dramatically reform the system" (Beer 2010:65).

In the last decade the Canadian sex worker movement found a structural solution to the paradox faced by their movement. In order to mount a successful law reform campaign, sex workers in Canada created specific organisations that do not receive any compromising funding (Beer 2010:68, 147). These organisations "reject funding to avoid bureaucratization, political suppression, or having to put on a 'public face'" (Beer 2010:68).

Beer's methodology was "multi-dimensional" and used "multi-site" ethnography

consisting of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, non-participant observation and document analysis across the Canadian sex worker movement (2010:46-47). My project will also use a qualitative methodology. Beer's interviews were coded into two topics, one being the "Sex Worker Rights Movement" (2010:55), which is where the bulk of the material exploring the question of capacity for political autonomy among the organisations emerged. Beer's participants self-selected for interview from a range of sex worker organisations in Canada.

One of the limitations of Beer's work is that she did not investigate the internal workings of the organisations (2010:55), looking instead on the process of law reform. Beer notes that the issues relating to sex worker organisations and their potential for autonomous political action are much more complex than her research was able to delve into, and that more "micro-level organizational research" is needed (2010:69). As such my question takes off where Beer's question ended. I will be looking at sex worker organisations' inner workings and using a case study approach on two specific organisations', asking unambiguously about the how sex worker organisations maintain the capacity for autonomous political acts, from funders.

The second large-scale research project that indirectly addressed the question of sex worker organisations management of funding pressure, and capacity for autonomous political action, is in the form of two case studies of sex worker HIV prevention projects, one outside of Johannesburg, South Africa (called the Summer Town project), and one in Kolkata, India (called the Sonagachi project) (C. Campbell and Cornish 2011; Cornish and Campbell 2009). Campbell and Cornish asked about the impact of funded peer education on the prevention of HIV transmission; the potential for political autonomy from funders was established as a secondary question once the issue emerged as important to the first question posed by the researchers. It was found that **autonomous sex worker control and leadership in the Sonagachi project gave their funded work a considerable advantage over the Summer Town project which had no sex workers involved in the leadership or design of the project** (Cornish and Campbell 2009:123). To summarise: Sonagachi project was able to maintain potential for political autonomy from their funders *and* create low HIV transmission, the Summer Town project did not achieve either measure. This is highly relevant to my research proposal.

One of the weaknesses of the Campbell and Cornish research is their choice of case studies. At the beginning of the research, the Sonagachi project was already known for its long-term success in HIV transmission prevention and sex worker political autonomy from funders, whereas the Summer Town project was just starting and had almost no infrastructure or activity. The two case studies were thus disparate and at extreme ends of the spectrum in terms of history, longevity and existing political autonomy. In contrast the project I am proposing will be case studies of two sex worker organisations that have similar infrastructure and history, and are both known to maintain potential political autonomy from their funders. In the Cornish and Campbell study, the capacity for sex workers organisations political autonomy from funders became a secondary question, however in my research proposal it will be central.

### ***3.2 Closely related research***

In this section I will explore the literature closely related to the question of sex worker organisations establishment and maintenance of autonomous political action. Early literature on sex worker organisations was generally pessimistic and proposed that politically autonomous action was unlikely or impossible. Recent literature is more optimistic, influenced by the longevity of the sex worker movement. There is a small body of literature that examines specific incidents of sex worker organisations response to funding pressure, including articulation of the importance of the ability to establish and maintain the potential for autonomous political action. Below I explore each of these themes briefly.

The main authors contributing to the pessimistic literature about sex worker organisations are Mathieu, O'Connell Davidson, Jeness, Fechner, Poel and Weitzer. To broadly summarise, most of these authors reach their pessimistic conclusions based upon the idea that sex work itself inherently lacks organisation and internal cohesion, and sex workers do not have power at work (Mathieu 2003; O'Connell Davidson 1998; Van der Poel 1995; Fechner 1994; Weitzer 1991). For example Mathieu describes sex work as "informal, competitive and violent" (2003:29), "unstructured" (2003:33) and

states that sex workers “lack of experience and political competence” (2003:45). O’Connell Davidson is committed to the idea that sex workers lack power in the workplace and conclude that therefore sex workers would be unable being able to organise, or if organised, would sex workers would not be able to be politically influential, for the same reason (O’Connell Davidson 1998).

In contrast, the optimists do not see sex worker organising as any more or less challenging than organising any other group of workers. Optimists, including Gall, Hardy, Beer, West and Day, disagree with this analysis. West argues that O’Connell Davidson’s conclusion about an inherent failure of sex worker organisations to effect political change are overstated, problematic and cynical (West 2010:107-108). West goes on to say that such a critique is “too abstracted from the specifics of national and local politics and is thus unduly pessimistic.” (West 2010:107). Gall asserts that O’Connell Davison does not understand that “**many of the obstacles facing ... sex workers, in generating self-organisation do not seem in a number of respects to be any more immovable than those which trade union movements have confronted since the beginnings of capitalist industrialisation**” (2006:54).

Specifically relevant to this research project is what the pessimists have had to say in regards to HIV funding. On this topic, Gall in 2010 summarised Weitzer, Jenness, Poel and Mathieu as follows:

These writers ... argued that the [sex workers’] collectives failed to counter being compelled to concentrate their work on health (of [sex workers]) and education (of public stereotyping) issues and move away from civil and human rights following the rise of AIDS. (2010:56)

As Gall describes above, the pessimists present sex workers’ uptake of funding in relation to HIV prevention as evidence of lack of sex workers’ political autonomy, particularly from funders. Jenness wrote in 1993 that HIV funding “led to the demise of the [sex worker] rights movement” and that participating in HIV funding arrangements meant that the movement “has at best circumvented and at worst abandoned original goal” (Jenness 1993:103). The pessimists predicted that the tensions associated with

receiving HIV funding would prove to be unresolvable.

The optimists argue the opposite; that HIV funding strengthened, rather than ended, the sex worker movement. The literature makes a number of points: HIV funding gave the movement a new legitimacy (Day 2010; Beer 2010:61); sex workers used HIV funding to formalise peer education and occupational health and safety (West 2000:108-109); participating in the HIV sector gave the movement a new platform from which to speak about sex worker rights (Day, Beer); sex workers were now positioned as experts on safe sex by the funders (Day 2010:817), and opportunities to meet and network internationally blossomed as a result of HIV funding (Doezema and Kempadoo 1998:22). None of these points are considered by the pessimists. This is not to say that HIV funding has only been beneficial to sex worker organisations. Below I will explore two examples in the literature of the compromising pressures sex worker organisations face in relation to HIV funding, and how those sex worker organisations responded.

In 2005, sex worker organisations in India were asked by USAID, the worlds largest contributor to HIV funding globally, to adopt an anti-sex work policy (Bandhopadhyay, Seshu, and Overs 2009:13). The organisations refused and “returned the funding” (Bandhopadhyay, Seshu, and Overs 2009:13-14). India was not the only place where resistance to this policy took place. The Brazilian Government rejected funds for the same reason (Kaplan 2005) and the sex worker organisation in Cambodia did also (Manzano 2006). What this literature tells us is that outright rejection of potentially compromising funding is one of the ways that sex worker organisations manage funding pressure.

In 2011, Empower Foundation, a sex worker organisation in Thailand, faced funding pressure to change the nature of their Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria funded work (Empower Foundation 2012). When Empower refused, they had their funding withdrawn (Empower Foundation 2012:13). In response, Empower Foundation demanded that the Global Fund change its funding parameters to “reflect the value of community and sex worker-led projects.” (Empower Foundation 2012:14). In this example the sex worker organisation is lobbying a large HIV funding body to develop funding policies that are more accommodating of their capacity for autonomous

political action.

The above examples describe sex worker organisations that manage funding pressure with confidence, and work deftly to maintain their capacity for autonomous political action. This concrete evidence in the literature challenges the pessimistic authors and finds instead that there are many reasons to be optimistic about sex worker organisations. I will now turn to very broadly related research, where similar questions have been asked of organisations in sectors other than the sex worker movement.

### ***3.3 Broadly related research***

The literature I describe below asks about generally about the relationship between receiving funding and maintaining the capacity for autonomous political action. I identify six sectors where this question has been asked, and distinguish observable themes. I then turn to two articles that identify how organisations have worked to establish and maintain their capacity for autonomous political action within a landscape pressure from external funders. In general this literature search has much to offer my project, and provides a rich and vast range of ideas to pursue and think about.

There are a range of relevant types of organisations described in the literature as being impacted by pressure associated with external funding. The contemporary women's movement is the sector with the largest array of material in relation to this (for examples see Lebon 1996; M. L. Campbell and Teghtsoonian 2010; Thiel 2010; Mendez 2002; Roggeband 2010; Knight and Rodgers 2012; Maheshwari 2011; Nazneen and Sultan 2009; Jafar 2006; Guenther 2011). Secondly, organisations in the HIV sector have been a topic of this question (Cornish and Campbell 2009; Kelly and Birdsall 2010; Letona and Upshur 2013; Mameli 2001; Mooney 2005; Spicer et al. 2011; Saunders 1999; Rau 2006; Bosia 2009; Comaroff 2007). Indigenous NGOs are also the subject of relevant literature (Arvin 2009; Trehan and Kocze 2009; Langton, 2012). Fourthly, the literature finds that NGOs in post-socialist and post-Soviet countries face pressures associated with external funding (for examples see Trehan and Kocze 2009; Thiel 2010;

Guenther 2011; Busch 2011; M. L. Campbell and Teghtsoonian 2010; Spicer et al. 2011; Harmer et al. 2012). The literature outlines that global justice movement NGOs face similar pressures (Morena 2006). Finally, there is pertinent Australian specific literature that has asked these questions (Spall and Zetlin 2004; Onyx et al. 2009). Each of these sectors offers different settings within which questions relating to organisations management of the pressures associated with external funding have been explored.

There emerges from this literature a series of significant themes, which I explain in detail below, and will now summarise. Common across the literature is the finding that funders have a desire for the organisations' they fund to be politically aligned with the politics of the funder. To achieve this outcome, funders use mechanisms to apply pressure upon the organisations they fund. Common across the literature are certain macro impacts that these pressures create within the funded organisations. These themes are important to this research project because they foreshadow the kinds of findings that could be expected from an in-depth study of sex worker organisations' management of such pressures. Finally I will discuss two research projects that explore how organisations both establish and maintain capacity for autonomous political action, even within a landscape of pressures associated with external funding.

The most conspicuous conclusion shared across the literature is that funders desire that the organisations they fund become are aligned to the politics of the funder (Mendez 2002:199). The literature uses a specific term to describe the process by which NGOs align themselves closely to their funders: "professionalisation" (Lebon 1996). Another terms used to describe this occurrence in the womens movement is "femocrat[isation]" (Beckman 1997). The literature illustrates that this preference by funders results in organisations reconstructing their politics. Harmer explains:

... under pressure from competing CSOs [NGOs], [grass-roots groups] reconstructed their identities to appear more professional, corporate and business-focused organizations in an effort to attract grants. (Harmer et al. 2012:8).

This alignment by organisations with the politics of the funder ("professionalisation") is

found across the literature to be a direct result of pressure from funders (Alvarez 2009:177). The organisations interviewed for the research projects of this literature are highly critical of this phenomenon; "...[funding] turned the civil society sector into robots that are just implementing donors' ideas" (Ukrainian NGO in interview...(Harmer et al. 2012:5). It can be concluded from the literature that term "professionalisation" is interchangeable in the literature with a deliberate loss by organisations of the capacity for potential political autonomy.

I will now turn to the mechanisms that funders use to create the pressures associated with "professionalisation," or loss of political autonomy. Competitive tendering and funding contracts emerge from the literature as noteworthy mechanisms (Harmer et al. 2012). In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan the competitive tendering process is found to have the power to change the political direction of NGOs, their leaders and staff (M. L. Campbell and Teghtsoonian 2010:193-196). Funders in Georgian, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine are using the mechanisms of funding contracts to *only* fund the NGOs that are not politically autonomous (Spicer et al. 2011:1752). These mechanisms are found to be pressuring organisations towards the short term project-based activities that are favoured by funders (Morena 2006:29). This is despite the evidence that the most effective funded programs are those that are long term (Cornish and Campbell 2009:124, 130). These mechanisms, and their apparent incompatibility with organisations' establishment and maintenance of autonomous political action are common within the literature.

The literature identifies some of the shared macro experiences that funding pressure creates within the everyday work of organisations. Organisations spend a disproportionate amount of time and energy applying for funding and negotiating with funders compared to the time and energy used for their actual funded activity (Mendez 2002:216). This has the impact of creating a great deal of anxiety among organisations' staff, volunteers and leadership (M. L. Campbell and Teghtsoonian 2010:184). Funders expect organisations to be knowledgeable about abstracted funding requirements, speak the language of the funders, negotiate on an equal footing with large funding bodies *and* also continue to be "local enough" to continue to receive the funding (Mendez 2002:219). This creates tensions for organisations in terms of time management and

prioritisation. When funding bodies do not deliver funding in a timely manner, awkward breaks in funding are created with impacts on staff retention and service delivery, as organisations have to operate services with not enough money (Harmer et al. 2012:5). Delayed payment of funding to organisations can also mean that services are interrupted or in some cases totally cancelled until the funder finally distributes the already approved funds (Kelly and Birdsall 2010:1585). The literature describes *most* organisations as facing a range of these factors simultaneously. For example organisations that do not receiving enough money are unable to do any practical work because staff workload is dominated by funding applications and reporting, therefore they are limited in their service delivery work and only run services that are most immediately needed, such as crisis care - unable to plan for longer term work (Thiel 2010:112). These practical effects are important to understand in the context of asking the how sex worker organisations manage these pressures.

To conclude this account of literature broadly related to my question, I will summarise two articles of significance that propose solutions to these tensions. In 2005 Jeff Cheverton conducted a comprehensive literature review of peak body organisations in Australia, United States and Britain, and identified that they experienced a tension between pressures from their funders and their capacity for autonomous political action (2005). Cheverton argues that the literature describes organisations' addressing this tension by **developing "clear, transparent governance practices that demonstrate how members' views are identified and represented."** (2005:427). To paraphrase, by focusing on the membership structures and accountability of organisations to members specifically, they counterweigh the pressures associated with external funding, and maintain their capacity for autonomous political action. Roggeband suggests a second solution: **organisations' reframing of funding to align with the politics of the organisation, rather than with the politics of the funder** (2010). In the Netherlands migrant women are positioned as "backward" and funding from Government is framed as an attempt to **"modernise" migrant women away from an allegedly oppressive "patriarchal" Muslim culture** (Roggeband 2010:943). The migrant womens organisations have responded by reframing politics of the funding. For example the leaders of funded migrant womens organisations lobby to bring Government attention to issues that are important to them, promote themselves as

experts and use the funds to do awareness raising work that will change the funders policies (Roggeband 2010:957). These solutions both draw upon the expertise of organisations - its membership and leadership - to allow more effective management of the pressures associated with external funding.

#### 4. Method

In order to answer the research question posed in this project a qualitative approach and mixed methods have been adopted. A qualitative approach allows for the collection and analysis of a wide range of different sorts of data (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:3) and is therefore particularly appropriate for a study that aims to create a nuanced understanding of how sex worker organisations manage the pressures of funding while establishing and maintaining the capacity for autonomous political action. The methods utilised include two case studies, document analysis, participant observation and interviews.

A case study method is particularly useful for limiting and focusing the scope of a large research project (Stake 2000:436). It also allows for an in-depth understanding of “how” and “why” questions (Yin 2002 in Schwandt 2007:29-30). The case studies selected for this project encompass two sex worker organisations – Scarlet Alliance in Australia and Empower Foundation in Thailand.

**Scarlet Alliance** is a national peak body of sex workers in Australia and has been in operation since 1989. It has a democratic structure with leaders elected at annual meetings and has been involved in a wide range of political campaigns and lobbying over the last two decades. The constitution clearly set out the organisations commitment to political autonomy (Scarlet Alliance 2011). Scarlet Alliance has strong relationships with a range of external funders, including the Australian Government. It has recently been funded by AusAID to support the development of peer education programs as part of HIV prevention programs in a number of Pacific countries. Members and leaders of Scarlet Alliance have also been highly critical of funding

paradigms in regards to a number of issues (Fawkes 2009; Fawkes 2006).

**Empower Foundation** is a national sex worker organisation in Thailand that formed in 1989. It has a democratic participatory structure, involving over **50,000 sex workers in the organisation since it formed in 1984** (Empower Foundation 2012:13). Empower Foundation engages in various service delivery activities as well as political activities. It has a range of relationships with external funders, mostly non-government philanthropic organisations from Western countries, and has a critical relationship with these funders (Empower Foundation 2012a).

These two case studies involve sex worker organisations of similar size and infrastructure both of which are confidently (and successfully) engaged in autonomous relations with external funders. Both organisations also work transnationally, supporting the development of HIV programs and sex workers organising outside their own country. One case study organisation is from the global north and one from the global south, which enables the examination of data from two different economic contexts. Most importantly, I have established networks with Scarlet Alliance and Empower Foundation already. This will significantly enable the project overall.

The case studies proceed via document analysis, participant observation and group interviews. The documents to be collected and analysed include publically available material created by Scarlet Alliance and Empower Foundation. These will establish the public profile, philosophies, aims and work of the two organisations. I will also be analysing their publications and public submissions about sex worker issues. This is to establish the way that the two organisations present themselves to funders and how they see their political autonomy from these funders. The themes that emerge from the document analysis will then inform the other methods utilised in this research project.

I will be undertaking participant observation by becoming a volunteer at each of the two organisations for a period of time. Observation remains a “fundamental base” of social science research (Adler and Adler, 1994:389, cited in Angrosino and Mays de Perez 2000:673). One advantage of the observational method is that the researcher is

not separate from the subject of research; the emotions, reactions, conversations and interactions that the researcher encounters in the field becomes part of the research and is drawn into the very center of the work itself (Angrosino and Mays de Perez 2000:675). This will be an advantage to this project and add a dimension of knowledge that would not be able to be achieved through document analysis alone.

Finally, the project will also utilise group interviews, also known as focus groups. Group interviews have gained increasing currency in recent feminist research and are seen as particularly useful for working with people who are historically alienated from, oppressed by, and/or intimidated by formal academic interview processes (Madriz 2000). This is clearly relevant for research in sex worker communities (van der Meulen 2011). Madriz describes group interviews as a “collectivist rather than individualistic research method.” (2000:836). This makes it particularly suitable for my case studies with sex worker organisations; group interviews will allow for the creation of a collective interview experience among representatives of sex worker organisations and will thus also enable information to be confirmed and tested dynamically in the field. This is particularly important when working with translators, as I will be at Empower Foundation. I have had extensive experience in group interviews in multilingual environments (see Jeffreys 2010; Kim and Jeffreys 2013). Multilingual group interviews allow for ideas to be shaped and formed in multiple languages during the interview process.

For both case studies, the material gathered during group interviews will be transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. The three different steps – document analysis, participant observation and group interviews – allows for *triangulation* of my results and, therefore, facilitates strong verification (Evers and van Staa 2010:749)

## 5. Theoretical Approach

This project is premised on sex worker theorisations about sex work. That is, understandings of sex work – and of sex worker organisations – that are directly related to the lived experience of being a sex worker.

I argue below that **sex worker theorisations about sex work** have been consistent and coherent. The trajectory of sex worker theory is obvious through the development of ideas and the themes of the movement from its very beginnings to today. While the sex worker movement in the 1970's emerged at a "unique historical moment" (Bell 1994:2) it also created a "new political line... [for a] grass roots movement" (Pheterson 1989:ii, vii) that has endured due to strong theoretical mainstays.

As indicated above, there have been at least three waves of the sex worker movement starting in the 1970s and continuing strongly up to the present day. In each wave important theoretical and conceptual work has also been produced. In the first wave Carol Leigh and Margot St James were influential in elaborating new understandings of 'sex work' and 'sex workers'. The women's movement, gay and lesbian movements of the 1960s and 1970s also provided ideas about developing a 'voice' which influenced sex worker movement strategies during this first wave (Leite 1989:288, Bell 1994:104). It was, at the time, "almost unprecedented for [sex workers] to speak on their own behalf" (Pheterson 1989:3). The discussions about creating a sex worker voice were welcomed by sex worker activists as "long overdue" (Pheterson 1989:52). Sex workers were challenging the stereotypes of sex workers as deviant and diseased, and resisting such stereotypes by recasting sex workers in a positive light – as workers (Flori in Pheterson 1989:70-72), as organised workers and activists (Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee), as public and community educators (Sprinkle and Harolot cited in Bell 1994:103), and experts in peer education to other sex workers (Fawkes 2009).

Leigh articulated very early on in the movement that new terminology *about* sex work, defined *by* sex workers, was needed (1997:226), and contributed to this be inventing the term "sex work"(1997). Leigh explains that "the use of the term "sex work" marks the beginning of the movement" (1988:210). However the use of the term "sex work" cannot be discussed without also understanding the rejection by the sex worker movement of the term "prostitute". Carole Leigh had asserted in the 1970's that the use of **the term "prostitute" was inappropriate for use when discussing sex work because it technically is referring to "offer[ring sex work] publicly" not the actual work of sex work** (Leigh 1997:229). Hunter and Perkins in Australia in the 1990s contended that the term

“prostitute” implied **implicit immorality** (Overs in Hunter 1992:112-3, Perkins 1994:8). Perkins argued that the word ‘prostitution’ “often suggests the selling of one’s very being, giving up one’s very identity for material gain..” (1994:8, 19) and as such is associated with only negative stereotypes. Andrew Hunter argued that the term “prostitute” is used as a generally derogatory description of people who are doing something that is regarded as sexually morally reprehensible and gaining from it (1992:112-3). Also, as Perkins describes, “‘prostitution’ is a term which has a strong association with the concept of exploitation... less to do with industrial relations than it does with ‘moral relations.’” (Perkins 1994: 7-8).

The industrial aspect within the term “sex work” became even more important because of the advent of HIV. The term “sex work” allowed sex worker organisations a labour-oriented, non-judgmental, and broad definition of the communities sex worker organisations were serving (Hunter 1992:113). The use of “sex work” as an umbrella term for all forms of sexual labour was helpful to sex worker organisations as they determined the scope of their service delivery work. The term “sex work” by this stage was being used in academia (Miller-Young 2006) and was recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (Leigh 1997:230).

By the 2000s, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) also advised against the term “prostitute” (2011:24) endorsed the term “sex work” instead (2011:26). The term “sex work” by this time meant “sexual commerce of all kinds” (Ditmore 2006:xxi). Many sex worker organisations around the world today reject the term “prostitution” (Abad et al. 1998:175) and adopt the word “sex work.” This includes organisations in global south who adopted the term “sex work” very early in their formation (in India, see Kotiswaran 2011:4, in Dominican Republic, see Kempadoo 1998:261). As I have described above, the development of a sex worker ‘voice’, the theoretical repositioning of sex workers, and creation of new terminology are key aspects of sex worker theory today.

I will now discuss the role of **ideas around anti-racism, migration and economic disparity in the global south, which are acutely important for the sex worker movement**. During the 1990s sex workers from the global south began to argue that

the sex worker movement needed to be more international and less dominated by sex workers from the global north (Doezema and Kempadoo 1998:23). They called for equitable travel funding, more translation, and for discussion relating sex workers from the global south to receive higher priority (Doezema and Kempadoo 1998:23). These demands were articulated at a 1997 international sex worker conference, resulting in “a strong anti-imperialist, anti-racist demonstration....forcing western sex workers to recognise and deal with these dimensions of power and inequality.” (Doezema and Kempadoo 1998:23). Today's movement has a critical approach to cross-cultural issues that involve race, linguistic diversity and migration. The multilingual project x-talk, London, describe their work through this lens:

In addition to providing free English classes to migrant sex workers, we support critical interventions around issues of migration, race, gender, sexuality and labour, we participate in feminist and anti-racist campaigns and we are active in the struggle for the rights of sex workers in London, the UK and globally. (x-talk 2010:i)

Empower Foundation in Thailand apply such critical thought about migration, border protection and gender disparity to their own research. In the introduction to their recent research work on trafficking, Empower had this to say:

Why is the world so afraid to have young, working class, non-English speaking, and predominantly non-white women [migrating] around?...We have been spied on, arrested, cut off from our families, had our savings confiscated, interrogated, imprisoned.... all in the name of “protection..” ..Just like the women fighting to be educated, fighting to vote... we will not stay in the cage society has made for us, we will dare to keep crossing the lines. (Empower Foundation 2012b:ii)

Central to both Empower and x-talks sex worker organising is this critical understanding of race and migration, and intersections with gender related oppression. This is illustrative of a global movement that has an awareness of global inequities based upon race and gender.

I will now discuss the **themes of the sex worker movement today**, and illustrate that they have stemmed from the sex worker theory of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The first of these themes is the critical relationship that sex worker theory has to feminism. The creation of the word “sex work” by Carole Leigh was a sex worker movement reinvisioning of the way that (some) feminists cast sex workers as not being able to act (Leigh 1997:230). For example, sex workers were challenging the idea promoted by some anti-sex work feminists that there can be no such thing as a “sex worker” because all sex work is victimisation (Barry and Dworkin in Sanders, O’Neill, and Pitcher 2009:7). The re-presenting of sex workers in a positive light in the first wave of the movement was a response to the anti-sex work feminist and modern discourses about sex work (Bell 1994:1). This theme continues today as sex workers demand that feminists to *listen* to sex workers and support sex worker organising (Jeffreys et al. 2011)

The second key theme is the decriminalisation of sex work. **Decriminalisation is the application of *civil* rather than *criminal* laws to the sex industry** (West 2000:106). Decriminalisation is associated with improved opportunity for peer education (Harcourt et al. 2010), and is intertwined with the positioning of sex work *as work*. This positioning has been consistently central to the sex worker movement (Gall 2011:2-3; Doezema and Kempadoo 1998:8). The movement has demanded the recognition of sex work as work since the early days (Flori in Pheterson 1989, Metzenrath 1994:124). During the first and second waves, decriminalisation was described as the *only* appropriate legal framework for sex work in Australia (Perkins in Pheterson 1989:57) Canada (Pheterson 1989:76) and the Netherlands (The Red Thread in Pheterson 1989:85). In the third wave the demand for decriminalisation continues to be articulated in the global north (Daniel 2010) and *also* in the global south (for examples see APNSW in Ahmad 2001 and Empower Foundation in Thin 2012). It is also the case that this demand has had particular repercussions depending on the sector of sex work being discussed. The need for appropriate laws has been articulated in relation to private sex workers in Holland (Miriam in Pheterson 1989:86), Australia (Perkins 1994:155,6), Queensland (SPAAN in Perkins:1994:157) and more recently resulting in a major court cases in Australia (“Limits Put on Sex Workers” 2012).

The problematisation of medical, health and academic approaches to sex work is a prominent and enduring theme of the movement. Within the health field sex worker organisations have consistently campaigned against mandatory HIV and Sexually Transmissible Infection (STI) testing of sex workers. Mandatory testing is the legislated establishment of a testing regime based on calendar intervals rather than the health needs of sex workers, and creates negative outcomes for sex workers and the general public (Samaranayake et al. 2009). Sex workers demanded an end to such testing regimes in Germany (Pheterson 1989:70,109) and Italy (Pheterson 1989:114,116) at the first World Whores Congress. This demand was raised again at the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Whores congress (Pheterson 1989:114), on the main plenary stage of the 2008 World AIDS Conference (Reynaga 2008), in 2012 in Australia (Jeffreys, Fawkes, and Stardust 2012) and will likely continue to be raised until mandatory testing regimes are ended. The sex worker movement has also expressed critical demands relating to addressing HIV stigma (Fiche in Pheterson 1989:110, Jeffreys, Matthews, and Thomas 2010), and improved academic research with sex workers to ensure that researchers and their subsequent publications are more ethically considered and ultimately sensitive to sex workers' needs (Jeffreys 2010).

Funding for autonomous sex worker-led peer-based organisations is a theme that has been apparent in the movement since the early days, and is the theme also most relevant to this research project. The first World Charter for Sex Workers Rights expressed the need for organisations of current and former sex workers to be supported *for the purpose of implementing the charter itself* (Pheterson 1989:42). From the very beginning of the movement, the demand for funding of autonomous sex worker-led peer-based organisations was not *for the sake of funding*, but *for the purpose of realising the aims of the movement*. This rhetoric in the present day is inextricably tied to sex workers role in the broader HIV response (for example see Fawkes 2009). Elena Reynaga, founder of Argentine Association of Female Sex Workers (AMMAR), explained the link between autonomous sex worker-led peer based organisations and the response to HIV in a key note plenary to the international AIDS Conference in Mexico City in 2008 - the first ever delivered by a sex worker:

We will only accomplish real change in the HIV/AIDS response through the

changing of public policies – and this can only be achieved through the leadership of effected communities. But to do this, we need to have strong community-based organizations that can participate in decision-making spaces....

Funds that *aren't* allocated to support community-based organizations are poorly invested and will have little sustainable impact in the long term.

Outsourcing the management of funds is a policy that contradicts the autonomy of sex worker organisations. Evidence shows that most- effective responses to HIV are sex worker-led. Our programs combine peer outreach with advocacy for sex workers' human rights and we fight strongly for the repeal of laws that repress or criminalise sex work. (Reynaga 2008, my emphasis)

Today this demand is asserted by sex worker organisations in the global south (for example see Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee) and global north (for example see Fawkes 2009), and continues to be a central theme of the movement.

I have argued above that sex worker theory has, over time, created terminology and ideas that have fed into and supported the themes of the movement. These theories and themes are highly relevant to any study of sex worker organisations in the current day, and have much to offer a deeper look at how sex worker organisations manage pressures associated with external funding, and work to establish and maintain capacity for autonomous political action.

## **6. Ethical Concerns and Fieldwork Safety**

I am familiar with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, revised in 2007 (“National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans” 1999). This document provides a broadly endorsed national reference point for ethical and safe research. It will guide and assist me to ensure I uphold acceptable conduct during the course of research work. The research project I am proposing will involve human participants. I am aware that my integrity as a researcher, the application of appropriate

consent processes, and creating maximum benefit while causing minimum harm to participants are some of the central principles of ethical conduct in the field.

This research project will conform to the University of Queensland requirements for fieldwork safety, including the guidelines regarding risk and consent.

## **7. Proposed Chapters for the thesis**

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Chapter 2 - Methods

Chapter 3 - Case Study - Scarlet

Chapter 4 - Case Study - Empower

Chapter 5 - Discussion of results and themes

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

## **8. Timeline for PhD Completion**

August 2013	<b>Milestone 1 – Statement of Intent</b>
October 2013	Introduction Chapter
November 2013	Literature Review
December 2013	Ethics Application
January 2013	Field Work
May 2014	<b>Milestone 2 – Work in Progress</b>
August 2014	Case Study Chapters
September 2014	Conclusion Chapter
November 2014	<b>Milestone 3 – Research Findings</b>
January 2015	Editing
May 2015	<b>Submission</b>

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