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# Exiting Prostitution: An Integrated Model

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## Abstract

Exiting street-level prostitution is a complex, convoluted process. Few studies have described this process within any formal conceptual framework. This article reviews two general models and two prostitution-specific models and their applicability to the exiting process. Barriers encountered as women attempt to leave the streets are identified. Based on the four models, the barriers, the prostitution literature, and the authors' experience with prostituted women, a new integrated six-stage model that is comprehensive in scope and sensitive to women's attempts to exit prostitution is offered as a foundation for continued research on the process of women leaving the streets.

## Keywords

exiting prostitution, integrated model, street-level prostitution

Although researchers have acknowledged that leaving street-level prostitution may be a long, involved process (see, for example, Benoit & Millar, 2001, Brown et al., 2006, Rickard, 2001), few studies have focused solely on this process or described it within any formal conceptual framework. The complexity of the exiting process, however, suggests the need for such a framework to enhance our ability to understand and predict relationships among the variables that challenge exit success. This article is the result of numerous discussions among the authors about the conceptual frameworks found in the general and prostitution literature and how well they explain the exiting process. We first describe two general models of behavior change and their applicability to exiting prostitution, followed by two models specific to sex work and their applicability to the same. We also discuss variables

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that have been identified as barriers to leaving the streets and whether the four models address them. Finally, we offer an integrated model that provides a foundation for continued research on the exiting process of street-level prostituted women.

## General Models

### *Stages and Process of Change: A Transtheoretical Model*

The Stages of Change (SC) model, presented by Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992), has been used extensively to describe and assess the process of changing destructive behavioral patterns. The model is comprised of two components. *Stages of change* includes five unique stages representing variable degrees of “readiness” to create (or maintain) new patterns free of problematic behaviors. *Processes of change* aids in understanding how change occurs. A summary of the model is presented below.

### *Stages of Change*

In the first stage, *precontemplation*, individuals are typically unaware of their problem behavior and have no intention of making change. Although they are largely unaware of the need to change, support network members often are and thus only at the insistence of others would individuals seek help during this stage. “Resistance to recognizing or modifying a problem is the hallmark of precontemplation” (Prochaska et al., 1992, p. 1103). In the *contemplation* stage, people are consciously aware of their problem behavior and are considering action to change, but have not yet made a commitment to do so. They weigh the pros and cons of the problem behavior and various solutions but fail to take behavioral action. Individuals in the *preparation* stage make small changes in their problem behavior (e.g., smoking fewer cigarettes per day), with intentions of making additional and larger changes in the near future. Thus this stage consists of continued cognitive action tempered with modest behavioral change. The *action* stage is marked by adjustments in behavior, experiences, or environment to change problematic behavior. This stage is characterized by the most visible and overt behavioral modifications. The hallmark of the action stage is overt modification of the target behavior and achieving a particular goal (e.g., abstinence) in relation to that behavior. If change persists for more than 6 months, individuals have entered the *maintenance* stage. During this stage, the ultimate goal is to maintain behavioral and attitudinal changes to avoid relapse.

### *Processes of Change*

In addition to the *stages of change*, Prochaska et al. (1992) stipulate a second major dimension of the transtheoretical model: *processes of change*. Whereas *stages of change* provides direction for understanding shifts in attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors, *processes of change* assists in understanding how shifts occur. A core set of cognitive and behavioral change processes include helping relationships, consciousness

raising, self-reevaluation, self-liberation, counter-conditioning, stimulus control, reinforcement management, dramatic relief, environmental reevaluation, and social liberation. Introducing the most appropriate *change process* during a given stage is recommended and, therefore, the transtheoretical model is intended to provide guidance to begin to match individual-specific change readiness (i.e., *stage of change*) with intervention (i.e., *change techniques*).

### ***Fuchs Ebaugh's Role Exit Model***

The Role Exit (RE) model evolved from two studies with people who made career changes, underwent major changes in their family roles, or exited "highly stigmatized roles," such as prostitutes, convicts, or alcoholics (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988, p. xvii). Below is a brief discussion of the RE model.

### ***Stages of the Role Exit Model***

Exiting a role, a "social process that occurs over time" (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988, p. 23), is comprised of four major stages: first doubts, seeking alternatives, turning point, and creating an ex-role. Although some people may be able to progress through each stage in a linear fashion, others may "reverse their decisions and return to a previous role" (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988, p. 37). First doubts stem from one's dissatisfaction with her or his current role. These doubts, which usually rise gradually from an unconscious to a conscious level, prompt potential exiters to weigh the pros and cons of remaining in or leaving their current roles. Several factors may cause or at least influence first doubts, including changes in the organization with which they are affiliated, burnout, relationship changes, and gradual or sudden life events. First doubts lead to cuing behavior wherein potential exiters seek input from others in their environment. Negative reactions may stifle the doubting process or may stimulate the exiter to seek others who would support her or his doubts. On the other hand, positive reactions from other people strengthen an exiter's doubts and lead to the second stage in the exiting process. There are also variables that may affect the duration of first doubts, including degree of awareness of other options, degree of control over the exit, and individual versus group exiting.

The second stage, seeking alternatives, can also vary in length of time. Potential exiters again weigh the costs and rewards of staying or leaving their current role. Some people, limited by the number of viable alternatives, may feel trapped in their current role. During this stage, people continue their cuing behavior, and both positive and negative social support are important in encouraging or retarding the exit process, respectively. Potential exiters engage in anticipatory socialization and role rehearsal and begin to identify with the "values, norms, attitudes, and expectations" of the people in the group they wish to join (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988, p. 107). They also may imagine playing the new role or may actually try it out (e.g., transsexuals who both imagined what it would be like to be a person of the opposite sex and who "were required to cross-dress for a specific period of time" (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988, p. 113) before undergoing sex-change surgery).

Turning point, the third stage in the RE model, can be a gradual process or, more commonly, an abrupt one that results from a specific event (or a culmination of events), an either/or situation (e.g., alcoholics), time-related factors (e.g., age), or events that provide justification for exiting. According to Fuchs Ebaugh (1988), turning points “serve three basic functions” (p. 134). They allow exiters to announce their decision to others, reduce their cognitive dissonance, and help them mobilize both emotional and social resources to complete the exiting process. After they leave, exiters may experience feelings of being in a vacuum “between the past that no longer existed and the unknown future” (p. 145). However, their adjustment and movement out of the vacuum are easier and proceed more rapidly if, while in their previous role, they have built bridges with the new group.

The final stage is creating the ex-role. This role is filled with tension as exiters emotionally distance themselves from the old role and try to establish themselves in the new one. However, their former “role identification has to be taken into account and incorporated into a future identity” (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988, p. 149). In other words, the identity of an exiter “rests not on one’s current role but on who one was in the past” (p. 180). Therefore, exiters again engage in coping behavior and society’s reactions can affect the ease of the transition. For example, physicians may be viewed negatively by society for leaving the medical profession, whereas prostituted women might be applauded for leaving their former roles. Along the same line is what Fuchs Ebaugh (1988) calls “role residual” or “hangover identity”—specific aspects of the previous role that remain with the individual even after she or he has exited (p. 156).

### *Applicability of General Models to the Street-Level Prostitution Exit Process*

Although critiques of these models can be found in the literature (Anderson & Bondi, 1998; Brown, 1991; Littell & Girvin, 2002; Wacquant, 1990), some research suggests that prostituted women involved in the street-based sex industry may pass through various stages similar to those described in the *Stages of Change* and RE models. In Dalla’s (2006) 3-year follow-up study of street-level prostituted women, several of the 13 who returned to prostitution and/or drug use could be easily classified as fitting in the *precontemplative* stage because of their limited awareness or recognition of the need to exit the street-level sex industry. Others described using cognitive maneuvers and behavioral actions to begin changing their prostitution activities and drug use (e.g., three described behavioral change motivated by a desire to live their lives differently after weighing the “pros” and “cons” of sex work). Although at the time they were interviewed they had already made significant behavioral changes, they also described *cognitive processes* that occurred earlier (i.e., corresponding to the *contemplative* and *preparation* stages). Finally, five women had remained free of prostitution, drug use, and other illegal behaviors for a number of years and could be classified as fitting within the *maintenance* stage. Thus the cognitive and behavioral *processes* described by the women could render their classification into one of the stages described by Prochaska et al. (1992).

Similarly, the RE model seems to provide an acceptable explanation of the behavior of women leaving the streets. In their study, Baker and Williamson (2006) found that first doubts emanated from both internal (e.g., being very tired, experiencing feelings of shame, wanting freedom) and external (e.g., remarks made by others about losing their children or their deserving a better life) sources. The only evidence of seeking alternatives was rehabilitation programs where they could get help with their substance abuse problems. Turning points occurred gradually for some women and more quickly for others. There was less evidence, however, about creating an ex-role. One woman wanted to be a more responsible parent, while another was enrolled in school and had a job, but also seemed to keep prostitution as an option in her future for economic reasons.

Although these two models contribute to our understanding of the exiting process, there are some inherent problems as well. First, both are limited in breadth and depth because they do not address the myriad factors that lead a woman to prostitution or keep her there. The Stages of Change model addresses a singular problematic behavior, such as drug abuse, but no single issue ties a woman to the streets. Applying the *Stages of Change* model to one issue fails to capture the complex web of factors (e.g., drug addiction, social isolation, and the shame and stigma of prostitution) that could prevent women from moving into another stage or, as described in the RE model, engaging in anticipatory socialization or creating a new role.

Informal and formal supports are considered critical to street-level prostitution exit success simply because of the sheer number and quality of changes necessary for women to successfully leave the sex industry (see, for example, Hester & Westmarland, 2004). The *Stages of Change* model, however, presents change as a largely individual process of cognitive restructuring and behavior modification, and the RE model does not seem to allow for the social isolation or the lack of informal or formal support systems that can aid in, or challenge, the exiting process.

The final problem with these two models concerns the linear progression through the stages. The *Stages of Change* model assumes a linear progression of change (although recycling is noted as probable), while Fuchs Ebaugh acknowledges that although there was a pattern to the leaving process and a series of predictable stages, people may reverse their decisions and return to their former role. Neither model, however, seems suited to the contextual circumstances of the streets or the “entry-exit-re-entry” behavior of prostituted women. For instance, because of their involvement in illegal activities, many street-level prostituted women are involuntarily removed from the streets as a result of incarceration. Although time away from the streets might act as a *turning point*, stimulate first doubts and seeking alternatives, or change their behaviors dramatically, their beliefs about their behaviors may not change. In Dalla’s (2006) study, some women had made dramatic behavioral changes during incarceration and thus, according to the *Stages of Change* model, they would be classified within the *action* or *maintenance* stages. Nonetheless, they also noted that, on release, they would return to prostitution and drug use. Thus despite marked changes in behavioral patterns leading to classification within the *action* stage, in reality these women did not view prostitution or drug use as problematic and therefore they could also be placed within the *precontemplation* stage.

## Specific Models

### *Breaking the Matthew Effect*

Månsson and Hedin's (1999) model is based on interviews with 23 Swedish women, most of whom had been involved in prostitution for more than 5 years. At the time of the interviews, 15 of the 23 women had been out of prostitution for more than 3 years, "a smaller group" had exited "less than two years" previously, and a few women "had yet to make a complete break and were still winding up the process" (p. 70). Although most of the women's experiences were street based, one third had both street and brothel experience, whereas others had experience in brothels or high-end escort services only.

The Månsson and Hedin model was heavily influenced by the work of Fuchs Ebaugh (1988) and Vanwesenbeeck (1994) who studied the well-being and risk of women involved in sex work in The Netherlands. The Matthew Effect, a term Vanwesenbeeck borrowed from Robert Merton, is defined as the "accumulated effects of either a favorable or ill-fated interplay between the individual and her surroundings" (Vanwesenbeeck, 1994, p. 69). Vanwesenbeeck's work focused on the interaction "between internal and external factors of women involved in prostitution" (p. 69).

This model is comprised of five stages including *drifting in*, *ensnarement*, *prebreakaway*, *breakaway*, and *after the breakaway*. Relevant to current purposes are the last three stages that deal with the exiting process. Månsson and Hedin failed to discuss the *prebreakaway stage*, but described the women's "turning points," taken from Fuchs Ebaugh (1988), as experiences that involved "eye-opening events" (e.g., being expected to engage in activities with which they were not comfortable), "traumatic events" (e.g., violent experiences), or "positive life events" (e.g., falling in love or finding a job; p. 71). These "turning points" could be representations of a "culmination of long term, destructive course of events or like a bolt from the blue" (p. 71). In contrast, the authors described other strategies as more "gradual and undramatic" in which women worked at "phasing out the activity" by limiting regular sexual services, reducing presence and exposure in sex work, or seeing only their regular customers (p. 71). The next stage, *breakaway*, happened either quickly (typically by women "loosely integrated in the prostitution environment") or over time by the totally ensnared, who had reached the limit of what they believed was "existentially bearable" (p. 71).

According to Månsson and Hedin (1999), structural, relational, and individual factors also influenced the women's ability to break away from and stay out of prostitution. *Structural factors* are described as "the societal circumstances in which the women have found themselves and which have influenced the breakaway and subsequent process of change" including "work, housing, education, and welfare benefits" (p. 73). *Relational factors* include "women's close relationships and how their social networks have functioned during the process of change" (p. 73). In this model, informal support, particularly from male partners and children, was viewed as critical to the exit process. The authors emphasized, however, that the "majority of women needed considerably more help and support than their own social network was able to offer" (p. 73) and that the greatest need was during both the *breakaway* and *after the breakaway* stages.

*Individual factors* include a person's ability to dream about their possibilities. Månsson and Hedin (1999) believed this ability is at the "very heart of the process of change. It constitutes one of the most significant strategies that women develop to overcome the very strains and challenges inherent in the break with prostitution" (p. 75). Resilient women are less vulnerable to stress and strain because they can adapt and cope, and women with capacities and interests, the authors believe, will be most successful. The most important factor to Månsson and Hedin was the woman's own individual coping strategies.

According to the authors, *after the breakaway*, women struggled with four main issues: working through and understanding the experiences of life in prostitution, dealing with shame, living in a marginal situation, and dealing with intimate and close relationships.

### ***Becoming an Ex-Sex Worker: Sanders' Transitions***

According to Beshers (1957), a typology is a type of model. Thus although not a "model" per se, Sanders' (2007) typology of transitions out of prostitution is described here because of its relevance to our discussion of the exit process. Sanders interviewed 15 outdoor prostitutes and 15 indoor prostitutes and identified four dominant ways out of sex work: *reactionary*, *gradual planning*, *natural progression*, and *yo-yoing*. Each type of transition is described below.

The *reactionary* type of exit is described as the result of a reaction to a significant negative or positive life event. For instance, women may have come to the conclusion that if they did not do something soon, they might end up dead. This route, according to Sanders (2007), was "not usually permanent because the women's plans were ill thought out and without a conscious plan of how to earn money" (p. 82).

*Gradual planning* occurred over a period of time. Both outdoor and indoor workers spoke of the changing conditions, increased danger, and heightened competition of sex work. With the belief that they did not want to engage in prostitution their entire lives, women "put into place other activities to substitute their earnings" (Sanders, 2007, p. 83) and worked toward developing other opportunities. Indoor sex workers talked about exit as retirement and, worried about a lack of insurance and pensions, began putting into place "clear financial planning to prepare for the significant reduction in earnings" (p. 83). Outdoor workers who gradually left sex work did so by decreasing the amount of sex work, "reducing the number of clients or working only occasionally" which, according to Sanders, coincided with starting therapies to deal with "addiction, abuse, and exclusion" (p. 84). Their exit was often encouraged by "specialist services working intensively to get women back into training, education, part-time employment, and other vocational skills training or voluntary work" (p. 84). Sanders noted that the need for suitable housing was central to their beginning a new life and escaping from the "temptations of the street culture, life, and networks" (p. 84).

*Natural progression* out of sex work is Sanders' third type of exit. Street-based women "often reached a natural point of change based on a history of failed drug treatments, drifting in and out of the industry, violence, and a chaotic lifestyle . . ." that leads to a "strong desire for a different lifestyle" (Sanders, 2007, p. 85). Indoor workers mentioned various

catalysts that influenced their move toward exiting prostitution including getting older and wanting to avoid pressures to look good, aspirations for other types of work, and the realization that responding to others' needs was becoming "physically and emotionally demanding" (p. 87).

The *Yo-Yo pattern* consisted of "frequent movement in and out of sex work" (Sanders, 2007, p. 87) that was experienced by both indoor and outdoor women; however, the factors that trapped the women in prostitution were different. Outdoor workers, who had not planned their exits, often reentered for drug money or because of movement in and out of the criminal justice system. Indoor workers often exited because they needed "time out" from the psychological stress, but returned because their exits were not planned and they failed to realize that the money they earned in a "normal" job was not equivalent to the money received through sex work (p. 88).

### ***Applicability of Specific Models to the Street-Level Prostitution Exit Process***

The data from the studies of both Månsson and Hedin (1999) and Sanders (2007) evolved from interviews with prostituted women, some of whom had already exited sex work and could speak from experience. Therefore, they are more in tune with the reality of life in prostitution and the complexity of leaving that life. For Månsson and Hedin, a woman's ability to cope is the most important factor influencing her ability to exit. While acknowledging that coping skills are critical, Sanders (2007) places more emphasis on structural factors that "restrict movement out of sex work and make permanent removal from the deviant career a complex and lengthy process" (p. 91). Sanders' descriptions are more comprehensive because she discusses the experiences of both indoor and outdoor sex workers and identifies themes that cut across contexts. Although not labeled as such, she also acknowledges how structural, relational, and individual factors often work in concert to undermine role changes in sex work. Moreover, Sanders does not stress linearity but rather describes different routes out of prostitution depending on each woman's individual circumstances. She also identifies the variety of services (e.g., safe housing, drug treatment, welfare support, job skills training, assistance reconciling with families/children) needed by women exiting prostitution. Most important, she recognizes that prostituted women may need help planning their transitions to ensure a successful exit. Although social service programs may not be able to control the manner of exit, having resources available and accessible to women once they exit may be key to helping them successfully stay out of prostitution.

### **Summary of Models**

A considerable overlap exists among the four models, which is not surprising given the references to Fuchs Ebaugh by both Sanders and Månsson and Hedin. Although Prochaska et al's (1992) *precontemplation* stage appears to parallel Månsson and Hedin's *prebreak-away*, corresponding stages could not be found in the models presented by Fuchs Ebaugh

or Sanders. For instance, the *reactionary* mode of exit did not seem to fit well with the *Stages of Change* model because reactions to negative or positive stimuli triggered women's exit without much *contemplation* or *preparation*. With *action* to leave prostitution ill thought out, there was not a plan for *maintenance* to create stability. Similarly, it seems that women who had a significant reaction to an experience and then left prostitution were not described as those who first doubted their stay in prostitution and then sought out alternatives as Fuchs Ebaugh suggests. However, *reactionary* exit is similar to her *turning point* and to Prochaska et al.'s *action* stages. Unable to create a new role successfully or maintain stability through the *maintenance* stage may be the impetus for why women who left under *reactionary* conditions return to sex work.

However, the remaining stages of all four models provide evidence of a great deal of similarity. *Gradual planning* and *natural progression* appear to parallel both the Role Exit and Stages of Changes models in that these women had *first doubts* or *contemplated* leaving prostitution. They prepared or sought alternatives, experienced a *turning point* and took *action* to leave prostitution. Those who engaged in *gradual planning* or *natural progression* had a higher success rate of remaining out of prostitution. Whether they were able to maintain stability or to *create an ex-role* that brought stability was strongly influenced by structural, relational, and individual factors that both Sanders and Månsson and Hedin described.

Thus the general models provide a basic framework for understanding exit as a process with identifiable elements, whereas the models proposed by Månsson and Hedin and Sanders help clarify the exit experiences of sex workers specifically. Together, they expand the knowledge base and provide more information from which to design a more integrated model that acknowledges barriers to exiting at each stage of the process.

## Barriers to Prostitution Exit

Our work in designing an integrated model delineating multiple stages of the exit process was twofold. First, our intent was to create a comprehensive model that could be further refined and tested as a means of advancing scholarship on prostituted women. Second, our efforts were also intended to articulate a research-based platform from which service providers could direct their intervention efforts on behalf of women exiting the street-level sex industry. To accomplish our second goal, it was deemed imperative to identify barriers to the exit process most commonly described in the literature.

Barriers to leaving street-level sex work are vast. Many scholars have described the myriad factors that compel women's continued involvement in street-level prostitution (see, for example, Brown et al., 2006; Butters & Erickson, 2003; Rickard, 2001). Yet most researchers have focused on specific barriers only (e.g., drug abuse, mental health, physical injury, or exhaustion); few have attempted to explicate the extensive breadth of barriers on multiple personal and societal levels that challenge a woman's exit success. To address this gap, we turned to the literature and our own work with prostituted women to identify the most common barriers faced by women attempting to leave street-level prostitution. We adopted Månsson and Hedin's (1999) three-tiered framework for organizing the multiple types of barriers faced by prostituted women (see column 1 of Table 1). As discussed

**Table 1.** Barriers to Exiting Street-Level Prostitution

Barriers	References	Models Referencing Barriers
<b>I. Individual factors</b>		
Self-destructive behaviors & substance abuse	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brown et al. (2006)</li> <li>2. Butters &amp; Erickson (2003)</li> <li>3. Feucht (1993)</li> <li>4. Goldstein (1979)</li> <li>5. Graham &amp; Wish (1994)</li> <li>6. Hester &amp; Westmarland (2004)</li> <li>7. Inciardi, Lockwood, &amp; Pottieger (1993)</li> <li>8. Miller (1993)</li> <li>9. Potterat, Rothenberg, Muth, Darrow, &amp; Phillips-Plummer (1998)</li> </ol>	Matthew Effect (ME) Role Exit Model (RE) Stages of change (SC)
Mental health problems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. El-Bassel, Simoni, Cooper, Gilbert, &amp; Schilling (2001)</li> <li>2. Farley &amp; Barkan (1998)</li> <li>3. MacMillan (2001)</li> <li>4. Romans, Potter, Martin, &amp; Herbison (2001)</li> <li>5. Valera, Sawyer, &amp; Schiraldi (2001)</li> </ol>	ME Typology of transitions (TT)
Effects of trauma from adverse childhood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Earls (1990)</li> <li>2. Hester &amp; Westmarland (2004)</li> <li>3. James &amp; Meyerding (1977)</li> <li>4. Nandon, Koverola, &amp; Schluderman (1998)</li> <li>5. Potter, Martin, &amp; Romans (1999)</li> <li>6. Seng (1989)</li> <li>7. Silbert &amp; Pines (1983)</li> <li>8. Silbert &amp; Pines (1982)</li> <li>9. Simons &amp; Whitbeck (1991)</li> </ol>	
Psychological trauma/injury from violence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Church, Henderson, Barnard, &amp; Graham (2001)</li> <li>2. Dalla, Xia, &amp; Kennedy (2003)</li> <li>3. Fullilove, Lown, &amp; Fullilove (1992)</li> <li>4. Hester &amp; Westmarland (2004)</li> <li>5. Maher (1996)</li> <li>6. Miller (1993)</li> <li>7. O'Neill (1995)</li> <li>8. Sterk &amp; Elifson (1990)</li> <li>9. Vanwesenbeeck (1994)</li> </ol>	RE
Chronic psychological stress	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brown et al. (2006)</li> <li>2. Williamson (2000)</li> <li>3. Young, Boyd, &amp; Hubbell (2000)</li> </ol>	TT
Self-esteem/shame/guilt	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Silbert &amp; Pines (1982)</li> <li>2. Young et al. (2000)</li> </ol>	ME RE

(continued)

**Table 1. (continued)**

Barriers	References	Models Referencing Barriers
Physical health problems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Baker, Case, &amp; Policicchio (2003)</li> <li>2. Baker, Wilson, &amp; Winebarger (2004)</li> <li>3. Inciardi (1995)</li> <li>4. Jones et al. (1998)</li> <li>5. Romans et al. (2001)</li> <li>6. Valera et al. (2001)</li> </ol>	TT
Lack of knowledge of services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Zweig, Schlichter, &amp; Burt (2002)</li> <li>2. Weiner (1996)</li> </ol>	RE
<b>II. Relational factors</b>		
Limited conventional formal & informal support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brown et al. (2006)</li> <li>2. Farley &amp; Kelly (2000)</li> <li>3. Silbert &amp; Pines (1982)</li> </ol>	ME RE TT
Strained family relations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dalla (2004)</li> <li>2. Dalla (2003)</li> </ol>	TT
Pimps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dalla (2002)</li> <li>2. Faugier &amp; Sargeant (1997)</li> <li>3. Hester &amp; Westmarland (2004)</li> <li>4. Norton-Hawk (2004)</li> <li>5. Silbert &amp; Pines (1982)</li> <li>6. Williamson (2000)</li> <li>7. Williamson &amp; Cluse-Tolar (2002)</li> </ol>	
Drug dealers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. DeRiviere (2006)</li> <li>2. Ratner (1993)</li> </ol>	
Social isolation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brown et al. (2006)</li> <li>2. Pyett &amp; Warr (1997)</li> </ol>	
<b>III. Structural factors</b>		
Employment, job skills, limited employment options	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brown et al. (2006)</li> <li>2. DeRiviere (2006)</li> <li>3. Monroe (2005)</li> <li>4. Rickard (2001)</li> </ol>	ME RE TT
Basic needs (e.g., housing, homelessness, poverty, economic self-sufficiency)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brown et al. (2006)</li> <li>2. Butters &amp; Erickson (2003)</li> <li>3. Dalla (2006)</li> <li>4. DeRiviere (2006)</li> <li>5. Monroe (2005)</li> <li>6. Raphael &amp; Shapiro (2002)</li> <li>7. Valera et al. (2001)</li> </ol>	ME TT
Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Benoit &amp; Millar (2001)</li> <li>2. Brown et al. (2006)</li> <li>3. Monroe (2005)</li> </ol>	ME TT
Criminal record	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Monroe (2005)</li> <li>2. Saphira &amp; Herbert (2004)</li> </ol>	RE TT

(continued)

**Table 1. (continued)**

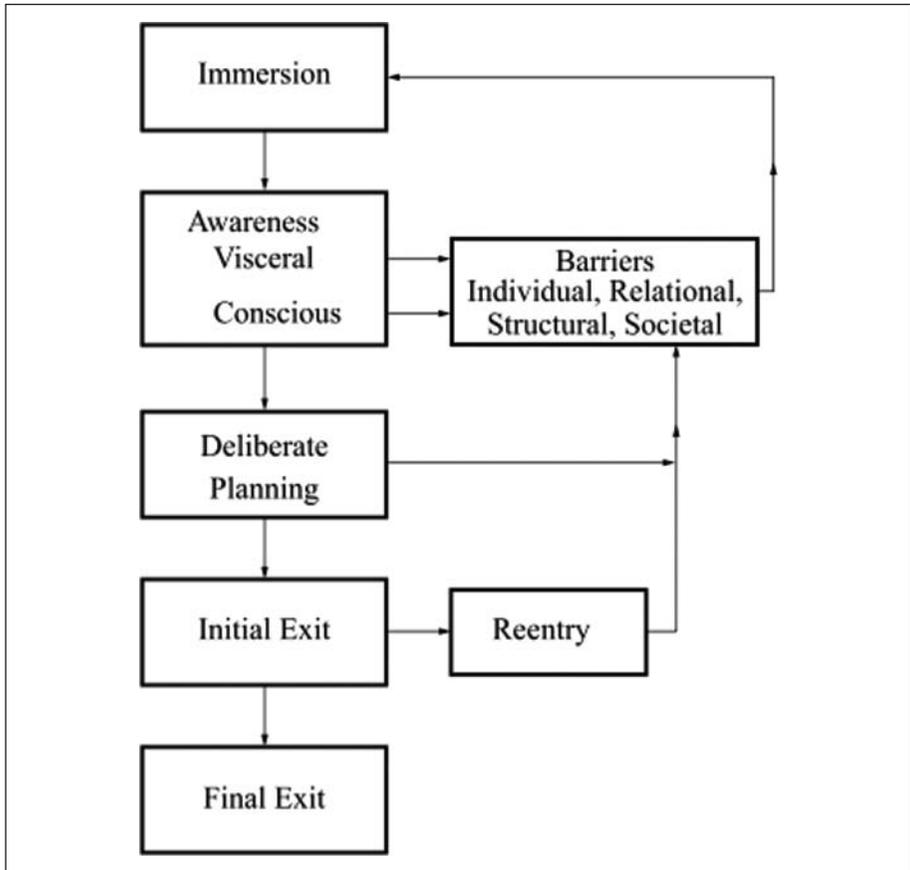
Barriers	References	Models Referencing Barriers
Inadequate services	1. Bagley & Ramsey (1986)	ME
	2. Hardman (1997)	TT
	3. McClanahan, McClelland, Abram, & Teplin (1999)	
	4. Plummer, Potterat, Muth, & Muth (1996)	
	5. Weiner (1996)	
	6. Yahne, Miller, Irvin-Vitela, & Tonigan (2002)	
IV. Societal factors		
Discrimination/stigma	1. Baker et al. (2004)	ME
	2. Brown et al. (2006)	RE
	3. Butters & Erickson (2003)	TT
	4. Carter (2003)	
	5. Monroe (2005)	

earlier, these include *individual factors* (i.e., those associated with a woman's "own internal drive and abilities"; p. 74), *relational factors* (i.e., those associated with her close relationships and informal social network), and *structural factors* (i.e., those associated with societal circumstances). We expanded Månsson and Hedin's framework by including a fourth tier, *societal factors*, which capture social perceptions of prostituted women (e.g., stigma, discrimination) that likely affect, in profound ways, the other three factors. In Table 1, column 2 provides references to the work of others who have identified each of the various types of barriers, and column 3 explicates which of the four *models* (i.e., Stages of Change, Role Exit, Månsson and Hedin, or Sanders' typology) acknowledge these barriers as factors that challenge permanent behavior change.

## Exiting Prostitution: An Integrated Model

Despite the value inherent in each of the four models discussed, neither the general nor the specific models encompasses all the possible avenues out of prostitution. Based on the four models, the prostitution literature, and our experience with women involved in street-level prostitution, we have developed an integrated model that is comprehensive in scope, yet sensitive to women's individual attempts to exit prostitution.

The integrated model for exiting prostitution is comprised of six stages (Figure 1). The first stage, *immersion*, is seen as the starting point wherein a woman is totally immersed in prostitution and has no thoughts of leaving or any conscious awareness of the need to change. This stage is similar to both *precontemplation* (Prochaska et al., 1992) and *pre-breakaway* (Månsson & Hedin, 1999). Length of time in this stage may vary dramatically from several months to many years and some women may never move beyond *immersion* (Dalla, 2006).



**Figure 1.** An integrated model

The second stage, *awareness*, is comprised of two parts. *Visceral awareness* refers to the gradual realization that all is not as it used to be. Here a woman experiences “gut” feelings about leaving prostitution, yet these feelings cannot be (or are not) articulated to herself or to others (Taylor, 1968). It is plausible that a woman could ignore or deny these feelings and return to a place of complete immersion in the sex industry. Visceral awareness could be fleeting, intermittent, or last for an indefinite period of time before the feelings move into conscious awareness. *Conscious awareness* occurs when these uneasy feelings reach a woman’s conscious level. She acknowledges her feelings and begins to process them consciously thereby enabling her to verbalize what she had previously felt at the gut level. She may begin talking to others about what she is thinking and feeling. Based on her ability to verbalize her thoughts, this stage corresponds to *contemplation* (Prochaska et al., 1992), *first doubts* (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988), *prebreakaway*

(Månsson & Hedin, 1999), and Sanders' (2007) *gradual planning* and *natural progression* stages.

The next stage, *deliberate preparation*, is similar to Sanders' (2007) *gradual planning* and *natural progression* stages as well as to *seeking alternatives* (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988) and *preparation* (Prochaska et al., 1992). Here, a woman begins assessing both formal and informal support resources. It is in this stage that she is most likely to make initial contact with formal support providers (e.g., treatment centers, support groups) available within her community and to speak with family and friends about life "on the outside." Although some *action* is evident (e.g., phone calls to treatment centers), little, if any, behavioral change actually occurs. Thus this stage is characterized by cognitive processing as well as data and information gathering. Again, given individual variability and personal initiative, length of time spent in this stage could vary dramatically. It is important to point out, however, that the woman may be acting on her own accord (i.e., personal desire to exit) or may be forced by others (e.g., family, children's services, the criminal justice system) to start planning her exit.

The *initial exit* stage is when the woman begins actively using informal (e.g., moving in with a family member) and formal (e.g., attending counseling, entering de-tox) support services. Clearly, work done in the earlier stage of *deliberate preparation* may be critical to her success at this stage of the exit process, particularly if a woman's needs are extensive (e.g., housing, employment skills, substance abuse, or mental health problems). Important also is that in some communities, services may be numerous and readily available, whereas in others, they may be minimal and/or difficult to access. Not only is access to formal and informal support critical at this stage of the exit process but so also is each woman's receptivity to those services. To illustrate, some women may enter a drug treatment program actively engaged and ready to change; they may rely on their support systems (e.g., sponsors), internalize knowledge gained, and then apply newly acquired skills to their own lives. Others may begin a treatment program, fail to utilize available support or internalize knowledge and, therefore, be unable to make behavioral changes. These women will likely abandon the program prior to completion and eventually return to the sex industry. It is in this stage of the model that a woman's internal desire and motivation to exit are severely tested. The *initial exit* stage captures the reality of the "entry-exit-re-entry" cycle of street-level prostitution and the variability of paths out of the sex industry. In other words, some women may seek out and utilize available services and never return to street-based prostitution (their initial and only exit); whereas for others, the *initial exit* may be short-lived and result in reentry. For the woman who is successful at exiting the first time, this stage is similar to *turning point* and *creating an ex-role* (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988), *natural progression* (Sanders, 2007), *action* and *maintenance* (Prochaska et al., 1992), and both *breakaway* and *after the breakaway* (Månsson & Hedin, 1999).

For the woman who returns to prostitution, the next stage in our model, *reentry*, parallels Sanders' (2007) *yo-yoing* and *reactionary* transitions. *Reentry* into street-based prostitution may result, yet again, in a complete *reimmersion* in the street-level sex industry. It is important to point out that after *reentry*, two pathways in a woman's developmental experiences with the exit process are possible. On one hand, a woman may recycle through

each of the stages. Yet because of earlier exit attempts, she may approach the next exit differently, that is, she may engage in greater *contemplation* or more *deliberate preparation* strategies, thereby making her next exit successful.

On the other hand, *reentry* might stimulate feelings of being “stuck” or “trapped” because of previous failed attempt(s). Therefore, despite *conscious awareness* of a need to change, she may lack the confidence, initiative, coping skills, or necessary resources to allow her to engage in *deliberate preparation*. These women present a significant challenge to service providers because, despite their desire to exit, their lack of behavioral action makes them invisible to formal support providers.

The last stage, *final exit*, most often occurs after a series of exiting and reentering cycles. Based on our own experiences and the prostitution literature, we suggest that it is unlikely that a woman will reach *final exit* on her first exit attempt because, once one is *immersed*, the barriers (i.e., individual, relational, structural, and societal factors) to exit success are extensive at each stage of the process. We recognize and readily admit the difficulty in defining specific “criteria” that mark *final exit*. Unfortunately, turning to our comparative models for assistance provides little clarity. To illustrate, *final exit* is similar to the *maintenance* stage of the Prochaska et al. (1992) model. They contend that *maintenance* is reached after a particular period of time (i.e., 6 months of behavior change). Given the myriad barriers a prostituted woman must overcome to exit successfully, in addition to the heterogeneity of any woman’s movement through the stages (i.e., just once or a series of exit-reentry cycles), we do not believe this stage can, or should, be defined by a specific length of time.

Our *final exit* stage is also similar to Fuchs Ebaugh’s (1988) final stage, *creating an ex-role*. Like those who create an ex-role, a prostituted woman in the *final exit* stage must also have made significant and often life-encompassing changes—in her identity, life style, habits, support sources. She must create, in reality, an “ex role” for herself. Yet even Fuchs Ebaugh recognizes that “hang over” from one’s previous identity may still exist. This begs the questions, “When and how does one definitively define *final exit*?” and “What are the repercussions of the ‘hang over’ effect for prostituted women?”

We have also compared our final stage with that in Månsson and Hedin’s (1999) model, *after the breakaway*. Interestingly, they too must have recognized the difficulty of defining the final stage of their model because they fail to do so. Instead, they describe “life challenges” associated with “after the breakaway” (p. 72) rather than the characteristics or defining features of the stage.

Simply stated, specific parameters (e.g., certain length of time away from the streets, the attainment of legal employment, safe residence, or the establishment of new friends without connections to the sex industry) delineating *final exit* are exceedingly difficult to define.

The dilemma is twofold. First, given individual variability, any woman’s *final exit* may look and be experienced in slightly different ways. Second, given the literature and our own work with prostituted women, we are also realistic. We fully understand that a woman may return to street-based prostitution, despite a significant time away from the streets, having achieved legal employment, or having created, by all accounts, a “new

(ex) identity.” There are, in other words, no guarantees. Thus although the final stage in our integrated model is labeled *final exit*, we believe that reentry is always a possibility. Further research on experiences of women who have left street-based prostitution and not returned is necessary to develop more fully the specific criteria encompassed within *final exit*.

### Limitations

The integrated model is based on our experiences with women in street-level prostitution and on our extensive reading of the research literature. Therefore, it is geared only toward these women and does not address the needs of women in different types of prostitution, or men or transgendered people in prostitution. More research is needed on all people in prostitution to gain a better understanding of the strategies they use to exit sex work.

### Implications

Is it necessary to have a model for leaving the streets? Does it really matter how many stages exist in the exiting process? As mentioned above, we discussed these questions and came to the conclusion that a model is necessary because, overall, it promotes a better understanding of the complexity of the exiting process. It also provides a structure for research, education, and practice. We recognize the overlap among these areas and, further, that integration across all is ideal. Thus the implications of this model for informing research, education, and practice, as well as suggestions for synthesis among them, are presented below.

### Research

According to many authors (including us), the complexity of leaving the streets is a given. However, a considerable amount of research on this phenomenon is not guided by or conducted within a theoretical framework, making the results nongeneralizable. Although single studies may provide us with increased knowledge about exiting prostitution, there is no cohesive body of work on which to build further research. This model, with its six stages, will provide a basis on which to construct a comprehensive theory that better describes how women exit prostitution.

A model has been described as “an analogy or example that is used to help visualize and understand something that cannot be directly observed or about which little is known” (Jacox, 1974, p. 9). Our integrated model can guide researchers toward a deeper exploration into the process of leaving the streets and allow them to ferret out nuances that heretofore might have been missed or clumped with broader concepts. For example, our model includes two aspects of *awareness* (i.e., both unconscious thoughts and feelings, as well as conscious ones). Learning about the former will allow researchers to explore this level of awareness and identify the role that visceral sensations play in bringing thoughts about exiting to the conscious level. Practitioners can use this knowledge in their efforts to help women work through the exiting process. In other words, the earlier practitioners can

recognize women's efforts to leave the streets, the more easily they can assist them in the *deliberate planning* stage.

## Education

Aside from promoting continued research and scholarship, this model has direct implications for education. Specifically, human service providers (e.g., health care professionals, social workers, substance abuse counselors, religious leaders, and outreach workers) are on the frontlines and are most likely to work directly with women attempting to exit street-based prostitution. It is imperative that they be educated about the exit process, be able to identify cognitive and behavioral signs associated with each stage in the process, and be prepared to provide services deemed most effective at each stage of the exit process. We also believe self-knowledge is a powerful tool made all the more so when that knowledge can be directly applied to understanding and then achieving goals of behavior change. Educating prostituted women about the exit process could prove exceptionally valuable to their exit success because such knowledge will help them (a) identify the specific stage of the model that corresponds with their current situation and, by extension, the most relevant services given their unique situation and exit stage; (b) understand and then prepare for future challenges associated with exit success as they progress through the next stages of the exit process; (c) understand the cyclic nature of the "entry-exit-reentry" process thereby helping them to understand that "reentry" does not necessarily translate into "failure"; and (d) realize that they are not alone, that others have experienced similar setbacks and challenges, and most important, that permanent behavior change is possible.

Furthermore, the introduction of the new and integrated model provides a unique opportunity to expand knowledge and education thereby dispelling myths and erroneous assumptions regarding street-based prostitution and the women who engage in it. Because of their marginalized status, women in street-level sex work have little power and few resources from which to advocate for themselves. Consequently, services to address the needs of prostituted women are severely limited and service providers often have little direct experience in or knowledge about effectively working with them.

By explicating the complex process of exiting and the challenges to success at each stage of the process, we hope to begin a more informed dialogue among service providers, policy advocates, and the broader community. Communication among these groups will result in the provision of targeted resources and effective strategies that address the needs of street-level sex workers attempting exit and seeking permanent behavior change.

## Practice

Reciprocity exists between research and practice. Because research involves reflection on and study of questions, researchers have a duty to share knowledge with practitioners who can then apply this knowledge to solve problems (Wilson, 1997). Human service professionals cannot act effectively to support a woman's exit unless they understand the exit process in a clear and coherent manner. Using our model as a basis for understanding the

exiting process, they can learn to recognize each stage more quickly and efficiently. More important, they can use our model to create assessment tools and interventions that are not only stage specific but also address each woman's specific needs. Researchers and practitioners can work together to create a stronger foundation for understanding the needs of women who are trying to leave the streets.

## Conclusion

In this article, we examined four models that explicitly address cognitive and behavior change processes—two of which are specific to exiting prostitution. Building on these earlier models, we developed a new model that retains the strengths and improves on the weaknesses of each of the four original models when applied to street-based sex work. In addition, we have turned to the extant literature and identified and incorporated the most prevalent barriers to exit success at each stage of the exit process. The result of these efforts is a comprehensive model that not only has direct implications for continued research, education, and practice but also provides a common structure and knowledge base for moving the field forward. We hope that this model will encourage researchers and practitioners to learn more about the exiting process through further collaborative research, to work together to develop assessment tools and relevant interventions that take the barriers to exiting street-level prostitution into consideration, and to develop ways to counter the barriers while supporting women's efforts toward a final exit.

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