



Editorial – Blurred Lines: The Contested Nature of Sex Work in a Changing Social Landscape

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This special edition of the *Graduate Journal of Social Science* explores the contested nature of the sex industry, a global industry operating within socio-political contexts that have witnessed an array of changes in recent years. The papers in this collection contribute to advancing critical understandings of the ways in which the changing social landscapes have been experienced by those engaged globally in commercial sex work. In so doing, this edition seeks to agitate some of the polarised debates often present within sex industry discourses by exploring some of the oftentimes overlooked nuances – the blurred lines – between the different sex markets, between sex as work and other forms of labour, between agency and constraint, and between care and control. At its core, *Blurred Lines: The Contested Nature of Sex Work in a Changing Social Landscape* represents a shared vision to combine the voices of academics with those working within the sex industry and with practitioners, in order to offer a meaningful consolidation of research and lived experiences; one that does not simply grant lip-service to ‘empowering a marginalised and stigmatised social group’.

Co-creating knowledge: Broadening the research agenda

Although research into the commercial sex industry has burgeoned in recent years,



much has conformed to a traditional – and narrow – research agenda built around prioritising knowledge of female street sex work. Consequently, we have extensive data and theories related to the backgrounds, lifestyles, and working practices of female street sex workers, which is disproportionate to the true size of this sector. In fact, female street sex work comprises only a small sector of a large and diverse sex industry (Cusick et al, 2009), as illustrated within the broad typologies of sex work offered by Harcourt and Donovan (2005) and Sanders (2005). These typologies distinguish between *direct* sex work, where commercial sex occurs in a range of indoor and outdoor settings, and *indirect* sex work, which includes domination services, ‘webcam’ performances, phone sex, lap dancing and swinging clubs. While the majority of these activities occur indoors rather than on the street (Connelly and Sanders, 2015), much of the body of research has, at least historically, focused on the street sex market. This is no doubt linked to its visibility (Hubbard et al., 2008) and relative ease of access. There are of course some notable exceptions. Sanders (2005), Brents and Hausbeck (2005), and Pitcher and Wijers (2014), for example, all provide important research into the indoor sex market. Others caution against viewing sex work solely as a female occupation with male clients, instead exploring male sex work (Whowell (2010) and LGBTQ sex work (Smith and Laing, 2012).

Existing research has also largely employed traditional research methodologies, particularly the qualitative verbal interview or researcher ethnography. These methods fail to acknowledge the breadth and depth of knowledge which can be *co-created* through a range of research tools. Alternative research methods have been increasingly employed in recent years, including the use of visual methods and methodologies informed by the principles of Participatory Action Research (see for example, O’Neill and Hubbard, 2010). O’Neill (2001) describes Participatory Action Research as methods in which those who have traditionally been the subjects of research become active participants and even co-researchers. Adorno (1991: 4 cited in O’Neill, 2001) argues that utilising creative methods allows participants to ‘say the unsayable’; to find ways of expressing what is difficult to put into words. These methods lend themselves particularly well to working with sex workers and other marginalised groups as they are social research tools which attempt to subvert the hierarchies of power created in the academy, and those that place the researcher as the expert. As such, the possibilities of these meth-

ods for creating new knowledge and informing policy in the sex industry arena are extensive. Furthermore, sex worker researchers are increasingly undertaking auto-ethnographies, further blurring the distinction between participant/worker in the sex industry and researcher (see for example, Colosi, 2010; Egan, 2006).

This special edition seeks to broaden the research agenda by shifting the focus solely from female street sex workers towards exploring the heterogeneity of the sex industry and its constitutive sex markets. It also responds to calls for the inclusion and prioritisation of sex worker voices in academic research, showcasing work authored by sex workers and research in which sex workers were active participants or directors. It therefore allows a multitude of sex workers' narratives to emerge. During the production of this edition, we encountered difficulties in ensuring that sex workers' voices remained at its very core because the wish to be inclusive and challenging to the research tradition did not always sit comfortably with the requirements and expectations associated with an academic journal. The reader will note, therefore, that to overcome this we have parted with academic convention in some pieces. We believe that the more traditionally-academic papers, combined with the pieces based on lived experience and narrative, creates a synthesis of knowledge which we would like to advocate in future research and publications. It is only by challenging the traditional research agenda that we can fully embrace an engagement with those working in the sex industry.

Recognising complexity and diversity: Moving beyond the polarised feminist debate

Traditionally, sex industry researchers have tended to position their work within two established feminist paradigms and in so doing, polarised 'sex-wars' (Weitzer, 2000) have ensued between those typically referred to as 'radical feminists' and 'liberal feminists'. Broadly speaking, underpinning the radical feminist position is the notion that prostitution is a form of violence against women and ought to be eradicated (Farley, 2003). Prostitution is often constructed as sexual slavery (Barry, 1995) and it is posited that it is incompatible with gender equality since, from this perspective, the sex industry represents the epitome of male dominance and female subordination. Radical feminists frequently strive for the complete eradication of the sex industry: recently, they have found some success in their advocacy

around the rolling out of the so-called 'Swedish Model' of regulation. This model constructs the 'prostitute' as a passive victim, whilst simultaneously criminalised the client. As Levy (2014) points out, its many harms are too often ignored, dismissed or obscured behind a veil of sensationalist claims.

Those known as liberal feminists, on the other hand, argue that the sale of sex is an understandable response to socio-economic constraints and that many sex workers exercise a rational choice in their decisions to engage in the sex industry. From this perspective, the sex industry may offer a flexible and viable labour option, particularly for migrants from the global South wishing to pursue opportunities in the global North. Indeed, Mai (2011) utilises his research to argue that sex work may offer a dignified standard of living for migrants, many of whom are prevented from accessing other (skilled) forms of employment due to the restrictive immigration policies omnipresent in the global North. To this extent, it is not the sex industry per se that is inherently harmful but rather, its unregulated nature and the stigma surrounding the sale of sexual services. Lowman (2000), for example, suggests that a 'discourse of disposability' exists in which violence towards sex workers is condoned. With this in mind, often those from a liberal feminist perspective argue for the decriminalisation of sex work, positing that workers in this industry ought to be granted the same human and workers' rights as other members of society.

Historically, the heated debates between radical and liberal feminist advocates have occupied a central space within scholarly literature, as well as being present both in policy debates and in clashes amongst those working 'on the ground'. It appears that traditionally, many engaged in debates in this field have therefore felt pressure to align themselves with either a radical or liberal feminist position. Indeed, this concern is highlighted by Chapkis (1997: 5) who notes:

I am concerned about exposing myself to the righteous wrath of one, further injuring another, or misrepresenting a third. The certainty and conviction of those who disagree with me make my own enthusiasm for partial and contradictory truths feel inadequate.

This reluctance to stray outside of the two polarised camps has, at least in part, led to somewhat simplistic, 'one-dimensional and essentialist' understandings of the sex industry (Weitzer, 2010: 6). For some, radical feminists are thought to be at risk

of disempowering women by denying their agency, while liberal feminists may be accused of over-endowing sex worker's autonomy (Maher, 2000). In light of this, a gradually growing body of work is emerging which calls for acknowledgment of the blurred lines between the constraint and agency experienced by those working in the sex industry. Moving beyond the 'constraint-agency' binary, this work often examines how structural factors act to mediate the levels of exploitation and violence sex workers experience, with non-citizens, the poor and women of colour more likely to experience abuse, while middle and upper class white women remain better able to obtain high remuneration in the course of their sex working (Bernstein, 2007; Connelly and Sanders, 2015). To this extent, Wolkowitz (2006) argues that a more helpful term for considering the sale of intimate services might be that of 'Body Work'. This term accepts sexual labour as legitimate work, whilst maintaining the vulnerability of many of the workers who engage in it (Wolkowitz et al, 2013: 19).

This special edition seeks to add to this growing body of scholarship moving beyond the polarised feminist debate. It offers a nuanced account of the complex intersection of power and resistance that sex workers experience (Connelly and Sanders, 2015). In so doing, this edition provides a platform for work which attends to the ways in which the sex industry can simultaneously be empowering *and* exploitative. Ultimately, however, we suggest that the inequalities that pervade the sex industry are not unique to it but rather, are present across society and a range of labour markets. Indeed the gendered structural inequalities and sexist ideologies that exist globally, work in conjunction to subordinate women, and shame and marginalise those engaged in sex work. The reader will note, therefore, that the papers included in this edition do not come from one unified feminist position, but rather demonstrate a range of lived experiences within the sex industry. Here the editors made a conscious decision to include papers that, at least at times, act in contradiction, in order to demonstrate the heterogeneous nature of sex work. We thus follow the advice of Chapkis (1997), who encourages us to listen to the accounts of workers in all their messy complexities, and not, as 'competitors in the status of truth'. To this extent, we encourage academics, sex workers and practitioners to build upon this growing body of scholarship, by co-creating further knowledge in this field which does not conform to the traditional polarised debate. It is only by recognising the complex and diverse nature of the

sex industry – and acknowledging that multiple truths can, and do, exist – that we can move towards a more comprehensive understanding of this labour market.

Policy and its impact on the lived experiences of sex workers

While the global sex industry operates within socio-political contexts that have witnessed an array of changes in recent years, the aforementioned radical feminist perspective has remained extremely influential in guiding sex work policy around the world. Indeed, the assumption of coercion and exploitation is often present within policies that govern the sex industry, which emphasise the vulnerable female *involved in prostitution* and posit exiting as the only legitimate outcome. In the UK, where the majority of the papers included in this edition are based upon, we have witnessed a move towards further criminalisation of the sex industry in recent years. Currently in the UK, there exists a complex – and paradoxical – legal framework in which while the sale of sex is legal, it is almost impossible to sex work without breaking a number of other related offences (Sanders et al, 2009: 116). As Cusick et al (2009: 705) note, a ‘critical mass of female parliamentarians’ exists in the UK, who are ‘eager to be seen to be doing something for women, and who use(d) trafficking rhetoric and inflated trafficking figures which exploit(ed) migration fears’. Under the guise of tackling sex trafficking, an amendment to the *Modern Slavery Act 2015* was recently proposed by Fiona Mactaggart MP to criminalise the client, in line with the ‘Swedish Model’.¹ Collective mobilisation from sex workers and sustained challenges from practitioners, academics and others ensured this was defeated.

Beyond the UK, despite emphatic opposition from activists, the ‘Swedish Model’ has also found prominent support within the European Parliament, when in March 2014 Mary Honeyball’s proposals to criminalise the purchase of sex were granted non-binding resolution. This model continues to be the *en vogue* form of regulation. Indeed, Beran (2012) describes the policy exchange and convergence from Sweden to other Northern European countries – including Norway, Iceland and the UK – and in this edition Walker and Oliveira demonstrate that the policy situation in South Africa is similar. Yet although the ‘Swedish Model may be constructed as the radical feminist gold standard, it fails to recognise those who

choose to work in the industry (Maher, et al, 2013; Scoular & O'Neill, 2007), as well as the multitude of barriers for sex workers existing the industry (Sanders 2007). Nonetheless, despite sex worker unionisation and responses to policy consultation from academics and project workers that argue that criminalisation poses further risks to safety and increases the stigmatisation of sex workers (Munro and Scoular 2012; Phoenix 2009; Sanders 2005), across the globe new policies continued to strategise a zero-tolerance approach to prostitution.

Likewise, other critiques of the 'Swedish Model' argue that much of the 'risk' associated with sex work is calculated according to cost/benefits to the tax payer (Hester and Westmarland, 2004: 112 cited in Scoular and O'Neill, 2007: 772). As such, we can read the sex workers are secondary to concerns about the 'good citizen' and the 'community', from which sex workers are typically excluded. The construction of exiting sex work as the only legitimate outcome means that those sex workers who do not wish to exit, or those that even simply admit to enjoying their labour, are cast out as undeserving victims. This marginalisation not only subjects sex workers to symbolic violence, but also makes them more vulnerable to the realities of physical violence. Furthermore, policies that criminalise the sex industry are also accused of over-emphasising the role of 'pimps' and in so doing, deliberately underplaying women's choice and agency, however constrained it may be. McCracken argues that the issue of 'pimps' is far from simple, (McCracken, 2013: 58) and yet the focus on alleged exploiters continues to overshadow the experience of those working in a varied and fluid commercial sex industry. Similarly, critics of criminalisation policies argue that too often the larger context of the feminization of poverty and a wider precarious labour market are ignored.

Comparatively, the Netherlands has adopted an alternative approach which legalises prostitution under certain conditions regulated by the local authority. Integral to this model of regulation is the distinction between voluntary sex work and forced/underage involvement in the sex industry, with the later remaining illegal. With this in mind, policies that legalise are often celebrated by some for representing sex as a legitimate form of labour (Kantola and Squires, 2004). Yet evidence indicates that due to poor implementation of the law, the working conditions of sex workers continue to be worse than those experienced in other professions. Indeed, Outshoorn (2012: 237) suggests that a two-tiered sex industry has developed in which (white) Dutch citizens work in a 'licensed sector', while migrant sex work-

ers and minors are confined to a more exploitative ‘non-licensed sector’. A lack of consultation with sex workers in the policy formation and The Netherlands’ recent restrictive changes to sex industry policy, which attempt to reduce the number of sex workers as part of the gentrification of red light districts (Aalbers and Sabat 2012; Outshoorn 2012), could serve as a further challenge to the ‘sex work as work’ debate.

Awareness seems to be growing, therefore, that decriminalisation – a process involving the removal of all laws criminalising the sex industry – may offer the most effective policy option for minimising the harms experienced by those engaged in the sex industry (Sanders and Campbell, 2014). Indeed, evidence from New Zealand indicates that the decriminalisation model improves the welfare, health and safety of sex workers (Mossman, 2010), with sex workers better able to avoid or respond to violence as a result of their enhanced employment rights (Abel et al, 2010). A move towards decriminalisation also finds support in a study conducted by Sanders, Connelly and Jarvis-King (2015) alongside National Ugly Mugs, a third-party mechanism in the UK for sex workers and support services to report violence and share intelligence. Analysing large-scale survey data, they conclude that for internet sex workers, decriminalisation offers a number of advantages, including: enhancing safety by allowing sex workers to work together; improving sex worker’s relationships with the police; and reducing societal stigma and prejudice.

This special edition seeks to draw attention to the misrepresentation of sex workers in current policy. The papers included here demonstrate that current policies often fail sex workers and trafficked individuals. Indeed, the global shift towards a model of regulation that criminalises sex work is considered to be both ineffectual and exclusionary (Agustin, 2005: 619). We believe that it produces harmful working conditions for those working in the sex industry and compounds the stigmatisation, marginalisation and ‘othering’ of sex workers. To this extent, the research findings and lived experiences offered in this journal seek to inform policy making, although disillusionment does exist amongst sex industry scholars and activists over whether the government uses research evidence in practice (Kantola and Squires 2004). Nonetheless, the editors advocate for a partnership approach between researchers and policy-makers, encouraging an effective relationship between research and policy development/formulation. We call for the government to review a wide range of research conducted by the academic com-

munity, in close collaboration with sex workers and practitioners, and to change policy accordingly. This, we hope, will lead to improved working conditions and lived experiences for those engaged in various capacities in the sex industry.

Overview of the papers

This edition begins with **Jet Young's** personal narrative: *Saving Us From Penetration: Ponderings of a Trans Rentboy*. Young, a transgender man, offers a thought-provoking reflection upon the lived realities of selling sex in the contested arena of the sex industry. In so doing, he offers a critique of the hegemonic feminist perspective – what he terms, ‘white, middle-class, English-speaking, University, Western feminism’ – exploring how its racialized, classed and cis-centred nature may function to vilify femininity. Notions of freedom and choice to engage in sex work are examined, focusing on how they are more readily recognised when sex is not for payment. Young also highlights the far-reaching effects of ‘whorephobia’, which operates to police women’s sexuality and femininity, and the way in which it has the most damaging effects for people of colour, the poor, trans, and/or the undocumented migrants. Young concludes that anti-prostitution arguments are too often based upon perceptions of how women *ought* to behave sexually in order to avoid being considered a ‘whore’, rather than the lived realities of sex workers. These lived realities are complex, involving the navigation of xenophobic immigration policies, criminalisation, transphobia, cultural violence, and stigma.

Gemma Ahearne, in her paper entitled *Between the Sex Industry and Academia: Navigating Stigma and Disgust*, then draws upon her own experiences as a lap-dancer to offer an account of the multiple identities of a former stripper and a current academic. Central to her paper is an exploration of the way in which stigma attaches itself – or is attached by others – to the ‘deviant’ bodies working in the sex industry. She examines how this stigma functions to potentially discredit, spoil and sully her academic work. Ahearne positions her experiences within the current socio-political climate operating in Europe of pro-abolitionism, arguing that it is becoming ever more difficult for those who have worked, or currently work, in the sex industry to admit to doing so whilst also performing in the academy. For Ahearne, to cast out the stripper means to maintain the boundaries of decency of both middle-class white femininity and the reflecting images in academia. As such,

Ahearne argues that stigma is a lived reality and encourages a self-surveillance to take place, where one is always imagining oneself as being viewed.

The self-reflective theme – and focus on the lived realities of the sex industry as told by authors who have worked in it – continues in **Dr Billie Lister's** paper. *'Yeah, they've started to get a bit fucking cocky ...'* *Culture, Economic Change and Shifting Power Relations within the Scottish Lap-Dancing Industry* draws upon data derived from her Ph.D research in which she, herself a dancer, conducted interviews with women working in lap-dancing venues across Scotland. Here, Lister highlights the precarious nature of the sex industry, examining the way in which economic and cultural changes outside of the lap-dancing market can result in dancers' declining earning potential and may alter the dynamics of power within the lap-dancing venue. She suggests that the economic recession, and the resulting competitive labour market, have dictated that dancers' main objective now is to earn money rather than enjoying the social aspects of their work. She argues, therefore, that her case study venue has shifted from being a 'social club' to a 'hustle club', drawing upon Bradley-Engen and Ulmers (2009) US typology of stripping. Lister posits, however, that women remain attracted to working in the – albeit, precarious – lap-dancing market: the ability to earn instant payment is an incentive rarely available in legitimised forms of labour. She concludes by urging Local Authorities to act to ensure that venues are more effectively regulated, a necessity in a market in which changes in supply and demand have negatively impacted working conditions, and a broader sex industry characterised by complexity and contradiction.

Facilitating and promoting the merging of academic debate with the debates sex workers have on a daily basis, **Rae Story** and **Glen Jankowski** offer an insight into the experiences of independent escorting. *Victor or Victim? Foregrounding the Independent Escort Experience Outside of the Polarised Debate* draws upon Story's own experiences as an escort, in addition to the accounts offered on a publically-accessible escort internet forum. Like the aforementioned authors, Story and Jankowski posit that ideological debates around the morality of sex work should not dominate over the voices of the heterogeneous collectives of people engaged in the sex industry. They seek to disrupt the dichotomisation of the sex worker as either 'victor' or 'victim' by exploring the nuanced, and at time ambiguous, lived experience of escorts. In so doing, the authors question the utility of the choice/coercion binary in a society founded upon the principles of capitalism, arguing that

it fails to represent the majority of sex workers' voices. In exploring some of the challenges independent escorts face, Story and Jankowski argue that often they are not unique but rather, affect women more broadly in a neo-liberal, capitalist system. They posit that the violence or the threat of violence, pressure to be commercially 'beautiful' and the economic hardship women face is exacerbated in a society which embodies socio-economic and socio-political inequality.

Dr Jane Pitcher builds upon some of the concerns raised in the four previous papers with the way in which the dominant discourse of victimhood is often applied to sex workers, a discourse that is founded upon radical feminist assumptions, perpetuated by the media, and evidenced in policy. In *Direct Sex Work in Great Britain: Reflecting Diversity*, Pitcher seeks to shift the focus of the lens away from its tradition position on female street sex work and on extreme examples of sexual exploitation. Indeed, similar to Story and Jankowski, Pitcher is concerned with highlighting heterogeneity in the sex worker population. She presents new estimates of the numbers and relative proportions of female, male and transgender sex workers engaged in the street and indoor sex markets and in so doing, highlights some of the methodological challenges of research based upon sex worker project data alone. She also reports on the diverse experiences and needs of indoor sex workers, to offer a convincing argument that criminalisation denies sex worker's agency and restricts their ability to work without experiencing violence. She thus offers a valuable contribution to the growing body of academic literature advocating changes in policy and practice which recognise the human and labour rights of sex workers. Throughout, Pitcher's paper lends further weight to demands for a more nuanced debate, one which moves beyond the dichotomisation of coercion and choice to reflect the diverse service needs of sex workers across the sex markets.

Pitcher's concerns about the way in which policies that criminalise the sex industry can facilitate and exacerbate violence against sex workers are shared by **Emma Smith**. In her paper entitled *The Changing Landscape of Scottish Responses to Sex Work: Addressing Violence against Sex Workers*, Smith draws upon her Ph.D research to explore the relationship between legislative and policy responses to sex work and violence in the Scottish sex industry. Smith argues that it is crucial to examine the stigmatisation of sex work and that due to this, there is support for services which actually function to harm sex workers – that is, often those that complement an abolitionist ideology. This is reiterated by Walker and Oliveira

below. Smith argues that her participants viewed measures taken against them by law and policy as potentially more violent and detrimental than physical acts of violence. In order to (re)imagine what violence against sex workers is, Smith suggests that symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1992) offers a theoretical framework. Smith argues that whilst developments in Scotland, such as brothel raids, are seen by the media as positive, they have negative effects on sex workers' lives, and they can actually reproduce and compound violence and stigma.

Next, **Dr Rebecca Walker** and **Elsa Oliveira** examine the blurred lines between migrant sex work and sex trafficking in: *Contested Spaces: Exploring the Intersection of Migration, Sex Work and Trafficking in South Africa*. Walker and Oliveira echo the concerns of other papers; namely that the false dichotomies of victim/ victor, trafficked/free serve to limit our understandings of the complexities of sex work. The authors refer to these as 'multiple realities' and argue that as social scientists we must explore these pluralities of identity and refrain from compounding crude binaries that do not address the richness and complexity of lived experience. Furthermore, far from trafficking being the result of 'demand' practices, government policy is harbouring the conditions for exploitative sex work to take place. Walker and Oliveira argue that it is the anti-trafficking movement who, through restrictive immigration policies, push migrant sex workers in ever more precarious conditions. The authors suggest that it is vital that we recognise the complexities and intersectionality that migrant women face in navigating the sale of sexual labour. Allowing sex workers to have safe spaces in which to talk freely means that we receive textured understandings, rather than those that derive from radical feminist ideologies which shut down those who refuse to accept a victim identity. They stress the importance of using creative methodologies that provide participants with the tools to express themselves in ways that traditional methodologies might not be able to offer.

Building upon the previous paper, **Laura Connelly's** short think-piece explores the blurred line between care and control by problematizing the complex functions of anti-trafficking NGOs in the UK. In *The Rescue Industry: The Blurred Line between Help and Hindrance*, Connelly argues that on the one hand, anti-trafficking NGOs provide valuable support to disadvantaged womyn by plugging gaps in provisions exposed by the retreating welfare state. She contends, however, that at the same time, these NGOs serve the interest of the neoliberal, neocolonial state. Indeed, anti-trafficking NGOs may work to construct all migrant womyn as passive victims

and in so doing, justify interventions that impose the values of 'the West' upon 'the Rest'. Not least, the rescue industry, according to Connelly, functions to legitimise the deportation of voluntary migrant sex workers under the facade of noble action. She posits that although some NGOs are critical of the state, they ultimately continue to operate within the existing neoliberal system and as such, create the illusion of change without offering a sustained and comprehensive challenge to the structural causes of trafficking. In so doing, Connelly seeks to draw attention to the need for greater scrutiny of the 'rescue industry' by those working outside of it but even more importantly, by those operating within it.

Toni Stone, a sex worker and documentary photographer, offers the final contribution, adding to the breadth of data and lived experience included in this special edition. We welcome her photo essay given the growing prominence of visual consumption and its centrality to culture and cultural construction (Pink, 2007). Images have also been celebrated for their power to challenge predominant ideologies and stereotypes. For these reasons, the editors are advocates for the use of visual methodologies within social research, and particularly research which takes places within contested terrains. Images hold endless narratives, making them both polysemic and powerful. Of these meanings, 'auteur theory' places importance on the intended messages within the production of the image: despite the image's apparent axiomatic nature, 'the photograph sees, but it sees the way it has been made to see' (Harper, 2004: 93). Barthes (1977: 145–6), on the other hand, argues that the producer's intent has become irrelevant and we have experienced 'the death of the author'. Instead, it is preferable to leave interpretative avenues open for the viewer to explore; allowing the multiplicity of meanings to emerge. Individuals' *ways of seeing* will bring meaning to the picture, negotiating the image's message with their own social identities (Berger, 1972; Fiske, 1994). For this reason, we have made the editorial decision not to offer verbal interpretation of this photo essay here but instead, to allow readers to explore the images for themselves. Further explorations of visual methodologies can be found in an earlier special edition of the *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, volume 10(2).

Conclusion

This editorial highlights some of the current concerns and debates present in sex industry research but moreover, those that are occurring 'on the ground' amongst

sex workers, practitioners, policy-makers and academics. We have sought to position the lived realities of sex workers as the focus of this edition, in an attempt to avoid contributing to the marginalisation of sex workers' voices. In so doing, we offer a rich synthesis of knowledge that challenges the traditional research agenda. This issue argues that as social scientists we must endeavour to go far beyond simplistic understandings and crude dichotomies; instead, we must work with sex workers to explore the rich textures of their (heterogeneous) lived experiences. To this extent, this edition explores the complex – and at times, contradictory – nature of the sex industry. The papers included here advance understandings of the ways in which the changing social landscape have been experienced by those engaged globally in commercial sex work.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work, and patience, of each of the contributors to this journal. Each of your contributions brings something different to the edition, making it full of rich empirical work and lived experience. It is our pleasure to showcase some of the emerging work, theories and ideas in this field. Thank you. A big thank you also goes to all the anonymous peer-reviewers, who provided such thorough and constructive feedback to the authors. Peer-reviewing is often such a thankless job but sincerely, without your work this edition would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the GJSS Team, particularly Remi Joseph-Salisbury and Arpita Das for inviting us to put this edition together, and to the copy-editors for diligently proof reading the edition.

Endnotes

- ¹ The 'Swedish Model' aims to end demand for prostitution by simultaneously criminalising the client, and constructing the 'prostitute' as a victim who requires help to exist.

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