



# UK SEX WORK RESEARCH HUB

SWRH Newsletter Issue 4

April 2017

## Welcome!

Welcome to the 4<sup>th</sup> UK Sex Work Research Hub Newsletter which is brought to you by Mary Laing (Northumbria University) and Nicki Smith (Birmingham University). We are thrilled to edit this issue of the newsletter and have been overwhelmed by the number of articles sent by Hub members for inclusion. There really is a huge amount of diverse research taking place across the UK. Big thanks to Raven for all of her

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@sexworkreshub



# **Joint Statement expressing serious concerns about police and UK Border Agency actions targeting migrant sex workers**

We are writing to express our serious concerns about a number of joint UK Border Agency and police operations targeting migrant sex workers which took place during the week commencing 17th October, the week during which Anti-Slavery Day, 18th October 2016, is marked.

On Thursday 20th October in Soho and Chinatown, London, six premises were raided and closed as part of Operation Lanhydrock, carried out by the Metropolitan Police and UK Border Agency[1]. These raids led to protests by sex worker rights organisations outside the Home Office. Photos were taken during the raids, including of the earnings seized from the sex workers. No charges for trafficking were brought but 26 people were arrested for "immigration offences" including four Chinese women who have been detained awaiting deportation. The English Collective of Prostitutes was contacted by some women impacted who report that they were terrified.

In Leeds on the evening of 21st October, UK Border Agency accompanied by West Yorkshire Police attended the managed area in Leeds targeting migrant women, removing six women and detaining them in Yarlswood Immigration Removal Centre. Basis Sex Work Project who have visited them report that five women remain there in great distress.

In Bolton, Greater Manchester Police and UK Border Agency officers, raided premises and took BBC News with them. This is in violation of National Police Chiefs Council Guidance on sex work (2016) which explicitly recommends that the media not partake in any operational raids as 'vulnerable victims may be present and consideration must be given to the potential consequences of publicly identifying sex workers which could seriously undermine their safety.' (pg.11)

There may well have been other similar actions that occurred in other areas of England and Wales that have not as yet come to our attention.

Such raids and 'sweep' type approaches are terrifying for those sex workers who are targeted by them and rarely achieve positive outcomes in terms of disclosures of exploitation including trafficking and slavery, areas in which gaining victim trust is complex and often takes time. The National Police Chiefs Council guidance on sex work refers to the detrimental impact of such raids;

'Moreover, brothel closures and 'raids' create a mistrust of all external agencies including outreach services. It is difficult to rebuild trust and ultimately reduces the amount of intelligence submitted to the police and puts sex workers at greater risk.' (pg. 10)

Operations targeting migrant sex workers, who are amongst the most vulnerable to exploitative working conditions and violence (particularly those with irregular and illegal migration status), in a manner which seems to pay scant regard to welfare despite claims

to be addressing vulnerability or modern slavery, are both extremely worrying and are discriminatory.

Historically such operations in the UK and elsewhere do not stop migrant people going into sex work nor do they support victims of slavery; indeed they force migrants further underground into more illicit means of working, increase dependency on third parties including coercive controllers make migrants more fearful of (and further alienate) the police, services and others support networks. This is highlighted by a quote from one of the women in Yarlswood;

“The night of the operation was awful. I had a good relationship with the police previously. They asked if I was ok ... I felt safe on the street. I knew the police were around and I'd call them if I needed them. .. I tried to go when I saw the police but the normal police took me to the immigration police. They said I'd be ok. When I found out they were going to deport me”.

These actions are alarming and we seriously question the effectiveness of such an approach to identifying victims of slavery and trafficking and prosecute coercers. In addition, if these actions were motivated, as claimed, by a desire to “rescue” victims then inviting media, taking photos to post on social media and involving the UK Border Agency seriously undermines any sense of “victim” care.

We also have serious doubts over whether the impact on sex workers and their relationship with police and services, which is clearly outlined in the NPCC Guidelines, was considered. Following Operation Pentameter, a nationally coordinated operation to address trafficking for sexual exploitation which took place in 2008, it transpired that ‘after raiding 822 brothels, flats and massage parlours all over the UK, Pentameter finally convicted of trafficking a grand total of only 15 men and women’ (Guardian 2009). [2]

At a time in the UK when of the last 15 murders of sex workers in the UK 11 (73%) were migrant women (NUM UKNSWP murder database) we would expect authorities responsible for public protection and the prevention of serious crime to be prioritising the safety of all sex workers, particularly migrants, whatever their circumstances, not undermining safety and exacerbating their vulnerability. As the NPCC National Police Guideline states; ‘As a law enforcement agency, the safety of people engaged in sex work must be paramount to the police service’. (pg6)

It also states that;

‘A significant proportion of people in the UK sex industry are migrants, of a range of nationalities, have a range of status in terms of immigration, working in a range of circumstances hence migrant sex workers should be treated as individuals. Consideration must be given to their particular needs. Sex workers in the UK are stigmatised and face discrimination. When these factors are combined with legal, cultural, language issues and racism faced by many migrant sex workers, a disadvantaged and excluded vulnerable group is created. Many migrants especially those with undocumented or irregular immigration status are reluctant to report any crimes committed against them to the police for fear of prosecution for immigration offences and a lack of trust in the police, for some, due to poor experiences of police

in home nations. This leaves migrant workers vulnerable to targeted crimes with perpetrators believing they will not be reported' (pg.14)

Hence, we would expect local forces and their partner agencies to be developing approaches to improve the safety and welfare of migrant people not undermining it. We urge the authorities to cease these actions and consider the detrimental impact on the safety, rights and welfare of migrant sex workers and sex workers more widely in the UK.

We want the authorities to establish and make public;

How many such actions took place and on what intelligence were they based?  
How much money has been seized from sex workers and when will it be returned to them?  
Whether they were part of coordinated national initiatives? If so which organisation provided direction? What were the objectives of these operations?  
How many migrant sex workers did officers have contact with?  
What were the outcomes for these sex workers? How many were removed to detention centres?  
How many victims of slavery and/or trafficking for sexual exploitation were identified and referred to the NRM? How are they being supported?  
What charges have been brought to date and how many charges relate to slavery and trafficking?

It is crucial that police and authorities are transparent and open, particularly when it concerns the welfare of a socially excluded group, whose rights can easily be violated by the actions of the authorities.

### **Signatories:**

**National Ugly Mugs (UKNSWP)**  
**English Collective of Prostitutes**  
**Sex Worker Open University**  
**Sex Work Research Hub**  
**Scotpep**  
**Basis Sex Work Project (Basis Yorkshire)**

[1] <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/chinatown-and-soho-18-arrested-in-prostitution-and-slavery-raids-as-police-storm-six-massage-a3374971.html>

[2] <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/oct/20/government-trafficking-enquiry-fails>

## **Beyond the Gaze**

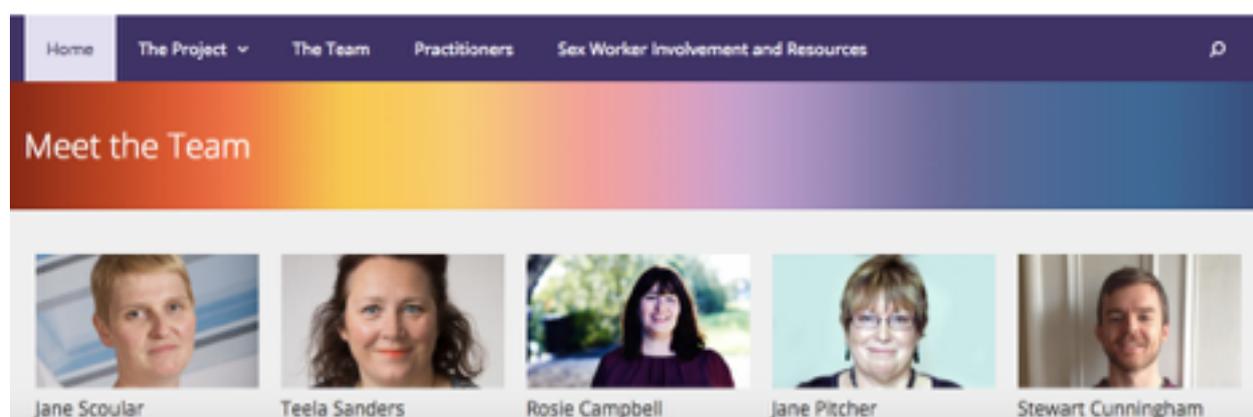
**By Teela Sanders, Jane Scoular, Rosie Campbell, Jane Pitcher & Stewart Cunningham**

The Beyond the Gaze [www.beyond-the-gaze.com](http://www.beyond-the-gaze.com) project reaches it's half way point (ends sept 2018) and has collected a monumental amount of data. We have a customer

survey of over 1300 respondents and also a survey on sex workers that work online with over 600 responses. This, in addition to interviews with 60 sex workers, over 55 police informants and a survey of support projects, explores working practices, safety and regulation within the online sector. Rosie continues to take forward the netreach activities with Basis Yorkshire and develop good practice guidelines & safety info with NUM, sex worker advisers and our practitioners forum. There will be dissemination events in 2018 which will be widely advertised.

# BEYOND THE GAZE

The working practices, regulation and safety of Internet-based sex work in the UK



## Sex Workers' Opera

### 1. Please feel free to use our Stories blog for your research/campaigning.

It features at least 50 of the 63 stories we've independently received or proactively collected from 17 countries to date. <http://sexworkersopera.com/stories> most are sent in by the worker themselves, others are collected by local sex worker support groups collecting audio stories on street corners, in cafes and in brothels in Chile and Singapore then transcribed and translated. Please reference the project if you quote a story for anything.

### 2. The flyer I handed out was just a pretty memento, not an invitation to the next show - wrong dates!

That flyer is from our 2016 run but I realise it doesn't have the year on it so I understand some people were already putting it in their calendars. There is no show in May this year sorry! Which leads me on to...

### 3. The Sex Workers' Opera is organising a UK tour from October/November/December 2017!

If anyone has the capacity to support us in getting a venue, co-funding, press, networking. Or is just passionate about us bringing the show to your area and can bring some audience, let us know. Even if you don't know what you can offer yet but want to hear about it, let us know!

When we do a show we roll out a localised inreach/outreach programme: offering free tickets to local Sex Workers, and also queer and poc grassroots groups

#### **4. We also run free workshops for local sex workers in arts action**

And subsidised workshops in sex work support 101 for local feminist, queer, poc and migrant groups, or academics too! Wherever there's untapped solidarity potential.

So when we're on tour we'll hopefully doing workshops in whatever cities we perform in. Let us know if you're interested in organising one of these as they're really politically and personally impactful, and so accessible you could bring your grandma!

## **21 questions with Criminology Professor Teela Sanders, Director for Research, University of Leicester**

**By Raven R. Bowen**



**Q: So, What do you do?**

**A:** *I'm the Director of Research and so I look after other research agendas, I facilitate and encourage research activities. My job is increasingly admin related but I try to keep myself thinking that I'm a research full time and a teacher... but the reality of it is that it's the other way around, which you don't really expect. You expect time to do research and autonomy but you don't get that. Totally disillusioned I guess, LOL!*

**Q: And your favorite color?**

**A:** *Purple, purple flowers and the book "[The Color Purple](#)" it was one of my first and favorite ever novels. Even though I don't own anything purple at all. I used to have a purple car when I was younger.*

**Q: What are you most proud of?**

**A:** *Being a vegetarian for most of my life. To carnivores that sounds ridiculous but since the age of 11 I became aware of animal rights and since that age it's probably the only thing that I've done consistently well over my whole life.*

**Q: Why did you choose the sex industry as a topic for your intellectual pursuits?**

**A:** *Well I think it chose me. I've always been one for the underdog, I've always been one to shout if you've got a voice and I've always done that. I went out to New York and volunteered with an HIV/AIDS organization when I was at university and I met sex workers who were volunteers and they just totally blew me away. Their lives, the stigma... and I was just like this is a cool group of people and I came back to the UK at looked at things from an academic point of view and that passion for sex workers just stayed with me and opened up the whole debate for me around sexuality and sex work and why this group of people get so stigmatized and outlawed and are the targets of our*

angst around sexuality. I was also very interested in the contradictions in capitalism and sex work being part of that, so I think it grabbed me politically and personally as it relates to regulation, policy and you see the inequalities.

**Q: The last thing you laughed about?**

**A:** Well it's my mum's birthday today so I was laughing with her about her bucket list. She's 69 today and we had a laugh as she's writing her 10-year bucket list. She's just got one thing on it at the moment and I thought that was pathetic. I want her to add a Caribbean cruise for the whole family so it becomes our bucket list!

**Q: What's your favorite food?**

**A:** Oh Curry! Indian food is my favorite food.

**Q: Your current project or pursuit?**

**A:** I have another Wellcome Trust project on homicide and mental health which I've just started. My other pursuits as in lifetime pursuits is that I'm really into camping at the moment and getting living in the outdoors is part of my agenda. We've got our greenhouse and our chickens and a fire pit so we try to be in the outdoors as much as possible.

**Q: What's your biggest regret?**

**A:** I'm one of those people who don't really have regrets. Roll with the punches I'd say. Not to say my life has been all happy with flowers but I don't dwell in the past. Things happen for a reason.

**Q: So Facebook or Twitter?**

**A:** Oh definitely Facebook for family and friends only, but Twitter is kind of the devil! I think that forcing complicated stuff into 140 characters... it's the devil.

**Q: What challenges you the most about your sex work related work?**

**A:** Never having enough time and trying to make sense of something ...so doing something decent within a finite amount of time. But in terms of sex work research has always been the challenge in trying to make changes and how academics are in a position to do that but are also very constrained, particularly in this area, so much time is taken up trying to quiet down the critics that the actual change can kind of get lost. So the challenge is getting past all of that and trying to make small steps and move things forward nationally, internationally and trying to be the critical voice. The challenge is the revolving door, sometimes you see 5 years later the same stuff comes up among a different set of politicians. I've seen the same issues about 2 or 3 times now and it's the same stuff and in all that time you're thinking where's the change? It's like flares, they'll come back around again. Individually it can be a bit deflating but collectively we must take things forward with good evidence-based research.

**Q: Favorite Movie?**

**A:** I'm a bit fickle on the movies...I love [P.S. I love You](#) and [The Color Purple](#).

**Q: And the last time you cried?**

**A:** I don't know probably everyday over something, LOL! I definitely cried when [George Michael died](#). That definitely made me sad and looking back on his videos and music from Wham! it's really sad.

**Q: Cat or dog person?**

**A:** Oh dog! My partner's got a cat that instantly took a dislike to me...it's the rival meeeooooowwww! They're feral animals! If you fall over and had a stroke they would probably eat you! You can't take them for a walk or anything, what's the point of a cat? I do not get it!

**Q: Who understands you?**

**A:** Probably my dad and my partner.

**Q: What's the last book or article you read?**

**A:** *I read a philosophy book over the weekend called [‘Constellations of Philosophy’](#) by Alain Botton but my son and I read the [Famous Five series](#) from the 1960s.*

**Q: Childhood Fear?**

**A:** *Snakes, massively! I've had one around my neck last year when I had animal parties for the kids and I didn't want them to have my fear but as soon as the head started moving I had to get it off me!*

**Q: What did your last text say?**

**A:** *My last text was ‘Do you want me to make you a cup of tea?’*

**Q: One thing that your work is aimed to do for the sex industry?**

**A:** *Provide a space for alternative voices.*

**Q: The meaning of life in one word?**

**A:** *Love!*

**Q: The last thing you Googled?**

**A:** *The nine times table and the Mad Hatter for a costume for my son!*

**Q: What do/did you want to be when you grow/grew up?**

**A:** *I wanted to work with the law. I wanted to be a solicitor or a barrister when I was a teenager. It's bizarre and I just thought it would be way too boring because I'm far too liberal to do that kind of stuff. It's far too much of a serious profession for me.*

## Whores of Yore

By Kate Lister

Whores of Yore is a project that took me quite by surprise. Unlike most academic research projects that require precision planning, ethical approval, funding and a clear sense of purpose, Whores of Yore snuck up behind me and happily slapped my career. I was researching medieval sexuality when I found a record when I found a London court record from 1340 of a “notorious strumpets”; Clarice la Claterballock. The wry wit in the alias made me laugh. But, beyond being funny, the fact that such names would be adopted said more about sex work in the fourteenth century than many academic texts I have read; there was a real humanity to it. I started the Twitter feed @WhoreofYore to share snapshots of history like that.



But, it quickly became about much more than tweeting the history of sex work. Twitter is a great leveller; your voice is on an equal footing with everyone else, and the feedback is instant. I started getting feedback from followers who were reacting to the material I was posting in ways I could have never predicted. In the beginning, getting daily, uncensored and anonymous feedback about your work is daunting, but follower feedback also made the feed better; it encouraged me to break away from a western focus, include more trans voices and to be braver. But, what changed my research was that Twitter allowed me to engage directly with the sex worker community. Suddenly, history was not a dead story – it was a powerful context to modern debates around sex work and sex workers today. It has changed the way I conduct research, because history isn't just a story, it's a heritage.

What's more, it's not my heritage; it's the heritage of the sex work community and I am serving them.

I built the whores of yore website in the hope it would provide a space that enabled a process of democratisation and facilitate a discussion, rather than a lecture into the study and history of sexuality. I have been extremely lucky in the scope of articles people have wanted to share on the site; authors, academics, archivists, historians, activists and (of course), sex workers have all contributed work around the issue of sexuality and sex work. BASIS Yorkshire (a charity who work with street sex workers and some of the most vulnerable members of the sex work community) have agreed to write a monthly blog about their work, which is a real honour. I also have a sex therapist, Drew Lawson, who is regularly blogging on the site and answering all kinds of questions about sexuality. I work with the archivist at Delta of Venus, the web's largest collection of vintage erotica, to bring a selection of historical pornographic images. The purpose of this archive is not to create a goldfish bowl for others to stare into, but to provide a platform and invite people to share their experience and story.

Going forward, the project will expand to include podcasts, vlogging and interviews with historians, activists, members of the sex work community, and those who feel they are marginalised by their sexuality. The history of sexuality will be placed side by side with sexuality today in the hope we can join up some of those conversations. Shame and stigma are broken down through conversation, and when we listen to one another; I hope that's what this project can play a part in.

[www.thewhoresofyore.com](http://www.thewhoresofyore.com)



## **Erotic Performance and Spectatorship: New Frontiers in Erotic Dance**

**By Dr Katy Pilcher, Lecturer in Sociology, Aston University**

Erotic dance is one of the most contentious issues in feminist debates today and a source of fascination in media representations, yet little is known about those who perform erotic dance for women customers, or the experiences of these spectators themselves.

Through vivid ethnographies of a lesbian leisure venue and a male strip show, [Erotic Performance and Spectatorship](#) examines the gender and sexual politics of erotic dance, simultaneously relating these to debates about sex work more widely. Drawing on insights gleaned through participant observation within erotic dance spaces; interviews with dancers, customers and management; together with a photo-elicitation venture with a dancer, this book subverts previous assumptions that only women perform erotic dance and only men spectate, and develops the debate beyond assumptions that erotic dance is either straightforwardly degrading or empowering.

Through the voices of dancers and customers, together with my own reflections on participating in strip venues, this book provides a distinctive view on issues including the politics of looking and being watched; the aesthetic, emotional and body work of erotic dance; questions of power; and the embodied experiences of dancers and customers in these spaces. I draw out some of the key and the 'queer' moments that I perceive to be central to dancers' and customers' experiences within non-conventional erotic dance spaces, as well as being the moments through which we can think about the contestability of normative power relations. I make links between participants' definitions of both venues as in some senses representing 'women's spaces', and the tensions with this notion; the complex ways in which customers and dancers negotiate the dynamics of looking and being watched through critically engaging with conceptions of a sexual 'gaze'; and how the particular venues that dancers work within is crucial to their ability to be able to experience autonomy through their work role. I highlight how people with erotic dance spaces challenge and negotiate heteronormative gender and sexual power relations, and what this indicates for the theorising of gender and sexual power relations more broadly.

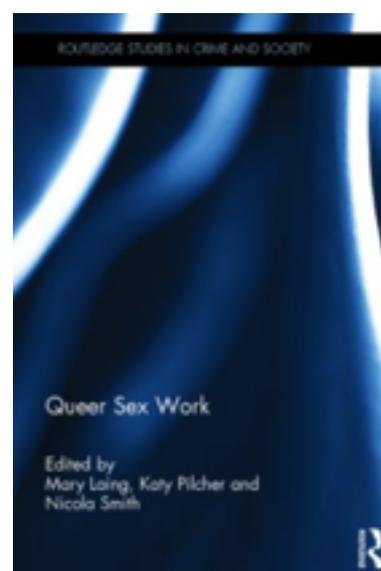
The book includes reflections on the sensory experiences of researching erotic leisure venues, and includes anecdotes of encounters during the research process that have influenced the conclusions drawn. I comment upon the status of 'sex work research' within and outside the academy and the impact upon researchers who may be stigmatised ([Hammond and Kingston, 2014](#)), or considered to be doing 'dirty' ([Irvine, 2014](#)) or 'morally' tainted research. Theorised through a feminist and queer lens, overall, I argue that people's engagement with erotic dance as both performers and customers is complex, and the book highlights the pleasures and the politics of participating in erotic dance spaces.

If you would like to review this book for an academic journal (and receive a free copy) please contact Katy to arrange this on [k.pilcher@aston.ac.uk](mailto:k.pilcher@aston.ac.uk). It can be purchased at a discount using code FLR40 on the [Routledge website](#).

## Queer Sex Work

By Mary Laing, Katy Pilcher & Nicola Smith

Sex work is a subject of significant contestation across academic disciplines, as well as within legal, medical, moral, feminist, political and socio-cultural discourses. A large body of research exists, but much of this focuses on the sale of sex by women to men and ignores other performances, practices, meanings and embodiments in the contemporary sex industry. A queer agenda is important in order to challenge hetero-centric gender norms and to develop new insights into how gender, sex, power, crime, work, migration, space/place, health and intimacy are understood in the context of commercial sexual encounters.



Our volume, *Queer Sex Work*, explores what it might mean to ‘be’, ‘do’ and ‘think’ queer(ly) in the study and practice of commercial sex. It brings together a multiplicity of empirical case studies – including erotic dance venues, online sex working, pornography, grey sexual economies, and BDSM – and offers a variety of perspectives from academic scholars, policy practitioners, activists and sex workers themselves. In so doing, the book advances a queer politics of sex work that aims to disrupt heteronormative logics whilst also making space for different voices in academic and political debates about commercial sex.

We hope that this unique and multidisciplinary volume will be indispensable for scholars and students of the global sex trade and of gender, sexuality, feminism and queer theory more broadly, as well as policymakers, activists and practitioners interested in the politics and practice of sex work in local, national and international contexts. The book has recently been republished in paperback by Routledge, and further details are available at <https://www.routledge.com/Queer-Sex-Work/Laing-Pilcher-Smith/p/book/9780415704557>

*Queer Sex Work* explores what it might mean to ‘be,’ ‘do’ and ‘think’ queerly in the study and practice of commercial sex.

## **Stigma experienced by sex workers living with HIV with Zimbabwe**

**By Joanna Busza**

For the past 5 years, I’ve been collaborating with the national HIV prevention and treatment programme for sex workers in Zimbabwe, Sisters with a Voice, which is run by the Centre for Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Research. Sisters with a Voice offers sexual and reproductive health services, HIV testing and counselling, outreach, legal advice, peer education and community organising activities in 6 fixed-site and 30 mobile clinics. So far, over 45,000 sex workers have been reached since 2009.

HIV rates in this part of the world are very high, and especially so among female sex workers (around 50%). Referrals for antiretroviral therapy are made to government services, and Sisters organises a “buddy” system for adherence support. As part of research conducted over the past few years, we looked at the kinds of stigma and discrimination confronted by sex workers, specifically looking at the overlapping stigma of both selling sex and living with HIV.

An interesting finding – which we have just published in *AIDS Care* – is that the women felt that they were more stigmatised against for being sex workers than they were for living with HIV. For example, among 1039 female sex workers who told us they were HIV+, the majority (62%) felt they had “lost respect” in the community for being sex workers, but only 22% felt that having HIV caused a similar loss of respect. While 44% reported being verbally abused for being a sex workers, just 15.8% felt they had received verbal abuse for their HIV status. In fact, almost all the HIV+ female

sex workers (91%) reported some form of stigma or discrimination based on sex work, but only half (51%) for living with HIV. Luckily, very few women felt they were actually denied health services for any reason, but more felt this had happened as a result of being a sex worker (8.5%) compared to being HIV+ (1.7%).

We interpret this finding as demonstrating that over the years, HIV has become more “normalised” and accepted, particularly as widespread availability of antiretroviral treatment means HIV is now a chronic, manageable condition instead of a deadly disease. In Zimbabwe, everyone knows someone in their family or among their friends who has HIV. Sex work, on the other hand, remains criminalised and marginalised. So the good news is that social norms can and do change – it wasn’t that long ago that HIV was much more heavily stigmatised. But efforts to tackle stigma against sex workers – through advocacy for decriminalisation, sensitisation for health workers, and public health messages that do not demonise sex workers as “vectors” of disease – are clearly needed.

For more information about the Sisters programme, see [www.ceshhar.co.zw](http://www.ceshhar.co.zw). We’re currently increasing numbers of outreach workers and peer educators, setting up self-help groups, and working to better serve the needs of adolescents and young women (15-24) who sell sex.

## Two projects by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

By Pippa Grenfell

### **The health impacts of sex work (de)criminalisation: synthesizing the evidence**

Dr Lucy Platt, Pippa Grenfell and Rebecca Meiksin (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)) are currently undertaking a short-term project, funded by Open Society Foundations (OSF), to synthesize the international literature on the impacts of (de)criminalisation on sex workers' health, safety and access to health and social care. The review spans multidisciplinary literature and is steered by an international advisory group of sex workers and sex work researchers. The project builds on our presentations at the 2015 UKNSWP conference in Manchester, the ECP’s 2015 evidence-giving symposium at the House of Commons, and the 2016 ProsPol meeting in Ljubljana; we also presented emerging findings of the review at the European Public Health Conference in Vienna last November. Key outputs of the project will include an applied policy brief for use in advocacy and policy debates and a supporting peer-reviewed journal article. The key findings and recommendations will be launched at a dissemination workshop at LSHTM later this year, details of which we will circulate via the Hub.

*If you'd like any more information in the meantime, please do get in touch: [Pippa.Grenfell@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:Pippa.Grenfell@lshtm.ac.uk) or [Lucy.Platt@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:Lucy.Platt@lshtm.ac.uk)*

### **The East London Project**

A participatory mixed-method evaluation on how removing enforcement could affect sex workers' safety, health and access to services, in East London

In February 2017, Dr Lucy Platt and Pippa Grenfell (LSHTM) began a 30-month, participatory, mixed-methods project, funded by the National Institute for Health Research, in collaboration with Professors Maggie O'Neill (University of York), Peter Vickerman (University of Bristol), Marie-Claude Boily (Imperial College) and James Hargreaves (LSHTM), Dr Sarah Creighton (Homerton Hospital), Georgina Perry (former manager of Open Doors) and key partners Open Doors and National Ugly Mugs. The project is a case study across three East London boroughs and will combine qualitative fieldwork, a two-wave survey, mathematical modelling and collation of routine policing data, to estimate the potential impacts of removing sex work-related police enforcement on sex workers' safety, health, and access to health and social care. The project adopts a participatory research approach, collaborating with sex workers and members of sex worker organisations as co-researchers and advisors.

*If you would like any more information about this project, please do get in touch: [Pippa.Grenfell@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:Pippa.Grenfell@lshtm.ac.uk) or [Lucy.Platt@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:Lucy.Platt@lshtm.ac.uk)*

## **Reviewing the occupational risks of sex workers in comparison to other 'risky' professions: mental ill-health, violence and murder**

**By Teela Sanders, Stewart Cunningham, Lucy Platt, Pippa Grenfell & PG Maciotti**

Bringing together social scientists, epidemiologists, sex worker rights activists and health practitioners, this Wellcome Trust Seed Award project aims to understand how occupational health and safety differs between sex workers and other professions which are established as 'risky' because of the elevated prevalence of violence in the workplace and poor mental health. Through literature reviews and evidence scoping, we will examine and synthesize data on the occupational risks of sex workers (female, male and transgender) across street and indoor workplaces in comparison to 'risky' professions as categorised by the occupational literature, focusing on three key areas: mental ill-health, violence and murder.

We will analyse routine data gathered by our research partners [National Ugly Mugs](#), to better understand the risk, forms and circumstances of murders committed against sex workers in the UK, and integrate these analyses with the literature review findings. This knowledge will expand our understanding of the role of the workplace in shaping and protecting against risk, and our capacity to develop policies and practices that address specific occupational health inequalities faced by sex workers. Our dissemination plans will establish a network of multidisciplinary researchers and practitioners in the UK to develop research projects and impact activities to improve the health and safety of sex workers.

*For further info on the project contact [Professor Teela Sanders](#) [teela.sanders@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:teela.sanders@leicester.ac.uk)*

# Ad Men: Queer ethnography research with men selling sex to men through advertisements

By Allan Tyler

My approach into sex work research through queer-scene advertising seems sideways by colleagues whose professional experiences are policing, psychology, or indeed sex work itself. But the opportunity I have is to approach sex work from perspectives of men who sell sex to men in London and from the perspectives of people who are not engaged with medical, psycho-social, or policing institutions. The advantage is accessing a population of people who sell sex who are not immediately engaged with services aimed at relieving experiences of scarcity or harm.

My data – if you are a reader who is interested in such things – comes from interviews (semi-structured and sometimes unstructured) with men who sell sex, the advertisements they (often) self-produce and post online or in print, and observations and field notes. What I have is a polytextual dataset with opportunities for triangulation and queer, critical readings of some of the limits of reading texts as representational – never-mind ‘realist’. My key findings: sex workers are not some discrete typology of people nor can they be classified into discrete typologies. Sex work advertisements are by definition designed to work performatively – to create a discourse more than reflect reality. Finally, simplistic binary models of sex/work, need/want, and agency/coercion confound any single definition of ‘sex work’.

Whilst I first set out to contact men through the ads I had seen for so many years, people who

## Other publications

- Hoefinger, Heidi. 'Neoliberal Sexual Humanitarianism and Story-Telling: The case of Somaly Mam', *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 7, 2016, pp. 56–78, [www.antitraffickingreview.org](http://www.antitraffickingreview.org)
- Hoefinger, Heidi, Pisey Ly and Srorn Srun (2016) 'Sex Politics and Moral Panics: LGBT Communities, Sex/Entertainment Workers and Sexually-Active Youth in Cambodia'. Book chapter in *Handbook of Contemporary Cambodia*, Katherine Brickell and Simon Springer (eds.), Chapter 27, London: Routledge
- J. R. Hargreaves, J. Busza, P. Mushati, E. Fearon & F. M. Cowan (2016): Overlapping HIV and sex-work stigma among female sex workers recruited to 14 respondent-driven sampling surveys across Zimbabwe, 2013, *AIDS Care*, DOI: 10.1080/09540121.2016.1268673
- Grenfell P, Eastham J, Perry G, Platt L (2016). Decriminalising sex work in the UK. *BMJ*. 354. i4459 doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.i4459>
- Platt L, Grenfell P, Eastham J, Perry G (2016). Response to Byng et al. Re: Decriminalising sex work in the UK [354. i4459 doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136>

were able and willing to talk about their own experiences of selling sex to men soon started to emerge from within my wider social sphere. And through the stories of the men I found, the men who found me – and those it turned out I'd already known – I saw and heard the overlaps between narratives of men selling sex to men and other, 'typical' narratives of 'typical' gay-scene men's 'typical' gay-scene weekends. A new question emerged: how was this experience and representation of sex work so different from so-many queer-men's experiences of anonymised, casual-sex?

The advertisements and the profiles were revealing in their own ways. Searching back through 20 years of ads I found several photos of people I knew. I also found people like 'Dev' who had advertised himself as 24 years old for more than 5 years using a photo that never changed, however his body might or might not have. The ads revealed themselves as co-producing ideas about what is real as much as they do about what sexuality, masculinity, and 'escorting' *look like* in London's queer scene/s. Sex work advertisements are, by definition, designed to work performatively. The ads are an appellation, a call to potential customers. What they signify is often a mythologised phantasy, a symbolic – rather than literal – depiction of what is possible. With age, for example, when the gap between what is real and what is possible becomes too great, many advertisers stop advertising any number if they don't stop advertising altogether.

We need to keep pushing this research forward. There is a growing recognition of the need to provide better information about sex work for professionals who work with people from a broad spectrum of experiences. Sharing stories and texts outside of institutionalised canons is one way to query and queer the inclusion of sex work in forensic psychology, counselling and mental health.

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## **Conference news: Responding to Sex Work in Wales Conference, College of Law and Criminology, Swansea University – Friday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 2017**

**By Debbie and the Swansea Team**

The Swansea team (Debbie, Tracey, Jordan and Marije) were delighted to host a Welsh Government funded one day event that focused on responding to sex work in Wales. The event was co-hosted by the Consortium for Sexuality Studies consortium-sexual-studies.swan.ac.uk and the Sex Work Research Hub. The conference was attended by over 80 delegates from statutory agencies, third sector organisations and researchers from across England and Wales.

The event was really well supported by a number of hub members – Dr Rosie Campbell, Beyond the Gaze, Alex Feis-Bryce, NUM, Sam Hanks, Cardiff University and of course us folks from Swansea. Following the opening address from Professor Elwen Evans QC,

Head of the College of Law and Criminology and Dr Rhian Hills, Senior Policy Officer – Substance Misuse, Welsh Government, the day focused on the following themes:

Responding to Sex Work in Wales – Chaired by Steve Chapman the Welsh Government’s Anti-Slavery Co-ordinator

I opened the session with my presentation, ‘Putting Sex Work in Wales on the Map’, I focused the need to include Wales in terms of policy and practice in relation to sex work. All too often Wales becomes subsumed within the ongoing discussion within England and the good work being carried out in Wales often goes unrecognised.

In her presentation ‘Managing Sex Work in Wales: Challenges and Successes’ Nici Evans, Lead for Human Exploitation, Cardiff Partnership Board, outlined some of the challenges and success of managing sex work in Cardiff. She focused on the issues of engaging communities with this agenda and the difficulties in developing sustainable services and harm reduction strategies for sex workers. Of course her presentation highlighted the excellent partnership work that has been achieved in the development of the Sex Workers Operation Team MARAC which has helped to keep the most vulnerable sex workers safe.



In their joint presentation ‘Supporting sex workers in Wales 2017 and beyond’ – Kim Ann Williamson, Crown Prosecution Service, Lead for Modern Slavery in Wales and Rhian Bowen-Davies, National Adviser for Violence against Women, other forms of Gender-Based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, spoke about how sex work is being embedded within the Violence against women strategy for Wales. And while this might not be welcome in every quarter – especially by those who want to see a stand-alone sex

worker strategy – we do need to recognise that we have to accept the real situation we find ourselves in – sex work hasn’t got a national strategy and if we can protect men women and trans workers then we must take the opportunities as they are presented – we also know that some sex workers are vulnerable to violence both on and off street and she made the point that sex work does not even get a mention in the Home Office violence against women strategy and that we can be different in Wales. Kim Ann agreed that sex work maybe does not fit under the modern slavery agenda or the violence against women agenda but at least a vehicle has been provided to push the work forward towards positive change. She also announced that the training that has been developed by us here at Swansea in partnership with NUMs and our local partners will be embedded within the National Training Framework for Public Sector employees in Wales. Her vision was simply, support, need, safety and harm reduction – something that we all share.

Following the break, session two examined – The Implications of Regulation for Sex Workers and was chaired by Sam Hanks, Cardiff University.

The ever wonderful Alex Feis-Bryce, spoke about the need to separate trafficking from sex work – how brothel raids do little to combat trafficking but how they do damage sex workers in his presentation - ‘Sex work, violence and patchwork policing’. He emphasised how high enforcement leads to sex workers being unwilling to report violence. Alex also spoke about the need for NUM representation in Wales.

Following Alex, Dr Rosie Campbell O.B.E presented us with a vision of the contemporary nature of sex work in her presentation entitled, ‘Online Sex work: new spaces, crimes and support?’ Rosie, gave an insight into the amazing Beyond the Gaze project and shared some initial findings. The future is here was most definitely the message from Rosie and hopefully the findings from the project will become embedded within policy nationally and also help to inform service delivery.

The final session of the day explored Alternative Approaches and Emerging Understandings and was chaired by Jordan Dawson, Swansea University.

We were delighted that Gemma Scire, CEO Basis Yorkshire, made the long journey to share her experiences in a presentation entitled, ‘Leeds’ Managed Approach to street sex work – Partnership, pragmatism and progressiveness’. Gemma very eloquently highlighted some of the advantages to the managed approach but didn’t shy away from discussing some of the problems she had encountered. This was very well received by the Police in the room.

The day then turned to a much under discussed topic, student sex work. Our very own, Professor Tracey Sagar, presented a paper ‘Student participation in the sex industry: Time to prioritise student well-being over morality’ that shared some of the findings from the project and emphasised how we need to do more to counter stigma experienced by student sex workers.

Following this we shifted to continental Europe to look at other regulatory mechanisms, focusing on The Netherlands, Marije Van Stempvoort, Swansea University and Lyle Muns, Amsterdam University, examined, ‘Regulation and emancipation in the Netherlands’. As a student sex worker, Lyle shared a very personal presentation with us that was both lively and informative. If ever there was a presentation to bust myths and fight the stigma associated with the sex industry, the Lyle’s was it! Marije spoke about how the perceived liberal approach to the regulation of sex work in Amsterdam, might be considered a myth and that the approach adopted there does little to address the issues of stigma experienced by sex workers.

Tracey concluded the day by pulling together some of the keys messages of the day. It was great to see that there was a will within the room to address violence experienced by sex workers and that the main fight that needs to be taken forward is the need to address stigma experienced by sex workers something that we should all seek to address where we can! All in all a great day! We did take plenty pictures of the day and are pleased to share them with you.

## **Postgraduate Sex Work Conference**

**By Angelika Strohmayer, Open Lab, Newcastle University**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of January Teela hosted the 5<sup>th</sup> annual sex work research hub postgraduate conference at Leicester University. After hearing only fantastic things about the previous conferences, I took it upon myself to travel the three hours to Leicester on train to see for myself whether it really was as safe, comfortable, and supportive a space as I was told it would be.

As the first round of questions came around after the first three papers, I began to understand why everyone who's been to this event before spoke so fondly of it! As the day went on and more and more questions were asked and answered, the sense of support and camaraderie in the room almost became tangible. Both PGR students and seasoned academics not only looked interested in what was being presented, but asked intriguing questions and shared their supportive and informative comments and remarks.

Something that really struck out at me about the conference besides the support and mentorship was the diversity in the room. It was great to see such an international delegation of attendants providing questions from so many different schools of thought, disciplines, and nationalities. Presenters attended not only from many corners of the UK, but also from University of Helsinki and the University of Milan (I'm not even going to try to count how many nationalities were in the room!).

The different paper sessions also ranged in topics: covering relationships and sex work; power, marginalisation and stigma; labour, rights and regulation; diversity in sex work; and the arts and sex work. We were also lucky to have a surprise treat from Alex from the Sex Worker Opera! The papers came from different schools, disciplines, and fields, which really showed the interdisciplinarity of current sex work research.

At the end of the day, I had learnt so much about sex work research and finally met some people I had heard so much about before going. It was a fantastic opportunity to get to know some other PhD students doing sex work research, and to hear about their work. At the same time, it was great to have the support from all those present at the event, and to be able to share thoughts and ideas.

Thank you so much to Teela and everyone else who helped make this event happen. It was such a fantastic experience, and I cannot stress enough how supportive the environment was. If you didn't go this year, put it in your calendars as soon as the date for next years' event comes around. Wherever it will be next year, I assure you it'll be worth the trip. See you next year!

## **#GeoSex17 Special Session at 2017 Association of American Geographers Conference, Boston (USA), 5-9 April**

**By Paul Maginn**

We are delighted to announce that there will be another #GeoSex special session - (De)Stigmatising Sexscapes: Policy, Politics and Performance - at this year's Association of American Geographers conference in Boston from 5-9 April. #GeoSex17 follows in the wake of #GeoSex15 (Chicago, AAG) and #GeoSex16 (San Francisco, AAG). As with previous special sessions we have a series of sub-themed sessions - five sessions in fact! - covering a diverse range of topics that speak to the regulation and stigmatisation of sex, sexuality and sex work.

A total of 21 papers are to be presented from a rich mix of early career and established academics, PhD students and, crucially, a number of sex workers and sex work academics. For this year we were lucky to secure some funding from the AAG's Enrichment Fund so as to help off-set some of the costs for (i) Bella Robinson, a sex work advocate with COYOTE Rhode Island and (ii) Rachel Wotton, an Australian-based sex work advocate and founder of Touching Base. We are grateful to the AAG for their support in helping us ensure that sex worker voices are an active part of the #GeoSex special sessions. The active inclusion of sex workers/advocates in the #GeoSex series is fundamental to our praxis in hosting these sessions.

Contributors to #GeoSex17 hail from Australia, the UK, EU and the USA and comes from a variety of disciplines backgrounds including geography, sociology, criminology and cultural/media studies. Full details of the sessions and papers can be found here: <http://meridian.aag.org/callforpapers/program/ParticipantDetail.cfm?IMISID=90091215&mtgID=63>

As part of the #GeoSex special sessions we try to organise some kind of off-conference fieldtrip. In 2015 we did a tour of Chicago's suburban sexscape on a big yellow school bus! Last year in San Francisco we organised a tour of Kink.com's studios. And, for this year we are hoping to hold a small "doco-fest" at Brown University. The plan is to screen several documentaries including: (i) Scarlet Road which features Rachel Wotton and focuses on sex work and clients with disabilities; (ii) Dr Billie McNeil (Leeds Beckett Uni) will screen a doco on indoor sex work in the UK that she is in the process of completing; and (iii) Bella Robinson is organising a screening of the award winning US documentary American Courtesans.

## Law & Society conference

This year's [Law and Society conference](#) will be held in June in Mexico City. Menaka Raguparan, Tuulia Law, Chris Bruckert and Raven Bowen have coordinated the first Collaborative Research Network (CRN) for sex work scholars. The [program for the Sex Work CRN](#) is now available. Congratulations to SWRH scholars and others around the world who will be presenting and attending! [#LSMEX17](#)



## Are you a final-year University student? Working as an erotic dancer?

By Jessica Simpson

I'm looking to interview self-identified female students as part of a Sociology PhD study. Broadly speaking, we know that a lot of students are working in the sex industry, but there is still a lack of research on the topic. This is an opportunity for you to share your experiences and opinions on your work, studying and your plans after university. You can choose either a face to face, telephone or Skype interview which will be confidential, anonymised and will last around 1 hour. Finally, to thank you for your time and insight, I would like to offer you a £10 gift voucher of your choosing. If you would like to take part or for further information, please do get in touch via email: [Jessica.Simpson@City.ac.uk](mailto:Jessica.Simpson@City.ac.uk)

## The Annual North East Sex Work Forum Regional Learning Day

By Gaynor Truman and Maggie O'Neill

The annual North East Sex Work Forum's Regional Learning Day (RLD) was held on the 10th November 2016 at the Discovery Museum in Newcastle. This marks the fourth annual regional learning day organised and hosted by the North-East Sex Work Forum (NESWF). The NESWF has been running for five years, is based on participatory principles, and is a partnership between the regional sex work support organisations Changing Lives, Arch North East, A Way Out; HMP Low Newton and an academic representative (Prof. Maggie O'Neill). Maggie has also MC'd the RLD for the last three years.



Once again we showcased and exchanged a rich breadth of knowledge and learning regarding sex work in the North East and beyond to aid the learning and development of delegates. The RLD attracts 150-200 delegates each year from services including health and welfare agencies, sexual health services, counsellors, mental health services and the criminal justice agencies, including police and the prisons. Student researchers and academics from the regions Universities also attend.

The organising team ensure that each year there is a wide range of presentations from both practice, policy and research and this year was no exception. The speakers shared a wide range of expertise, from both their practice and their geographical locations. The day started with the members of the North-East Sex Work Forum giving a local update of services, research and learning. This was then followed by Sarah Charlton from

*Changing Lives* who gave a front-line view of delivering DBT (Dialectical Behavioural Therapy) to a group of women in Newcastle and the benefits the women had reported following the therapy.

Next up were Maggie O'Neill (MC), Alison Jobe and Kelly Stockdale (*York and Durham Universities*) presenting Participatory Action Research (PAR) conducted in Teesside with community co-researchers and *A Way Out*. The research sought to better understand the needs and experiences of women working on and off street with a view to improving service provision. Debbie Jones from Swansea University presented findings from the Student Sex Work Research project that she had conducted alongside Tracey Sagar. Raven Bowen, a research student (who had relocated to the UK from Canada where she has a long history as a practitioner and activist, running a sex work support project in Vancouver) gave the last presentation before lunch, sharing initial findings from her PhD 'duality' research on concurrent involvement in both sex work and 'square' work. Following lunch *Open Clasp Theatre Company* performed an extract from their very gritty play (the script had been developed in consultation with sex workers) 'Rattle and Roll'. Writer and Creative Director Catrina McHugh led afternoon workshops based around the play and the sharing of learning, using theatre based exercises.

Evaluations were very positive overall and in summary delegates would like the organisers to think about inviting sex workers and sex worker advocacy groups to share their experience; have more knowledge and understanding about student involvement in sex work as well as travelling communities, migrant workers, transgender and male workers. The experience of leaving prison was a key issue of concern. Delegates also wanted training, more bespoke training and for training to be rolled out regionally.

The NESWF have discussed the need for training for services and for sex workers, (indeed this was also a key finding and ask from services/stakeholders contributing the Teesside research) and are in discussion about developing: awareness training; enhancing /upskilling project workers to feel more comfortable and knowledgeable about law, rights, services; empowerment/ training for service users; and training in participatory and arts based methods.

## **Study on Sex Working Sex Work Researchers**

**By Merel van Mansom**

Have you worked in the sex industry while pursuing an academic career?

I would appreciate your contribution to a small pilot study on 'sex working sex work researchers' and experienced stigma by filling in a small questionnaire with 10 open questions.

This pilot study will cover stigma and vulnerability perceived by those that do sex work research while being a (former) sex worker.

It will contribute to the fact that being a sex worker and an academic is not something mutually exclusive with the ambition to show the difficult strategies of sex working sex work researchers to mediate between these two separate fields

For more information and the small questionnaire (10 open questions) please follow this link:

<https://nl.surveymonkey.com/r/FZDTVRX>

If you would like to know a bit more about the study you are more than welcome to contact me by e-mail: [merel.vanmansom@unimi.it](mailto:merel.vanmansom@unimi.it)

## Support Sex Work Organising!

Give generously to organisations that do work by, for and with sex workers - who survive with very few resources.

To Support ScotPEP —A Scottish Organization that promotes health, dignity, inclusion and social justice for sex workers. [View site.](#)

To Support Umbrella Lane —A Glasgow sex worker service with goals to creating a non-judgmental resource that shares information to support the health safety and wellbeing of sex workers. [Contact them.](#)

### Contact the Hub

Sex Work Research Hub  
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Join the Hub mailing list by subscribing at:

<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=SEXWORKRESEARCH-HUB>

## And finally ...

The next issue of this Newsletter will be available in Summer 2017.