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FOURTEEN

SEX WORK FOR THE SOUL:
NEGOTIATING STIGMA AS A FEMINIST ACTIVIST
AND CLOSETED SEX WORKER**Lucy Blissbomb¹**

Abstract²: As a white, middle-class Australian sex worker, my greatest professional fear was being “outed” to the women’s and community organizations with which I worked. For twenty years I supplemented my activist work, with its concomitant high social capital and limited financial rewards, with sex work, which provides financial rewards accompanied by significant stigma. This paper discusses the strategies I built into my day-to-day existence to protect my privacy, manage stress, and keep a long-term secret from my loved ones and colleagues while engaging in activism to promote sex workers’ rights and the notion that sex work is real, and rewarding, work.

Introduction and Approach

My middle-class³ upbringing provided me with a lifelong love of learning, a strong work ethic, and dreams of a rewarding career as an advocate for women’s and community organizations. Although I starting working in the sex industry in the early 1980s as a short-term strategy to support myself through university, I quickly realized that if I wanted financial security and to own my own home while doing the work I loved, I would need to continue engaging in sex work. In order to do so, I needed to find ways of reconciling these seemingly different (some would say poles apart) occupations. In this article, I offer an account of my experiences as a sex worker and explore the ways in which I coped with social stigma and incorporated my professional skills into my sex work routines. I also examine how my personal experiences have shaped my advocacy for sex workers’ rights and, in doing so, I hope to provide an account that contributes to a “more nuanced and

multidimensional understanding of contemporary” sex work, which has recently been recognized as lacking (Weitzer, 2005, p. 211). I will discuss some of the key issues that affected me as a middle-class, educated, white Australian sex worker who pursued a profession with high social capital but low financial rewards and supplemented it with what most regard as work of high financial value but very low social value. I will then provide a limited comparison of the professional skills, benefits and challenges presented by both forms of work to demonstrate that not only have I found both careers interesting, self-determining and personally rewarding, but that I used remarkably similar skill sets to be successful in, and manage, them both.

I will examine my sex work experiences with respect to agency and argue that the largest impediment to “coming out” is whore stigma⁴, the negative social connotations ascribed to many forms of sex work. Despite the fact that limited forms of sex work are legal and relatively mainstream in Queensland⁵, Australia, most of us remain relatively marginalized regardless of our social capital. In developing this paper I have taken an informal first-person approach with limited use of academic referencing for two reasons: much of the academic discourse on sex work silences sex workers’ voices, and I am providing personal opinions based upon my own middle-class, relatively privileged experiences as a sex worker.

Whore Stigma

While I resisted the obvious sex work and worker stereotypes, it was a passive resistance during my twenties. I read some of the sex worker literature but quickly lost interest in it because it just didn’t feel relevant to me. It was largely written by academics who drew erroneous conclusions from conducting research on street-based sex workers (‘outdoor’ workers make up only a small part of the sex industry) (Weitzer, 2005, pp. 213 & 215) and perpetuated embarrassingly inaccurate stereotypes that I found puzzling and very annoying. The works of abolitionists (e.g. Jeffreys 1997;

Dworkin 1981; MacKinnon 1982), as anti-prostitution activists are known, categorize sex work as a form of violence against women, which in turn actively contributes to our oppression. Abolitionist publications do not recognize sex work as legitimate work and also fail to recognize the many different kinds of sex work (and workers). As Alexander points out, private workers who ‘escort’ are the most independent and have the most control over their work (Alexander, 1987, p. 190).

There is not a lot of research on private sex workers and this is especially true in Australia. The study *Call girls: Private sex workers in Australia* (Perkins & Lovejoy, 2007) resonates with me in many ways, not least of which is because their study of 95 sex workers, followed by in-depth free-flowing interviews with 17 call girls (private workers), demonstrates unequivocally that sex work is legitimate work in the eyes of those who perform it. Importantly, this study compares different types of sex workers, ranging from brothel-based to street-based, and de-bunks problematic myths about us, particularly the argument that we are victims without choices. It presents verbatim a huge amount of material from private workers. There are few works written by sex workers or that record our voices and the issues as we define them and this is one of them. As Jeffrey and MacDonald point out in their wonderful book, *Sex workers in the Maritimes talk back*, sex workers are silenced and our views and analyses are often missing. “It is this silencing of their critical consciousness that lies at the base of their greatest oppression” the authors note, “This silencing has denied sex workers full citizenship and full humanity” (Jeffrey & MacDonald, 2006, p. 1).

By the time I reached my mid-thirties, I felt secure enough in the daytime work persona I had created to begin advocating for systemic change in the sex industry in Queensland and did this by using my established credibility in political and community circles and by lobbying personal contacts. I justified my advocacy on the basis that it was a natural extension of the work I was already

doing to improve women's legal and economic status and rights but did not acknowledge to others that I was a sex worker. In spite of over a decade of sex worker activism, I have only recently started to "come out" in limited ways. I don't use my real name in articles about my sex work history and experiences. I have some wonderful, and courageous, female, male and transgendered sex worker role models and can offer no excuse except to say, "I am working on it!"

Sex Work as Skilled Labor

I found sex work lucrative and in some ways relatively easier than my work in community organizations. Some of the findings of Hochschild's seminal work regarding emotional labor are strongly applicable to me as a sex worker given that I know that what we do is skilled, yet unrecognized, work (Hochschild, 1979). However, I did not find that emotional giving in sex work caused me serious burnout although it certainly did at times in my day work. Sociologist Teela Sanders (2005[a], p. 54) found that emotion work is a larger issue for indoor sex workers than health and physical safety, and I acknowledge that this is generally true. Yet the fact that I only performed sex work part-time and was able to borrow from my other professional skill set in managing my professional double life helped me prevent burnout.

Sex work, and especially private sex work, requires good negotiating and boundary management skills. Women who have worked previously in areas such as sales and finance do well in the industry because they have the skill set necessary to set targets, very quickly assess what customers want and negotiate extras. Clients want to get as much as they can for as little money as possible, and from the moment they contact you it's important to control negotiations, understand that these need to be re-negotiated throughout the booking and recognize the role that boundaries play in those negotiations (Respect, 2010[a]).

Negotiating doesn't end once a booking starts (Blake, 2010). It involves getting clients to pay you, take a shower and do what you want them to do in the bedroom (Respect, 2010 [a]; Jeffreys, 2006, p. 114). It can be difficult when a client argues with you about condom use for oral, for example, even though you have already told them on the phone and made it clear on your web page what the conditions are. Earle and Sharpe (2007, p. 49) have identified sex workers' use of the Internet to establish 'ground rules' regarding condom use, pricing and service limits, and I found it to be a very effective mechanism. Occasionally, however, clients tried to reduce my prices once they arrived by saying they didn't have enough money in the hope that I would agree to go ahead with the service because it was better to get some money than none. In response, I offered to provide topless massage and hand-relief, which was usually accepted. I never agreed to less than my advertised rates because I would have been too angry to do a good job.

In Queensland, private sex workers must be sole operators in order to work legally and must work alone.⁶ This prohibits sex workers from having a receptionist to book appointments, a driver, or protection, unless the latter comes from a security provider, thus rendering sex workers a potential target for violence. This is one of the most powerful ways in which stigma manifests. While very few clients are dangerous, the isolating conditions under which private workers work makes us targets for robbery and violence, mostly by men pretending to be clients who know that many sex workers will not report crimes against them to the police for fear of disclosure. Skills I commonly used in sex work (apart from being technically great in bed) included controlling the encounter while appearing to give the client what he wanted (Jeffreys, 2006, p. 114). This control had emotional aspects, including performing to suit individual clients (Jeffreys, 2005, p. 20), instantly assessing the client's desires, counseling, active listening, appearing sincere, being able to instantly relate to a diverse range of people with appropriate emotions and personality traits, as well as real physical

aspects, particularly in guiding the client while controlling his access to my body.

Clients of private workers expect more emotional support and affection than those of outdoor workers (Weitzer, 2005, p. 225), and I found that clients from the Internet expect even more; they expect you to “genuinely” enjoy yourself and make comments on Internet forums if you can’t carry this off! Skills I learned from the sex industry include sales skills, marketing, health awareness and the ability to separate love and sex (which is considered abnormal for women, although normal for men). The power of non-verbal communication, creating rapport, interviewing, negotiation and assertiveness were other skills I honed (Trevithick, 2000, pp. 22 & 23). I learned to value cultural diversity and see people from all walks of life as people and not as stereotypes or ‘test subjects’. And I learned to trust my “hooker-spidey senses” (Blake, 2010).

My intuition and ability to grasp situations and suss people out within seconds has been one of the most valuable things I have ever learned, and it is a skill that not only enabled me to make real money as a sex worker, but also enhanced my reputation in my day work as someone with sound judgment and strategic and analytic ability. Skills from my day job that I found useful in sex work included dealing with aggression and hostility, ending a relationship (Trevithick, 2000, pp. 22 & 23), managing boundaries, counseling, active listening and crisis management.

Doing Gender

I worked hard to establish a life in which I could control potential sources of chaos. While my manufactured persona, Lucinda, was created only for work purposes, I had fun with her and discovered that the measures I took to be in control of encounters were also forms of resistance (Sanders, 2005[b], pp. 335 & 337). As a white, middle-class, educated sex worker I found that manufacturing an image, in which I invested quite heavily, presented an opportunity

to “do gender” (Tyler & Abbott, 1998, p. 435, as cited in Sanders, 2005[b], p. 338) not just to manage and protect boundaries, but as a conscious business strategy to attract the kinds of clients I wanted and capitalize upon their desires. I paid for professional photographs and web design and bought expensive waist-length platinum-blond hairpieces, visiting the hairdresser weekly for color touch-ups. I also had a personal trainer three days a week to help me stay in great physical shape.

I learned something else from sex work that changed my perspective on life and played a very important part in managing two identities: how to have fun. I developed a more playful nature, which wasn't about flirting or having fun with clients but about discovering the humor in individual hypocrisy and gender stereotypes. Doing a “double” with another worker, for example, was always heaps of fun and the ultimate inside joke, which the client never gets: our clowning about and pretending to compete for his attention was for our entertainment, not his. As Sanders found in her ten-month ethnographic study, we use humor for many reasons, but “coded jokes” that are made in front of the client are common (Sanders, 2005[b], p. 278). The feigned submissiveness and the frantic nature of pretending to be madly in lust with another woman not only keeps the client off us but excites him so that the encounter finishes more quickly. Clearly, erotic labor is the “quintessential con” (Earl & Sharpe, 2007, p. 66).

My favorite doubles partner called herself Nerita. When it came to oral sex, I just placed my thumb and forefinger together, put them over her vagina and licked them to create authentic sucking sounds. (It sounds like something you'd see on the box of an action figure, doesn't it? “Now with authentic sucking sounds.”) Clients couldn't tell it was all a performance even though to us it was clearly high camp. Nerita and I found that a strap-on is a great time-waster in a double, as we could charge clients a premium to watch us use it on each other after wasting a lot of time pretending

to fit it on. I remember when a client bought me an especially complicated strap-on to use in a double with Nerita. After she fitted it on me I asked her, "Do I look fat in this?", a joke about women and body image issues, but the client sat up looking concerned, put his glasses on and sat there with an erection, earnestly assuring me that I didn't. As put so eloquently by Elena Jeffreys, sex work skills involve the:

...use of iconic archetype[s] when interacting with clients and consciously performing gender roles, all within the limited time frames of sex industry bookings... The sex worker skillfully mediates the gap between client expectation and reality, by invoking desire, imagination and fantasy... For female sex workers, including transgender, this is comparable to techniques used by drag performers. The exaggeration of aspects of femininity to communicate desirability, sensuality, sexual availability and prowess, are used to express archetypal characters to increase income. (Jeffreys, 2006, pp. 113-14)

The skills used in feminized caring professions have long been regarded as natural or innate rather than as skills. The same is true for sex work. There's a whole lot more that goes into it than just lying back and thinking of England (or your to-do list or what you are going to do with the money you just received). Seeming spontaneous and fun in such a controlled environment, adapting to what the client wants in potentially risky situations as well as doing all the above is very skilled, yet unrecognized, work. It is thus a matter of considerable debate whether female sex workers enjoy sex with clients (Earle & Sharpe, 2007, p. 74). From my perspective, the answer is a qualified *yes*. While the things I enjoyed most about sex work were feeling feminine and powerful, dressing up, playing a part, drinking nice wines and getting nice gifts of flowers and perfumes (once I even got a car!), I taught regular clients what I did and didn't like in bed, so sex with regular long-term clients got better and better. From my perspective,

familiarity certainly didn't breed contempt. While Bernstein's study of sex work for the middle classes (2007, p. 477) found that the majority of the middle-class sex workers she studied were non-monogamous, bisexual and experimental, this didn't apply to me. Good sex was a bonus, but to me it was really about the dollars, not exploring sexual boundaries.

Pluses and Challenges

As with my day job, the way I felt as a sex worker varied and depended on the circumstances. I found the challenging and frustrating aspects of sex work to be the unexpected things, not the hype about violence, drug use or degradation commonly reported in the literature and espoused by Wynter (1987, pp. 268 & 269), founder and editor of the national newsletter *WHISPER* (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt) with one exception: the stigma (Pheterson, 1996, p. 65). It's the stigma of sex work rather than sex work itself that causes so many problems for sex workers (Jeffrey & MacDonald, 2006, p. 137). And for me the risk of being outed continues even though I retired from sex work seven years ago.

Most of the time I found sex work much less stressful than working in community organizations. The key causes of my stress and occasional periods of burnout in my day job included elected officials, some of whom sat on management committees and some of whom held full-time paid positions in these organizations as well. I found that while most of the people in such organizations are well meaning, some are also seriously inept. And these are the people have power over you, who get to decide whether you're doing a good job, and so on. Such organizations are amazing to work for when they work well; however, my experience is that many of them are not well run and are managed by people who have little, often no managerial, business or legal experience and are unwilling to show leadership on important issues. Yet they micro-manage you to death on things that aren't important to either

the work at hand or in collecting data to justify continued funding, or aren't part of their role. They confuse governance with management, which can sometimes lead to tricky ethical dilemmas.

I've worked for management committee members who pressure you to work on their own pet projects that are not in the best interests of the organization, get jobs for their friends who are not qualified for such roles and then have to be carried by other employees, punish whistleblowers, bully and harass employees, ignore funding priorities and expect you to keep quiet about mismanagement of funding for the "greater good". Then they have the nerve to not pay you proper award rates on the grounds that they can't afford it! I found in some organizations that my wage wasn't just subsidizing the services we provided to clients but wasteful and incompetent management committee decisions as well. The thing that affected me most was working in organizations where the very people proclaiming to be fighting for other people's rights denied these to their own staff or just sat back and watched their colleagues' rights get trampled on through ignoring, bullying or harassment. Needless to say, I did not remain with such organizations very long. It's these behaviors and workplace cultures that grate against my conscience, and they are surprisingly and disappointingly common.

In my day job, it's the clients that make it all worthwhile. Although they can wear you out, they are the reason I have remained in this sector for so long. Working with them to identify their options and overcome their situations is rewarding, but some people fall through the cracks of society, justice and welfare regimes and I couldn't help everyone get the outcomes they sought. In comparison, I found sex work to be refreshingly simple, free of baggage and easy to manage. In some ways I could be more myself with regular clients than I could with the people I interacted with in my day job, whether they were clients, colleagues, peers or

management committee members. And I pretty much always managed to give my sex work clients a happy ending.

The logistics of managing two jobs were relatively easy and I hid my second job successfully for just over twenty years. As a sex worker I could control my hours and work in a brothel as little or as much as I wanted. I also went through periods where I saw one or two regulars at home once a week. It was definitely the way to maximize earnings for the time I spent and gave me time to undertake further study, which was a hobby for me. Emotionally, I found managing both roles relatively easy when it came to clients, but much harder when it came to my personal life. I found my manufactured persona quite easy to maintain with clients and told regulars a few snippets of non-identifying information about me to make them feel special. I didn't have problems managing my self-identity; I thought carefully about who Lucinda would be and just stuck with the story. I shared very little real personal information with clients (Respect, 2010 [b]) and just re-structured the story a bit to cater to the client's fantasy, for example, to feel desired, needed, cared for or like a sex machine. In my personal life it was different; the one man I wanted to become seriously involved with and to whom I chose to tell the truth could not deal with it, and it's one of my very few regrets about sex working. In my day job too, I was careful to keep my sex work a secret because I regularly dealt with solicitors, barristers, police, tribunals and industrial and anti-discrimination advocates.

The consequences of being discovered terrified me, even though I mostly worked legally. It was the ideological component of my day work that scared me so much. Many of my friends and colleagues had negative views about sex work and viewed sex workers as victims. Their poorly informed yet well-meaning views meant that they did not see sex work as real work or as a choice and saw sex workers as "prototype victims of patriarchy and capitalism" (Pheterson, 1996, p. 60). I found it ironic that such friends and colleagues were at the forefront of demanding better

rights, pay and conditions and legislative reform for women, yet when it came to sex work their answer for sex workers was to leave it or lobby to have sex work abolished (Pheterson, 1996, p. 61). It was the stigma associated with being a sex worker that made me feel that I had to lead two separate lives.

Some of my sex work clients also perpetuated this stigma. I was perplexed by clients who said things such as, “I’d hate for my daughter to do this”, because I’m sure that no one dreams of their child growing up to work in a petrol station, in an abattoir, or emptying bedpans. Yet sex work seems to carry a particular taint of social undesirability, although I never found it degrading. I used a range of mechanisms to cope with the stigma, albeit unconsciously most of the time. For instance, I didn’t undercut other sex workers and adhered to norms around condom use, and informed other workers of potentially dangerous clients and no-shows. The strategies I used to deal with the stresses of being discovered and manage the complications of being two different people were just a regular part of my day-to-day life. Once I started becoming a sex worker activist, I had to deal with the growing sense of shame I felt at hiding my sex worker status and relying instead on more conventional forms of credibility. It was a defining moment when I realized that I felt that I had more credibility speaking for sex workers as a perceived non-sex worker than as an expert in my chosen field.

There’s a Time and Place for Spontaneity: Sex Work Isn’t It

I used a number of daily strategies commonly employed by sex workers to manage stigma and other risks, including separation and isolation (Blake, 2010), identity management and the establishment and maintenance of boundaries (Jeffreys, 2006, p. 115), controlled disclosure and strong personal relationships. I took advantage of the tremendous flexibility available in sex work to maximize earnings while minimizing the need to miss important events in my professional life as a social services worker. I had

control over my hours of work and modes of work. I moved in and out of brothels, escort agencies and private work depending on the hours I wanted to work and how much time I had available. In brothels you just turn up for your scheduled shifts, and I studied between bookings. Private work takes up more time in that there's a fair bit of marketing and screening of clients.

I preferred working privately. It meant I could target the clients I wanted and minimize risks and wasted time. For the first few years of private work I advertised in the Yellow Pages as available for outcalls at night. That way I targeted wealthy older businessmen, who are a relatively easily pleased and undemanding group and are generous and reliable. I minimized the chances of running into anyone I knew and built up a great set of regular clients who texted me before coming to Brisbane every couple of months and were a predictable source of income. My choices were based on my assessment of the risks (Sanders, 2005[a], p. 46), which for me were being discovered and losing money through no-show clients who made a booking with me and then didn't arrive. Having sex with many men certainly didn't mean that I was having sex with random men (Pheterson, 1996, p. 39); I targeted and screened them carefully.

I managed my identity by using a working name, which didn't just help to protect my identity but helped me stick to my boundaries. When I went to work I was Lucinda, and Lucinda was an image, not me. When I went home it made it easier to leave my work persona behind. I also managed my alter ego by dressing differently and altering my appearance substantially (Sanders, 2005[b], p. 325). My glamorous waist-length hairpieces were very different from my own hair, and I dressed in tight, low-cut long velvet, satin and lace evening gowns. In my day job and real life I'm a Doc Martens and jeans kind of person: the slightly scruffy, perpetual student type. I wore different underwear for sex work and kept my two lives delineated by having two mobile phones and email addresses. I didn't work from home until I was in my late

thirties, preferring to do outcalls and supplement them by hiring a hotel room one or two days a week at times.

I worked hard to maintain emotional, mental and physical boundaries to make bookings run smoothly and filter out those clients who were unlikely to respect them. I controlled the place, timing, pricing, logistics and level of service I would provide in each booking (Sanders, 2005[a], p. 43). I controlled access to my body (Sanders, 2005[a], p. 325) by not providing extras, such as kissing or allowing oral on me, because it was too hard to control when clients inevitably tried to push boundaries (such as jamming their tongues down my throat or removing the latex dam I initially used for oral). It just caused hassles and reminded them that they were clients. I didn't do fantasies much either because getting dressed up in costumes made me feel stupid. As I was known for providing a girlfriend experience⁷, I turned it to my advantage by saying that I could only "be myself" in bookings, which reinforced my reputation as a "genuine" person who really cared about clients and was intuitive to their needs.

In my day job and private life I built strong, long-standing female friendships, and these women became my testing ground when I started disclosing my status as a sex worker. For the most part, I was pleasantly surprised by their reactions and active support. Their two most common first reactions were disappointment at my not having trusted them sooner and some cautious queries about whether I had addiction issues. I thought I knew some of these women, but it wasn't until I disclosed to them that they started revealing some of their secrets: one had a partner who was a serial adulterer and another had a partner with gambling problems. Disclosing didn't just enrich these relationships, it made me realize that many of us have secrets, shame, or carry guilt.

Other strategies I adopted included justification, becoming educated about sex work and learning to recognize and embrace my power, as well as understanding the nature of agency and how

none of us are truly unconstrained by society, our gender, or the expectations placed on us or our work. As Sullivan states, most paid work, including sex work, involves “varying degrees of coercion, exploitation, resistance, and agency” (Sullivan, 2010, pp. 87 & 88). I now realize that in my earlier years of sex working that I used my education and perceived class status to view myself as different and as an excuse to distance myself from other sex workers. I didn’t encourage sex worker friendships until my mid-thirties, even though I did help other sex workers with advocacy, social security, child support and domestic violence problems. It took me an embarrassingly long time to realise that other sex workers didn’t have these problems in any greater numbers than my colleagues and friends and usually had significantly fewer problems than my day job clients.

I learned to use my power. While I knew that I had economic and sexual power, I had not considered the extent to which I controlled the logistics and the encounters. Time is money (Earle & Sharpe, 2007, p. 90); I controlled the timing and pace of encounters. While I sometimes gave regulars a bit of extra time and pretended that I was having such a good time that I had forgotten what time it was, it was a calculated business strategy aimed at enhancing my “sincerity” to a client to get repeat bookings and bigger tips. I enjoyed getting dressed up, playing a part, looking glamorous, being someone different and doing a good job. And most of all, I enjoyed getting paid a lot of money for it. My physical fitness really improved too in the periods when I was working a lot. And if I didn’t feel like working, I just turned my phone off.

Activism as a Form of Internalized Whore Stigma?

I didn’t realize until quite recently that my sex worker activism was (and is) as much about justifying my sex work to myself as viewing it as skilled and meaningful. I did my best as a sex worker, as I did with other jobs. Bernstein describes attending meetings of sex workers in San Francisco who sought to professionalize sex

work through training and warning each other of problem clients (2007, p. 480), and these are strategies that I also adopted. I started advocating for sex workers in the organizations I worked for in my day job. I joined the Board of SQWISI (Self-Health for Queensland Workers in the Sex Industry), the then-Queensland sex worker organization and assisted individual sex workers with complaints against the police and medical services, for example. I was very active in lobbying to change Australian Labor Party conference policy, which resulted in a review of the prostitution laws and led to the enactment of the Prostitution Act 1999 (Queensland). It was (and remains) an ill-conceived piece of legislation in many ways. Many of us who worked in illegal brothels prior to the legalization of licensed brothels have found that we had better conditions (and made more money) prior to legalization, and sex workers who work illegally have become even further marginalised (Sullivan, 2010, p. 88). Although I have now retired from sex work, I am still active in sex worker organizations and was an inaugural member of SSPAN (Sexual Service Providers Network), an inaugural Management Committee member of Respect Inc., the recently formed Queensland sex worker organization funded by Queensland Health to replace SQWISI, and am a member of Scarlet Alliance, Australia's national umbrella sex worker organization. I am currently working with other members of Scarlet Alliance on strategies for using the law creatively to advance systemic and individual rights for sex workers.

Conclusion

With over twenty years experience as a sex worker, I can say that from my perspective, sex work is a viable and rewarding career choice for a number of reasons, especially for middle-class women who can bring specialized skills and knowledge to their work and get paid quite a lot of money for it. The money, job satisfaction, personal empowerment, camaraderie with other sex workers and dressing up are just a few of my favorite things. Have I mentioned

how much I am in demand at dinner parties? I have an extensive array of hilarious—sometimes disgusting—stories with which to regale audiences. However, while studies show that there is an increase in the respectability and economic mainstreaming of the sex industry and that middle-class women are increasingly entering it (and perhaps bringing new values, such as the need to find meaning in the experience), the whore stigma is still the major cause of our oppression, regardless of social capital. It is for this reason that I remain relatively closeted. Abolitionists continue to play a major part in this oppression, and it is important that research moves away from the tired old cliché of sex work as exploitation to examine the diversity of sex working arrangements.

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³ Although this term is used in very different ways depending on the cultural context of usage, being “middle class” in Australia generally connotes university education, engagement with one’s neighborhood community and home ownership,

⁴ For analysis of this stigma and the role it plays in shaping law, policy and ideological surrounding sex work, see Doezema 2010, Scoular 2004.

⁵ Sex work legislation significantly differs from state to state in Australia and includes a broad spectrum of legal regulations on sex work, which is illegal in Western Australia, decriminalized in New South Wales, legal in the Northern Territory provided that sex workers are registered with the police, and, in Queensland, legal for sole operators and licensed brothels. The Queensland legislation permits sole operators to perform “outcall” services to clients, provided that they go alone, and is enforced in periodic police “sting” operations.

⁶ According to the law in Queensland, the presence of more than one sex worker is equivalent to a brothel, which means that two sex workers sharing an apartment (even at different times of the day or night) constitutes an unlicensed brothel. Licensing requirements for brothels are onerous and difficult to comply with in addition to mandating that brothels' location in industrial areas. Additionally, brothels must have a toilet in each room as well as bathroom and there can only be a maximum of five rooms, which means that each costs at least one million Australian dollars (U.S. \$884,000) to open.

⁷ For more on this cultural practice, see Bernstein 2007b.