

Tricking and Tripping - Sterk

Anthropology fieldwork not necessarily in exotic locations.

This reading is based on fieldwork done in the US - on the streets of NYC and Atlanta; Study occurred a decade ago

Investigating Prostitutes Specifically

- They say that many people in the population view them as fallen women, but they are prostitutes for one reason or another, whether it be drugs, money, or other societal misfortunes.
- This article presents prostitution from the point of view of them women themselves, to better understand their current lives

Learned of well known places from law enforcement. These places are called strolls, or streets where prostitution is heavily concentrated

Developing ethnographic maps of street prostitution

Gaining entree to the prostitution world was harder than anticipated because of the women who would stare and break eye contact without verbal interaction, and the men, or customers, who would stare and catcall.

Important

Qualitative researchers, like Sterk, often refer to their initial connections as gatekeepers or key respondents. Some key respondents are important in providing initial access, but they become less central as the research evolves.

Key Respondents tend to be individuals central to the local scenes, such as pimps or senior prostitutes in this case.

Had to be careful with who she trusted, as one of the prostitutes, who was deemed to be a 'failed street walker' and who acted unprofessionally due to drug use, limited her interactions with other potential subjects

On another occasion, she had a key respondent who claimed to have 3 crack houses, but that didn't end well because he had a negative reputation on the streets which almost denied Sterk entree.

Nonetheless, she was able to gain entree and build rapport with a lot of the women by helping them out personally

One of the most important ways Sterk developed relationships with the women was by allowing them to tell their stories and engaging in casual dialogue.

Identity

- Was given the name Whitie, and was called Ms. Whitie by those who disrespected her
- Relationships with people on the streets kept her safe and reduced harassment overall
- Later adopted an identity that allowed her to be seen as both an insider and an outsider

The EMIC Approach

Sterk took the emic approach by living with the subjects. While hanging out on the strolls, she would have to deal with the uncomfortable living conditions that the rest of the prostitutes had to deal with. This included cold/warm weather, lack of access to rest rooms, refusal from restaurants, and harassment by customers and police.

Only expressed her own opinions if forced to do so, engaging in mainly informal conversations

Learned she needed to set boundaries in order to better her work as a researcher

She often served as a health educator for many women, talking about condoms, gels, douches, and other feminine products.

- Found it difficult to communicate with women in crack houses as they were very different people and sometimes didn't remember previous interactions. Made sure to only disclose information if the woman explicitly remembered the interaction

Ethical dilemma faced when an HIV positive woman was seen explicitly refusing to wear a condom

- Many women fearful of AIDS epidemic, but also worried about being rejected by their customers
- Some women became 'pros' at 'forcing' their customer to use a condom by hiding it in their mouth

Interviews

All interviews were conducted in private settings:

- Woman's Residency
- Sterk's Car or office

- Restaurant of the woman's choice
- Any other setting the woman felt comfortable in

Important

Sterk did not start conducting official interviews until she had become more acquainted with and had more relationships with the women.

Acquiring written consent before the interview was a challenge for Sterk as she often felt awkward asking

Only by letting the women identify their personal issues and the topics they personally wanted to address was Sterk able to get good interviews and get the insider perspective

Leaving the Field

Sterk always felt particularly guilty and foreign when she would go back to her car after a long day or in the midst of a Storm.

She obviously needed an emotional break during the height of the AIDS epidemic where she needed to remove herself due to the high Death rates

Also had to remove herself when she would become too involved in a woman's life or family. Or if she started to become judgemental to too high of a degree

Six Fundamental Aspects

Six themes in the 'Ethnography of prostitution'

1. Women's own explanations for their involvement
 - Included traumatic pasts, sexual abuse, lack of love as a child, pressures of society (pimps specifically), need for drugs, and **economic forces that pushed them into the life**
2. Typology that captures differences in prostitutes

Distinguishes between:

 - Streetwalkers: women who work streets but do not do drugs
 - Hooked prostitutes: women who identify themselves as prostitutes but began using drugs upon entry
 - Prostituting addicts: women who view themselves mainly as drug users and who became prostitutes to support their drug habit

- Crack prostitutes: women who trade sex for crack

3. The role of pimps

- Not a name appreciated by the women, who prefer 'old man' or 'boyfriend'
- Entrepreneur Pimp: treats the woman like property or employees who are purely there for financial gain
- Lover Pimp: A loving partner who is a steady partner but who also lives off the prostitutes earnings.
Drugs often become the glue in the relationship when both partners use drugs
- For Crack prostitutes, the drug becomes more of a pimp for them

4. The role of HIV and AIDS

- Many prostitutes know of their status (infected or not) and don't always act accordingly
Has led to many people blaming prostitutes for the spread of HIV

5. Common theme of violence and abuse

- Most common violence is that from customers
- Men often assume that they can buy a woman because they're paying for sex

6. Escape from prostitution

- Many women can describe their experiences from leaving the business
- Struggle with the stigma of their past, challenges of developing new identity, and the impact of their past on current relationships
- Drug addicts who were prostitutes have more adapting to do because of their struggling rehabilitation
Mainly, their past follows them like a bad hangover