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Sex worker ‘voices’

It is common to hear complaints in discourses on sex work that the views and opinions of sex workers are not heard or considered or are devalued. With that in mind, this month’s newsletter focuses on sex worker ‘voices’. The comments from sex workers are thought-provoking and reveal a range of issues related to prostitution, including:

- motivations and factors leading to sex work;
- autonomy and freedom of choice;
- the commitment to safer sex, sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention and the use of prophylactics;
- positives and negatives of sex work;
- how sex workers see themselves and attitudes to sex work;
- prejudice and stigma;
- barriers to exiting sex work; and
- the inherent danger and violence all too commonly associated with sex work.

The quotations below are from actual sex workers and are from a range of sources.

It’s a choice and it pays well.

I’ve got qualifications, BSc, MA. I’ve developed good skills from being a sex worker too – empathy, good phone manners.

I think 25 [years old] about max [expected length of stay in sex industry] ... in about five years ... ‘cause it will be good to get heaps of savings and then by the time I’m 25 be able to put it for a house or something ... Really, ‘cause I’ve just been partying.

Love it, I love it. I love meeting the people, I love doing what I do ... oh some girls it may be just for money. With me it’s not, it’s money, yes, but I work for myself, which I love.

I’d just, if I remember correctly, it was like coming up towards Christmas and I lost my job. And I’d just been and got a personal loan for a car and blah-de-blah-de-blah, and it was just, yeah, right on Christmas, and yeah, it just, I needed a lot of money fast and this was the only way to do it. Simple.

I found out I could survive that way, ‘cause I was so young when I started. I was too young for the dole, I had no experience for a job ... Um 14. It just happened by itself.

But the reason why I’ve come back is because at home it’s just me and my two children, and being up here, you’re around other females that are in the industry.

My goal is to buy a house or a bit of land and to support my son.

I started two years ago. I’d never had sex for money so I went along to a brothel to find out how it all works ... I’d had one partner my whole life.

I stopped working because I just, I reach that time when, “Agh, I don’t want to do this any more. I’d rather clean. And I’ll generate the extra by cleaning and I’ll do some studying.”

Oh I wish I could have [left the sex industry]. If I could find a really good job, I would leave in a second, that wouldn’t, like I said, discriminate me for what I am and be acceptive of like I am an employee, I’m not a transgendered person who they have to keep looking at funny.

Yeah, I’ve been in a long-term relationship for about seven years, on and off. I have a little boy who is two and a half ... My partner knows I work, but my family doesn’t.

I feel like if I’m in a room with a client, then it’s safer, because, you know, maybe if it wasn’t legal, then, you know, he could use that against me or threaten me with something, or you know.

You know, if I didn’t want to do something, I didn’t have to do it, because what I’m expected to give is a hand-job, a blow-job with a condom, and sex with a condom, vaginal sex. If I don’t want to do anything else, that’s fine ...

I see myself as an actor with a wide range of skills. I ask what the client wants and then I provide what it is they want. I don’t ridicule them, I don’t make fun of them and I don’t say they are perverted or dirty.

So much of sex work is building a persona and performing as that character. On the surface, having a persona is for identity protection, think Clark Kent and Superman, but what you learn is that it’s good practice. You put on a persona because, as a sex worker, you frame sex differently than you do in your personal life. The separation of personal-self and occupational-self is something everyone does at work, it’s part of being a professional.

I now say, “I don’t want your germs, do you want mine? I could be fined and go to jail, and if you take it off [the condom], then I could send you to jail”.

I definitely insist on condoms with every client, not only for their health but mine.

I make sure clients are aware of the do's and don'ts before a booking is confirmed. If a client asks to pay extra for no condom etc, I just don't take the booking.

Knowing what other workers are charging or offering is a really important part of setting boundaries. You feel more confident in saying, "You must use a condom", if you know that all the stories clients tell about other workers doing oral without a condom aren't true.

There are things sex workers do to protect themselves, such as learning to identify signs of STIs, learning to communicate about STIs, and learning to negotiate services with clients based on that assessment.

Sex work tends to make me feel extremely isolated – it is a result of this I often feel bad about myself – not the work itself. I just want to chat to other work colleagues – like everyone else does, I don't think that is a strange thing – to want to relate and belong.

As far as the sex goes, you can either enjoy it or hate it. If you hate it, it will feel like it lasts much longer than it does and you are less likely to get a repeat client.

I work professionally and safely and pay my taxes, raise my children in an excellent manner and yet am still perceived to be a trashy piece of scum. No one in my up-market community would ever guess what I did for work, but there's still that stereotypical portrayal of sex workers.

I really don't think that there's anything a law change would bring about to reduce the stigma and the attitudes that people in general have about the industry, um because most attitudes and opinions about us hookers is based on ignorance, bigotry, intolerance and jealousy ... For well, you know, at the end of the day all we're trying to do is get by like everybody else. It's just a job.

It is absolutely imperative that someone stands up and represents us, we seem to be one of the most misrepresented demographics.

It is offensive to talk about exiting ... We don't need rescuing.

Sometimes clients have been aggressive or violent or I felt unsafe. I have been roughly handled and had clients remove condoms.

I have had money stolen (\$26,000) by an illegal operator who was arrested and charged in the end. There were a lot of other workers involved and he was raping some of them. I was lucky!

I've grabbed my gear and run off and hid in nearby bushes until I could phone for a ride home.

Broken wrist as client wouldn't let me leave.

I was tied up in a situation where I could not move or get free. So I leave it for your imagination as to what happened. I can't explain what happened.

I had a bloke grab me as soon as I opened the door – he got me in a headlock and he sat on my back. I lost my vision, I nearly died, I couldn't breathe. I prayed to God to help me and the guy got up and left. He thought he'd killed me.

Do you have any suggestions for future *In Touch* articles?

The PLA is always keen to receive suggestions about articles for future editions of *In Touch*. If there is something that you would particularly like to see covered please let us know by emailing your suggestion to plaadmin@iprimus.com.au.

Sex worker organisation planning day

United Sex Workers North Queensland (USNQ) and Crimson Coalition have requested that the PLA publicise the following.

USNQ and Crimson Coalition (based in South Queensland) are working to establish a new state-wide sex workers' organisation, to be called United Sex Workers Queensland.

USNQ is holding a planning day on 1 June 2009 in Townsville (venue to be advised by Jackie). Present and past sex workers are invited to have their say about the proposed new organisation (how and what it should do). As an alternative to attending on the day, comments can be provided to Jackie via

phone or mail. For more information contact Jackie on 07 4724 4853 before 23 May 2009.

For past and present sex workers in the south of the state, Crimson Coalition will hold a South Queensland Planning Day on 30 June 2009. Contact Candi on 0421569232 or email crimsoncoalitionqld@gmail.com for further information.

Non-sex workers are also invited to have their say. Brothel licensees and approved managers, sexual health clinics and others can contact USNQ and Crimson Coalition to obtain a questionnaire.

2009 PLA meeting dates

The PLA Board generally meets on the first Monday of each month. Meeting dates for the remainder of 2009 are: 22 June, 6 July, 3 August, 7 September, 5 October, 2 November, and 7 December. *Whilst current at the time of printing, these dates are tentative and subject to change without notice.*

Vacancies for Approved Manager positions

Cleo's on Nile: 12 Nile St, Woolloongabba. Seeking an approved manager for a busy inner city brothel – beautiful premises and undercover parking. Flexible hours with great conditions – Open 24/7. Contact Lyn on 3393 1678 or admin@cleosonnile.com.

Scarlet Harem: 14 Avian St, Kunda Park, Maroochydore. Sunshine Coast brothel requires an approved manager. Immediate start. 24/7 rosters. Excellent conditions await you. Come join our team. Managers are not required to do sexual health checks. Phone 5476 5044 or email love@scarletharem.com.

Asian Star on Meadow: New brothel at 1/32 Meadow Ave, Coopers Plains in Brisbane will open in June. Two to three approved managers are required. All shifts are available to choose from. Excellent conditions with great bonus. Please contact Carmen on 0415764788, or email to ccyy309@yahoo.com.

Please note that approved manager advertisements may be submitted at any time for inclusion in the next edition of the newsletter. They should be emailed to plaadmin@iprimus.com.au