

# RESILIENT

& RESISTING

THE SEX WORK EDITION

FREE ZINE





# ABOUT RESILIENT & RESISTING

Resilient & Resisting is a collaboration between groups and individuals, with artist/activist Jet Moon, produced with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arcola Participation. Fierce, intimate oral histories, collaborative stories, D.I.Y. research and interviews from people at the intersection of several kinds of marginalisation. Those of us who are disabled, queer, kinky, sex workers, survivors. Much political action (of all kinds) comes from the power of survival.

Resilient and resisting stems from my personal experience of these brutal years of austerity. Feeling incredibly isolated, I sought to place those experiences in their political context. I became aware that I was not alone, many others were experiencing stigma and resisting their conditions. These are complex stories of overlapping struggles that often go untold, or when others write about us, are sensationalised and sanitised.

Find us online at [resilientandresisting.org](http://resilientandresisting.org)

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# INTRO DUCTION

This zine is a compilation of the stories from Resilient and Resisting that talk about sex work, alongside contributions by sex worker organisations, and a group interview by sex workers on 'sex work disability and trauma'. The stories and interview are presented in a shortened form. Full versions can be found on the website.

Maybe it's not so surprising that in a project about stigma and social change, I encountered a lot of stigma. I did not consider at the beginning that the project would involve repeatedly outing myself. I should have thought that one through better!! It's still not my personal preference.

At the heart of this project are people telling their stories, this project is for US, to build strength and break down isolation. I wanted to stay true to that ideal and to work outwards. From that perspective of sharing and identification, stigma became beautiful.

As I worked to find funding, organise events, and deal with institutions, I learned a lot. I learned to deal with my own internalised stigma: to break through that, to go and knock on doors and ask for things. To stand up for our right to be heard. Still, I encountered many layers of stigma: particularly in regards to sex, sex work, and disability. I got asked if I had 'ever had a real job', heard complaints from gate keepers about not being able to join 'sex worker only' spaces!

Stigma was not confined to people in positions of power, it manifested in different ways. Often those who lived with their own experience of discrimination held misconceptions about others. There were amazing times of finding new common ground despite this.

I often felt the barriers present for those who don't for whatever reason go to more institutional spaces (mobility, class, lack of funds), and tried to find ways to make more welcoming events.



In the event: 'Our Stories', I worked with Hackney Museum to create a live reading as part of their contribution to '16 days against violence against women and girls'. I wanted to feature the voices of sex workers and trans women and non-binary people, who are rarely heard in this context, except as statistics. This event helped to set a precedent for sex worker and trans positive language and inclusion within Hackney Council policy. Exhibition co-ordinators at the museum did a lot to welcome us.

At 'Fighting for space, love and loss', a celebration of LGBT history month, we took items out of the museum's standard displays and replaced them with our own historical objects. Included were placards and photos from demonstrations outside Hackney Town Hall against the N11 licensing policy, almost ten years on since the strip clubs were closed. Bittersweet, but it felt like something to place that record inside the council's own museum.

Here in this zine are some voices that speak of the intersections of sex work, disability, queerness, kink, and survivorship. Individuals who told me their stories were part of a collaborative process. There are other stories in *Resilient and Resisting* by people who are sex workers or have done sex work, not everyone mentioned that as part of their story. Sometimes we would get to the end of the interview and the person would laugh 'Ha! and I didn't even mention sex work', because we had so many other things to talk about. Other times I went to do interviews and hadn't realised people had a sex working history until they brought that into the story.

Also included in the zine are contributions from groups: Radio Ava, who featured monthly readings of the stories and took part in our panel discussion, ECP: English Collective of Prostitutes, who contributed to our panel discussion and with an interview about their Archive material, and ELSC: East London Strippers Collective, who contributed to the exhibition at Hackney Museum.

This zine presents one small example of the many faces of activism and community in progress all around us.

**Jet Moon, *Resilient and Resisting*, 2019**



# IN THE CIRCUS

There's a documented history of EDS (Ehlers-Danlos syndrome), you can see it, trace it through photographs of the old sideshow traditions of the circus, all of those people who lived in freak-shows or made their living as contortionists. You know those pictures of people 'The elastic man' where they can stretch their skin right out from their neck, that's type one EDS. Or you see a particular type of back bend and think, a person without EDS couldn't do that. Those entire contortionist families who are part of a circus: that's EDS. So there's a whole invisible, yet visible history of peoples' survival and the ways that people have used their disabilities as a way to survive, it's there if you know what you are looking for.

There's a common thread of EDS in my family, as it's hereditary. I can see who has passed it down, tho it's not talked about. It's hidden in plain sight. I can also see that there's a hidden history of sex work in my family, people doing this kind of work to get by. My great grandma, we were all told that she was an opera singer back in the days of music hall. Except there are no records of an opera singer by that name, in those days theatrical terms were used to describe another type of work: 'an opera singer', 'a dancer', 'an entertainer', 'an actress'.

Sex work. What I would say about that now is different from what I would have said ten years ago when I started out. I used to be very into telling that story where sex work is all about my agency, an expression of who I am and my sexuality. It's just getting by isn't it? That's what it is for me. I'm just so bored with it.

I can't be bothered to go through all of the palaver of finding new clients, all the vetting and screening and putting up with dickheads

and wankers. I wish I could just go back to brothel work, finding somewhere where I can just go and work for one day of the week and walk away with a wad of cash.

**It's a head fuck working with these well off clients anyway, all their delicate sensibilities.**

With a brothel all I have to do is go there and fuck whoever walks through the door. In those places mostly it's just ordinary guys, brickie's, labourers, taxi drivers, workers. Usually there is a way to get on with most of them.

That skill of watching some one walk through the door, having to assess in a matter of seconds flat what they were looking for: who I could be to them. At the end of the night I would feel like a champion, I felt invincible, I felt like \*Rarrr\*! like I had just wrestled 20 lions and won.

**Middle class work, mostly it's a lot of sitting and standing still for long periods of time in an office.**

**I can do that for about two or three days before it starts to make me unwell.**

Before muscles and internal organs begin to twist in ways they shouldn't or there is the chance of a dislocated joint or an injury from the sheer un-naturalness of those demands. I need to move.

**I get a lot of freedom through my work. I might not always make a lot of money, but I have TIME.**

Time to focus, time to think, time to rest when I need to, time to spend with the people I care about and to go where I want to. Time to take care of my health, time to prepare a special diet that helps me to stay well, that takes a lot of time.

**I can't do those things if I am always occupied with working these shitty 'respectable' jobs.**

What is it that people are actually doing anyway? Sitting in an office, moving around scraps of digital paper, filling up the world with more bullshit. It's ditch digging for white collar workers.

With my Anarchist crew. I love doing naughty things and I love running away from the police, it's a right laugh. The real giggle is that with all this uproar about Brexit and Corbyn, all of the struggle and chaos of in fighting. It's those naughty Anarchists with their jokey pranksterish, badly behaved ways that have managed to raise the profile of some of the really serious issues.

The infamous paint bombings of hipster cafes in Brick lane, The stuff around the 'Ripper Museum' in Whitechapel and also the noise parades in Soho and Whitechapel, we've got these issues up and out there to the point where people are seeing and reading about them, seeing what the effects of gentrification and beating down the poor are. Every demonstration I go to lately, there's statements from the organisers saying they don't support any kind of violent direct action. As far as I know no-one was even considering that anyway. But what the fuck is that about? We are in a system that IS doing violence to us everyday.

**There's a thing about pain and memory, there are the times when you are in pain, when it's impossible to forget.**

Then there is the time after that when you are not in pain, when it's very hard to remember exactly what that pain felt like. Somehow within us we have a mechanism for forgetting. I can't remember having a time before illness, this wasn't something I 'got' or something that happened to me, it's always been there in my earliest memories. My body moves and behaves differently because of this, that also forms how I think and how I experience the world.

All of us in my crew we went to an art gallery together, in a building where a lot of us used to squat. One of our mates was doing his cabaret show there. This place which used to be ours, is now full of hipster wankers being 'edgy'. All through the show our mate was taking the piss out of them but the audience didn't quite know what to make of it. It's satire and he is sending himself up as much as the audience, so I don't think the audience were sure if they were really being insulted or not. We were all up at the front cheering him on, and at the end of the show he sang the song 'You're all a bunch of cunts'. We all joined in. At that point it became obvious, we really did hate them.

# INTIMATE PLEASURE

I wish i could just go home but I'm not ready to go home yet. Oh, but London! This city takes so much more than it gives!

**With going home it's complicated, I don't know how to be around my family anymore.**

If I try to talk about what happened, then it is me making a problem. I suppose I can go home when my grandparents are dead, maybe that sounds like a harsh thing to say but that's when I will feel that it is all over, that I am finally free.

My house I have there, I bought it before the crash. I will be paying that mortgage until I am 65! But back then I was able to get a mortgage to buy a house without any deposit or savings. That house, it was the first time I ever had a placeto myself, where I didn't have to do anything for anyone else. I laughed a lot and I think that is in the energy of the house, I want to be able to share that with others.

**In the last ten years if I counted, I've had more than 40 jobs.**

All of them casual, and a lot of those I got fired from for being unreliable.

It's not so easy to be reliable for these jobs where you don't know from one day to the next if there will be work, or where it will be.

Regular work, I tell you one thing, with my clients' they are not always nice, often they can be disgusting or difficult, but I can deal with that. But they don't yell at me. In my straight jobs, those situations where I was the 'free' worker, I never had a situation where they didn't yell at me. This was the price of having a job, that they are actually allowed to yell at me, to bully me and tell me what to do. I am supposed to act as if I am grateful for the job and the opportunity for them to treat me like shit.

**Really the only thing I like about sex work is being able to organise my own time.**

That I don't have to go and spend 8 hours a day five days a week in some job. At least with sex work I can decide to go somewhere else or decide not to go, as long as I have the money for the rent that is.

Housing, it's so expensive just to have a roof to live under, how can it fucking cost so much? Most of my life, that is once I left my family home, I lived in collectively with others. Apart from the money I believe in the politics of that. Except it's not always like that, there is the work of it. Because in living together there is always the division of chores, of cooking, cleaning, organising the buying food, of peace keeping, of cleaning up other peoples mess.

And if you are for some reason not able to do that work, then you are seen as somehow less part of the group, less contributing to the house. Living alone, sometimes people just need to be alone, to have a space for themselves. Sometimes it is necessary to find your own space just to be able to think and figure things out!

Feeling ready to go into past trauma, to fall apart, sometimes it takes years to be ready, and then there is the question of how to function, how to survive when that is happening. I realised I was telling the same fragments of stories over and over again to friends, and I was aware that there were gaps, things I was not telling or where I didn't even know what happened.

**I wanted to know my own story and to try to make sense of that. Except to have this space, to live alone, I have to work so much and have clients in my house all of the time.**

They are always asking questions, so many questions, they want to know all about you, that you should tell them all of your secrets, so they can know you.

They ask if you are ill, are you on drugs, what happened in your past that brought you to doing this for a job? They want their own perfect picture of the 'Manic Pixie Dream Girl'. If you were really sick they wouldn't notice it.

**That's the thing with sex work, it's isolating.**

If you are not part of that visible sex workers community, then how do you find other sex workers?

Activism in this sex worker scene, OMG. I'm afraid I can't even go into those spaces anymore, because there is so much policing of what other people say. I have enough anxiety as it is without wondering if I will accidentally do or say the wrong thing. I wonder about that. How is it that in these open political spaces, which are suppose to be inclusive, that so many times it is someone with a university degree telling others how to speak? Or always those with English as a first language picking over every single word that is said? Where is the space to make mistakes and learn? Where is the room to actually find out what we need to know? I'm sick of it!

I try to offer myself to go past isolation, to be there to support. I got approached by a couple of women back home who want to start some sort of sex workers project, because right now there isn't anything.

It's been such a long time since I had sex in my own language, to fuck in the language that is my mother tongue, to hear the words of what we will do with each other or to say the names of parts of the body, I almost forgot how it feels. It's been years. Now in my life on all levels, I can't deal with peoples stupid questions and bigotry anymore, I got too tired for that. I won't tolerate that anymore.

**Freedom? What is that? I have never been free. What does that even look like?**

I have always had to make money, to do what I am told, to find the ways to have basic things. That is not freedom. Everyone one has the right to housing, to have food, shelter, health care, because that is what it takes to live!

**And everybody has the right to live!**

# LIVERISH

I've taken a lot of drugs in my time, truck loads, shed loads. Drugs I didn't even know the names of, great drugs, shit drugs. That was a long time ago, I've been in recovery for decades now.

**I guess that makes me one of the 'good' addicts, one of the acceptable ones, but I'm not interested in telling that kind of story.**

I never paid for any of the drugs I took, I fucked a lot of people and I scammed a lot of doctors. Like they say, sometimes the free things are the most expensive. My past has meant I have a complex relationship with the medical establishment.

The town I lived in 70% of IV drug users were infected with HCV, that's the Hepatitis C virus, this was in a time before needle exchanged existed.

The Philippines are killing their junkies, execution squads in the streets. Australia are trying to bring in drug testing for people on benefits. Are they going to test for street drugs? Or for the ones legally prescribed, and that the government profit from?

Exhaustion, those times when I can't get out of bed. I hate resting. Then there are the times when I think I am well. I forget I'm ill. Sometimes that feeling can last for weeks!

I run around doing things, making up for lost time. I start to feel guilty for daring to say I was disabled. What the fuck was I thinking? Was I trying to make people feel sorry for me? Then the crash comes. Sometimes it is so subtle, like feeling the snapping of a hair, but the good times are over.

**People say 'You're so lucky, I'd love to spend the day in bed'. They don't understand. Motherfuckers.**

**It's not possible to explain fatigue to people who never had it. They think you're 'a bit tired'.**

**No, I can't get up.**

What I want, desperately, more than anything else, is to be up and about. There is so much that needs to be done! Instead I lay here, reminding myself to breath, because my chest feels so heavy.



# **I hate asking for help, I feel ashamed.**

They say the liver is the seat of anger in the body. Yes, I'm angry, I'm angry about a lot of things. I am RAGING at the injustice of this world. All the times I've dreamed about 'What I would do if I was well'. The fact is, I still did a lot!

Precarious work, the extreme sport of our times. I didn't 'decide' to become a sex worker, I got fired, I needed a job. I thought maybe I had some transferable skills.

# **In reality I knew nothing about the sex industry, but sex work gave me a way to survive when I was ill.**

Most of the time I could still manage to sit up, put on some make up and a slutty outfit, get to the end of my bed and turn on my cam. With lot of make up and good lighting, there you have it: Hey presto! Instant wellness!

On my side of the screen I perform being well, being sexy, being straight, pretending to be a woman. On the other side of the screen my clients want to talk about their crossdressing fantasies, being forced into homosexuality, transgressing the traditional masculinity they feel trapped by. How much they want to be my whore. It's a funny old world.

Sex work meant I was able to pay the rent, eat, make my bills, I was even able to support a partner for a while. But I was very isolated, most people don't get how isolating sex work can be. Sex work has been good to me, tho I could do without the legal bullshit and how I often lie about what I do for a living.

Doctors told me so many lies about my health. The biggest lie of all was pretending that they even KNEW what the fuck they were talking about. I got turned down for treatment on the NHS, they said I wasn't sick enough, what that means is, I wasn't dying from end stage liver disease.

The liver consultants at the hospital would laugh at me when I complained of fatigue, like I was a fucking princess who didn't I know what being really sick was all about. When I begged for treatment the doctors told me 'What ever it is that is wrong with you, it's not Hepatitis C.'

The first available treatments for Hep C were poisonous and grim: injecting yourself everyday, for six months with shitty drugs that made you sick as a dog, and still might not cure you. When the new treatments started to appear I was very excited.

Except Big Pharma are making a massive profit out of illness. It costs \$80,000 for a 12 week treatment in the U.S. £35,000 In the UK. That's about £400 a pill, this shit better be good right? The buyers clubs, they bring in and distribute the cheaper generic drugs from India or Pakistan, to those who need them. Buying Hep C treatment was the most expensive drug deal I've ever done.

I joined a group on the internet to find out more information. A stranger messaged me, telling me he could get the new drugs to me within ten days. I'm used to talking to strange dudes on the internet but usually they pay by the minute. I was suspicious, it had to be a scam. We talked for a while and he turned out to be for real. That was my big drug deal on the internet, pressing a button, sending £950 to a stranger, crossing my fingers and hoping.

All the activism I've done, blockades I've been part of, immigration detention centres I've camped outside of or visited inside, people I've campaigned for, demonstrations I've walked on, fields I've stood in, police horses I've been trampled by, cops I've fought with. When I found I wasn't able to go on demonstrations any more, when I didn't have the energy to be out in public, some people would ask: 'What does it feel like not to be an activist anymore?' because that is the picture of activism most people are familiar with.

# **Who knew that 'Fighting the power' would include fighting for my own medical treatment?**

# A LIONESS

My earliest memories? My earliest memory is of my beautiful mother who I adore and the colour violet all around, violet everywhere, surrounding me. Another is age three, putting on a dress and running out the door. I was missing for hours. Everyone was out in the streets looking for me, searching for a little boy. They couldn't find me anywhere, then an old woman said, 'Oh, but there was a little girl, I saw a little girl go that way.'

The beginning of my difference, my quirkiness, or even my pain if you like began at age 5. At the age of 5 I was closer to my older sister than my brothers, I was the youngest. I didn't like to play football, I didn't like to climb trees.

**My sister always wanted a younger sister, she used to tell me 'Pray to God to become a girl, so we can be Sisters'.**

We played with our dolls. I had my Barbie or was is Cindy? The one with the fringe. And I loved Wonder Woman and The Bionic Woman. I loved all those strong powerful woman, with beautiful make up. I used to tie t-shirts on my head so it was like long hair, and another around my shoulders like a cape, then jump from the living room table shouting 'Wonder Woman'.

Then somebody said to me 'Take that thing off your head, stop behaving like that, stop walking like that.'

**Boys don't do that.  
Stop being like a girl.  
That's the first time  
I remember feeling  
humiliated. I felt shame.**

I had a very fortunate upbringing in the beginning, I was born in Paris and raised in Italy. We had a big household, with lot of people to help us, integrated into the household like an extended family.

When the war in East Africa happened we had to leave Italy and go to Egypt. We went from living in a large home to all of us fitting into a two bedroom flat. This was not the Egypt that tourists know, it was the real Egypt.

That was also the first time I was molested, this guy took me, I didn't want to go with him. He kissed me and put his tongue in my mouth, that was the most disgusting thing. I remember washing my face over and over again, trying to get rid of that feeling.

Eventually we went to the South of France as refugees. Starting school there, I fought countless times. Going out in the world I had to fight like a Lioness. I would fight like a cat. I would bite scratch, I didn't care, that was how I defended myself. Fear, pride, adrenaline, I did what I did. Again it was all to do with my colour. I would get so angry.

I would fight tooth and nail, I would battle with those who tried to put me down, I was not taking it. Oh I would fly into such rages. There was so much anger inside me. The people left me alone after a while because I was a Lioness.

I started to have my first experiences with sex at 14, it was the same as before, I felt disgusted, but it became a routine. I would run away from home and sleep with older guys. I think I've always been looking for that Daddy figure. But also there has been always that thing where I felt sex wasn't about me, I felt a lot of shame and pain and anger.

Because I felt there was something shameful about me, I started to keep secrets. Not being honest was a way of protecting myself. I didn't want to reveal things about myself in case it was considered shameful. I didn't want to bring shame into my family.

I found the gay scene, it was like I arrived. I completely blanked my family for a whole year, even leaving that close bond with my mum that none of my other siblings had.

Prostitution, I started at the age of 20, a guy I was dating he pimped me out. He said 'Oh, you can go to Porte Dauphine, you can work there.' I went there with another guy, I had my first few clients and I thought, 'This is fantastic'. I was going there for a whole summer and I loved it. I tell you why I loved it: it was outside, it was in a beautiful place, it was the cars, the people, the transsexuals, the prostitutes, the gigolos, the dealers. All of these people, I was drawn to them. I didn't have any embarrassment around them, they made me feel at home, they embraced me. That summer was amazing. I met many many people and some nights we would talk, talk talk, till the sun came up. Those deep encounters, they shaped me and made me love life more, those beautiful people made me feel there was a way out. Those prostitutes were poets, nurses, mothers, all kinds of people.

It was very dangerous as well, I'm lucky that I haven't been killed, some times people were disappearing. You know, 'Where is Jon Francois?' 'Oh he went into the woods and we haven't found him since.' But I wasn't scared, I was excited. I wasn't excited because of the danger, I was excited because there was something else, a kind of life I could relate to.

Struggles with mental health, gender, sexuality. Experiences of violence, fear, sexual abuse. Prostitution, rejection from society, family, the LGBT community, the black community, the Muslim community, gay Community, trans community. Racism, homophobia, being disowned, being an outcast. I subscribe to all of the above. All of the things we take inside that turn to anger. It must come out, no matter what, it has to come out, it must find a way out. Or otherwise all that shit is going to be in there and it will destroy you.

## **Once I started to be me, that's when the anger subsided.**

Being me with my clothing, with my not specified gender, I feel more relaxed. It doesn't mean I don't get scared. Sometimes I do get scared, when I get looks on the underground or whatever, but I've got nothing to hide, I expose who I am, I'm stronger for it. Sometimes I take my bravery as irrelevant, I had to be brave all my life, that's just the way it is. My bravery is so inbuilt, I almost forget about it. I don't see it. Perhaps I should honour it more. I'm one of those people who think you just have to get on with it.

I learned a lot through my mistakes, I'm less defensive, less with a chip on my shoulder. I don't believe in being constantly chronically angry, but I do believe that when you have had enough you have the right to expose your anger, without hurting people. My anger comes when I feel cheated, ostracised, less than or less of a human, when I think people think they are better than me.

## **I want every one to feel love.**

I searched for joy for all my life. All the things that bring me JOY are all the things I used to feel ashamed of. Everything that could bring me happiness was in front of me the whole time.

I don't feel shame anymore.

# SWITCHING FOCUS

I grew up with my mother telling me I wasn't good enough at being a woman, that I wasn't a proper woman. Coming out I didn't feel confident around Femmes so a lot of my early relationships were with other Butch, masculine of centre folk. I was too afraid to even talk to Femmes, but at the same time I was burning for them.

I thought about transitioning in my twenties, I was ready to begin that process. Then I reached a level of being comfortable in some in middle place and that was fine for years.

I don't recall an exact point of decision to change how I presented, maybe it started with buying gifts for my Femme partner at the time. Buying things for her in this 1960's girl band style, which she disliked and thinking 'If I had the guts I would love to wear this'. Eventually I realised: it's me, I'm the one who this is for, this is what I want to wear, this is my style.

I've made a major change in my life, I've expanded. Going from being queer and dyke focused, to seeing straight or bi cis men. I used to be a sort of Faggy Butch dyke, now I present as Femme. Being with male people is very It's different from being with women, but I still still have my own fluid gender identity running in my head. Except ask myself on a daily basis, 'Am I passing as a woman?' I wonder, 'Am I really pulling this off?'

I've gone from living an alternative lifestyle to mixing with people who are more mainstream and being judged on that level. I'm dressing very middle class these days, passing in that way, but I'm still feel a dirty squatter punk underneath, it's like I'm doing research. The weird thing about dressing like this is people assume I'm financially solvent, which I'm not. It's difficult to explain to people who don't live on the same terms about things like not having enough money to leave the house, things that can be seen as a sign of failure.

Coming from a community background you are used to working on zero budgets, working for months for free, and so you don't quite understand how to value that work. If it wasn't for my circle of support, people helping me, giving me places to stay, giving a financial hand, then I just simply would not be here. There's no way I could have done the things that I did without that help.

## A lot of people wouldn't have had the guts to do what we did.

Faslane, the protest camp outside the military base, I lived there for just over a year. There were kind of two camps within the protest camp: the middle class friends of the earth types, and us Anarchists and queers. It was two different cultures. One was very much about a particular kind of language and way of doing activism, where as us Queers, we got out and actually had conversations with ordinary people.

I never went over the fence onto the military base. At the time I was a brown masculine identified queer person and I just didn't like my chances. There were people with guns on that base, you know what I mean. It just didn't seem like a good idea. So I put my energy into support and working more behind the scenes. I felt like I had to do something about these issues that it seemed no one was talking about. The fact of having this military base there in Scotland, or the war in Iraq and our involvement in it.

I have a fetish for straight right wing military men, (laughs) which is a direct polar opposite from what I used to be into. My fetish for the military thing has roots in colonialism and power, I like the immediacy, that I can meet a man straight away and just get down to it and have sex.

I do a lot of things through swinger sites, finding hook ups. It's not sex work in the totally professional sense, it's more having dinner bought for me, or underwear, or heels. Getting my refrigerator replaced or the occasional bill paid. Men do things for me and help me out, I judge them for their behaviour and fuck their asses. My friends say I'm in my 'Happy Hooker' phase, I love it, I love being in contact with people in this way.

It occurs to me how much of a survival practice kink is in my life. I've only started connecting the dots again recently as an adult. I started very young. I've always wanted to try out new things and see what they were like. I was self suspending myself by age seven, doing lots of play with my body and finding this sense of excitement and discovery, That has never stopped.

The sexual conditions where I come from are dire if you are queer, I travel for sex. I remember the first Sex parties I ever went to in other cities decades ago. Part of a queer festival: Queeruption, it couldn't happen nowadays. A lot of it was in squatted or free spaces, the spaces aren't there anymore. It was also the energy and politics of the time. I loved it, I loved going there. I met so many people, people who are still my friends now. Being among people who looked like you, felt like you and fucked like you. It was amazing.

I've avoided mainstream kink circles, I felt it was too tame and not interesting. I've also never had the money for it, there I am with my cheap hand made whips and outfits. I can't see myself at Torture Garden. I'm not sure I would even want to go there even if I could afford it. But kink has been one of the main joys in my life. I like feral animalistic things, body fluids, fucking in the dirt and the mud, food on the body, sharing food, food in the ass.

I just love being filthy, I love all kinds of filthiness. People say to me 'You're so filthy', but I don't think of myself as being into extremes, it's not something I set out to do. I'm just into the things I'm into, that started way before I had any context to put my taste or activity into. It's just me being myself. I've always resisted so called normality. The idea that I would behave in a certain way, follow a certain path. Marriage, I always saw it as transactional. I don't see why people make that separation between marriage and sex work, there are strong similarities. except with sex work, I am the free agent. I always wanted to be 'The Mistress' rather than the WIFE. To Me The Mistress held a different set of associations, of sexual freedom, of excitement, of passion, of

being master of my own fate, things that were the opposite of marriage. I suppose the idea was wrapped up in a lot of French turn of the century Romanticism, I've watch too much French film of a certain genre. Being Femme I feel for the first time in my life I understand the female experience. I know there is Femme privilege but when I was a Butch woman, I thought I understood image and sexism. I don't think I was ever fully awake to what it meant to be female, to realising what women have to deal with day after day.

God, am I even allowed to say that? These days I have a lot of conversations in secret with friends, because there is so much we feel we can't say in public without being policed, or being shot down in flames.

I don't know if I would even call myself a sex worker anymore, yes I've done it. I started to worry about safety. I was seeing people in my own space, because that's what I had, but I don't want to do that anymore. I guess I see my role as an educator, in sexwork, in kink, through a lot of the art stuff I'm doing. I try to have conversations with people, about possibilities, about something beyond ordinary expectations. I spent a lot of time talking to truck drivers lately as I was travelling up and down the country, organising the revolution one person at a time. I've been surprised by a lot of peoples views, when I talk to them about going on strike, it's something people have thought about but they don't want to lose their jobs.

Sexually I seem to attract those who have a more fluid gender, maybe I haven't met actual straight people at all. But this fetish for the right wing (laughs), my politics are deeply Anarchist, but I just love military men. Every single one of them has turned out to be kinky, I love educating and changing them having that sense of sexual control. Cross dressing military men, I love the fact that they can't stop thinking about me, instead of all the other destructive things they are supposed to be doing. I understand there are many reasons people sign up, disempowerment, money, education, it's not black and white. Sometimes I describe myself as a bit of a Fag in a dress and these cis men, they understand that. They feel that masculinity in me, they sense it. They are blown away by me and I tell them:

**This is queerness,  
everything I am, you  
owe to queerness.**

# SEX, REPRESSION & MENTAL HEALTH

**Domestic violence, violence in the home, my first memory of that is my mum, she was very violent.**

Her being violent towards us kids or us witnessing violence toward her from men who came into our home that's what I remember. She was this angry woman, politically she was very aware and really powerful. She was out there in the world doing all sorts of things that she wasn't supposed to do and that other people didn't approve of. The local policeman would come prowling around our house, looking in the windows and checking on her. She was an independent woman, we were coming out of the 60's it was a time of experimentation and an explosion of sexuality.

**From really early on I knew there was a connection of domestic violence and repression being connected, domestic violence and sexual repression.**

Out driving with my mum in the countryside in our old Bedford van late at night, we got pulled up by the police. The local policeman pulled us over because he thought we were two women out alone at night. The look of shock on his face when he looked in the window and saw I was really young and my mum was much older than he expected. My mum she knew what he was after, and she explained that to me as we drove away.

**What I ask myself when I think on this question of repression and violence, what I ask myself is, can women ever be safe?**

We live in such a repressive society, and I see this relationship between sexual freedom and repression. The question I come out of it with is, If women are going to stand up and have a voice, will men always repress that? What I come out of violence with is the knowledge that there was no avoiding it and those experiences have affected my choice making ability.

What I am left with is this fear, that if I am creative, if I am vocal, if I stand up, if I stand out, I will be hurt, and that is a really rational thing to think. Can women ever be safe?

Back when I lived in a street of squats, I had my own squat and I chose my lovers. I could be single, I could go off travelling on my own and come back.



**I think because of my sexual freedom, oh I don't want to say it, my lips want to button up! But I think because of my sexual freedom men wanted to beat me.**

Domestic violence one of the things I find so offensive about it, is how much what women are saying and doing gets minimised: saying no, saying men can't have something, saying you don't want to play a rape game, saying you are going to leave, you get battered for that.

That resorting to violence instead of exploring with words. I'm far more interested in WHY violence happens rather than what the acts are, because it's a failure of communication. I just cannot understand resorting to violence. I judge the arse off those who resort to violence, it's such a lazy way of communicating. I am angry, I am so angry, but I do not believe in violence as an answer and I do not want to resort to violence.

I always left violence, I was always leaving, cos I saw the violence coming. For a very long time I didn't know how not to get into violent situations, but I ran away a lot, I got myself away from those violent situations.

My first experience of sex work, I went to work in a massage parlour that was just on the corner of our road of squats. I was 18, I had no qualifications, what else was I going to do? I wanted to make some money. This was 1978, it was a really naive time in many ways.

In those days men were so bad at sex, they were really really terrible at sex, so having men coming in and me being able to tell them exactly what to do, it was a way of exploring. Having a room where I could play and discover, it was lovely. If I say that experience was good for me and I enjoyed it, it's like I'm not allowed, other people want to say that was a problem. Though I also knew that what we did was secret, because you couldn't tell other people about it, it also meant that if things went wrong you couldn't get help.

I've heard my mother blamed for all of my difficulties, well she had her own problems. What I come back to this idea I have about repression, that if women speak up, they will be told to shut up.

**Not just women, we live in a society that represses others.**

Mental health, how those words are used makes me so mad, because when people say mental health, what they actually mean is mental illness. That is the focus of services, from people who assess benefits, psychiatrists, professionals even a lot of support groups, the whole focus is on illness.

**What I want to focus on, what I want to put energy into and have skills for maintaining is my mental wellness!!**

For me mental health is mental wellness, but services, benefits, fellowship, support services in our society, when they say mental health, we are talking about ill health, they've got it wrong. Working in the the field of mental health I also bring up these questions, and end up having to resign from jobs because I just don't fit their roles and models.

My mental un-wellness, is simply that I do not fit societies borders. One of the reasons mental health professionals get concerned about me is because I have thoughts about suicide, 'Will I go on?' Those thoughts are just part of me, I don't plan how to kill myself, but as soon as I mention that I am slapped with a diagnosis. My understanding of that question is it's not a mark in the debit box, these are the questions humans ask themselves, these are the questions great thinkers ask. Its not wonderful, it's not sad, I just don't fit. If I stay with the thought of not fitting I can feel quite broken, but I'm not broken, I just don't fit. I'm not mad, this world is too small, it can't contain me.

# SEX WORK, DISABILITY AND TRAUMA

A GROUP DISCUSSION BETWEEN SEX WORKERS WHO IDENTIFY AS DISABLED

## INTRODUCTIONS

### MAFALDA:

Before I started doing sex work, I tried other self-employed forms, doing 30 hours a week and it really took a toll on my health. The only types of work that I could access were low-waged, minimum wage and that is not really enough to be able to survive in London. When I started being self-employed, I was very scared of claiming benefits and I found it very difficult to consider myself disabled. I had issues because of the stigma attached to being disabled or being on benefits. I did not think that my problems were serious enough and on the other hand I also did not want to be that person. It took me a long time to be able to accept the label disabled for bureaucratic processes.

### ANDIE:

I started sex work almost 10 years ago. I am a sex worker of colour. I am also a child survivor and have long-term CPTSD as well as other neuro-diversities relating to trauma. I went to university and it was a struggle. I have done various forms of work, being migrant, being a survivor, it's difficult to do frequent work for little pay and be able to survive. So I turned to sex work. I started out in the porn industry. For me as a survivor it has been very difficult. The longer I have been a survivor, the more trauma that happens to me, it's become harder as I get older to do most things. Keeping a job, a civvy job, even going back to education is incredibly difficult. Sex work has given me the freedom to work when I want or can. I can dissociate whilst at work, which has its downsides and upsides. I personally hate sex work, I do it to survive.

### VICTORIA:

I am a sex worker. I have PTSD and severe anxiety. I was diagnosed when I came to London, when I had money to access health care and a therapist. Before that, I had 40 jobs that were not sex work.

I could not stay in jobs, because people scream at you, I just freeze and go into panic mode. I stop being able to go to work, then guilt trips in and makes everything complicated. My family, they see therapy or anything related with mental health as very stigmatised. So I could not really explore while I was living there, why could I not keep a job. When I came to London and I started doing sex work, I could afford to take time and to explore.

### JAK:

My first experiences of sex work were not even sex work. I did a lot of survival sex which was transactional. At that point in my life, I remember going for a job interview in a brothel and thinking "This is actually quite shit money! And I didn't do it. I lived on benefits for a long time. Reflecting back, I was mentally and physically unwell, that money enabled me to live. At the point where I got a "normal", civvy job, I felt a real sense of achievement, "I am a real person!" Then finding out how shit work was. I had very few jobs where I earned proper money. Years of overworking, doing too much free work and living with a long-term untreated illness, I became more and more unwell. Austerity got worse, I lost my shit job and I started doing sex work. Sex work was what I **could** do at the level of health that I had.

### AYA:

I have not been in sex work long, that is partially to do with my age. I grew up in a family of disabled people – all of us are autistic – and that made it difficult to live together. I started SW as a way to supplement a civvy job I was struggling with. A job that worsened my mental health. It got to the point where I could not handle that retail client-facing job for hours, I could not do that anymore. I had to rely on sex work fully, and I had to move out of the house. That transition from part-time, to survival sex work is quite jarring. I have to remind myself that this is all I can do, I did not always hate it but in a way, that makes

me more bitter: this is the only option that I have. Because I am a student, I cannot claim universal credit. I am not diagnosed with Autism and because of that I cannot apply for PIP.

## WHY CIVVY WORK DOES NOT WORK

### AYA:

On the autism side of things, that affects how much time you have to spend interacting with people, pretending to be neuro-typical. When you are doing a retail job, one of the only jobs you can access without training and education. You have to be in that client-facing role for four hours at the very least, usually six to eight hours, sometimes twelve. With sex work: I personally work in a way that I push clients into half hour slots at the most. That is how I work best. Then it is over and I would have made the equivalent of doing eight hours in a civ job in retail. For my brand of autism that works. Mathematically it makes sense: eight hours or thirty minutes.

Fitting into work place hierarchies, relating to figures of authority and the anxieties that can induce. Being able to work independently is very freeing from that. I understand that is definitely not the case with all sex workers, there are sex workers who do have a boss. But I know for a lot of other sex workers, myself included, have independent status, that is an invisible aspect.

### ANDIE:

That is the whole condition of work, it is a very neuro-typical-accessible space, everyone else outside of that does not fit. My brain has deteriorated because I have been a survivor since I was six years old, my CPTSD gets worse and worse. I cannot speak at times, linguistic functions stop working. Many aspects of my life are harder because of my neurodiversity/brain injury – which is what PTSD/CPTSD is classed as, it is a brain injury. Especially when it is left untreated.

Even doing basic admin work is incredibly hard, which is why I stopped doing independent sex work. Brothel work – as shitty as it is and as shitty pay as it is – means it cuts down the extra work I would do if I was independent. Then again, it is not very good pay so I work more. It's not great, but then I can take time off.

Accessing benefits, I have done that but also had a time where I was undocumented because I have joint nationality. Without my EU documentation, I did not have anything to prove that I was legally allowed to be here without a visa and could at any point get deported. I could not apply for

housing benefit or anything. Even if I wanted to do civvy work, I could not. Civvy work is a thing that people assume, that people can do, and should do.

### MAFALDA:

This is something the rescue industry or people who do not know sex workers, and even some people who do know us think: "You could be doing something else"

I have tried to do something else! I delayed. I have been thinking about doing sex work since I was 18. Sometimes I go: "I wasted all that time. I could have been making more money!" I tried being a student, my mental health meant that I could not continue. I tried working in a call centre. I tried doing other self-employed work. Working a normal job 30 hours a week, would have a terrible effect on my health.

I tried doing a different self-employed job it was incredibly draining and I still depended on agencies. So even though I had a very noble job dealing with vulnerable people, it was not something that I could live on. I was also punished if I cancelled, it became unsustainable. Sex work was freeing in a way.

### VICTORIA:

I would be excited usually about every job that I would start, then something would happen that would throw me. The times that I stayed longer in jobs, was because I was working with **really** cool people. I did not have even one job that I was able to say: "I am not feeling well." Because they would be like: "You **have** to come to work!" This idea that we have to go to work when we are sick, how it works in Portugal is: When you are sick, you lose the three first days of payment. If you stay ill for a week, you only get paid sick pay for four days. When the minimum wage is 400 Euros a month that is a huge amount you lose.

I would start having big problems to focus. I would not sleep well. I would go to work, having this complete blur of my mind, including vision. Sometimes, I would not go to work and I would be in such tension that my body would ache, the muscles would ache like if I was being beaten up. I was never able to hold a job for more than a few months.

Power dynamics. It does not even have to be a boss or manager, it can be just someone who has one role above yours. It makes a huge difference how people treat you. Why can someone not explain to me what they are telling me to do? It is like holding the power of knowledge. Everything

just makes me go mad. Then the anxiety, it just keeps going in loops, until I am just so fucking tired.

#### **JAK:**

With ordinary work I never had a job that had sick pay, that was not casual, that had holiday pay. Work took up all my time. If I was trying to do something outside work which was creative and/or part of some political action, there just was not enough time to live. I do not think that I am so different from other people through having shit mental health or having physical illness. Maybe it is different when people have good jobs, whatever they are. I do not know. That does not seem to be the case as far as I can tell. Ill or not, work seems enormously unrewarding for the amount of time and life that it demands.

### **WHY WELFARE OR RESPECTABILITY IS NOT ACCESSIBLE**

#### **AYA:**

Sometimes the system has cracks that people fall through. It is the case with any bureaucratic system. Student finance does not consider the fact that your parents maybe cannot give you any of their income. Universal credit will not consider that you are not getting enough in student finance, you are still not eligible. Those are things that for bureaucratic reasons are inaccessible. Because people have a lot of faith in systems to work for the most vulnerable people, they do not want to be confronted with the reality that actually it does not work.

#### **MAFALDA:**

I have only been able to access welfare for very short periods. When I tried to claim housing benefit as a self-employed person, they said that I was not working enough hours making me a "person from abroad" so I was not allowed any housing benefit. I was too young for working tax credits. I had issues not being born in the UK. I have applied for PIP and universal credit but I have not heard back yet. I am scared they are just going to turn around and say: "You are not ill enough." Even if I do get universal credit at the end of a long period of struggle, it is a long time to get the money. I need the money **now** to pay my rent **now**.

Landlords are difficult around benefits. You have to claim them in secret, that is extra stress. The anxiety of going through all the loopholes, constantly being scared they are going to take that away or that you are not going to get it at all, because they have made claiming so difficult.

#### **JAK:**

I remember applying... not even applying for housing benefit, sending away to get the forms. The next day my housemate got a call from the DWP investigating them. "You told us that your housemate was employed." Which I had been! I lost my job! The system is enormously bureaucratic, punitive, based on sanctions, based on punishing people rather than helping. It is fucking exhausting. When I was looking for medical treatment the doctor said to me: "Well, it is difficult for you to keep working through the treatment, you can just claim benefits." [laughs] Clearly, that person had no fucking idea.

#### **AYA:**

Course administrators recommended: 'You should just stop doing your course for a bit, interrupt your studies, and claim benefits while you sort your life out.' This is really damaging: people in authority positions over disabled people who do not know how it works. Most of my income is through a student loan. If I interrupt my studies, I lose that student loan. The DWP will still class me as a student, I still would not be able to claim universal credit. But that was the advice one of the head people on my course told me. You cannot trust people in these authority positions for help, because they do not have experience with the system. They are not going to know the ins and outs, since it is not part of their lives.

### **THE DOUBLE STIGMA OF DISABILITY AND SEX WORK**

#### **ANDIE:**

The NHS would only offer therapy if I stopped doing sex work. On the basis that sex work is abuse and they do not help people in abusive situations. To access therapy you need to be in a stable job and be stable. I said to them: 'I am looking to exit the industry at some point but cannot do that until I have the therapy.'

When you are seeking help and they know that you do sex work, you are backed into a corner. I turned to the psychiatrist and said: "Unless you are willing to pay for my survival, then I am not going to stop doing sex work because I have no other option." It is not the best job for me, but it is what it is.

I have to talk about sex work in therapy because it has contributed to other trauma. I do not want to be like: no, sex work is not violence. I **have** experienced a lot of violence at work! I do not want to be like: it is fine and dandy, sex work is perfect, blablablablabla.

If you want help, you **have** to play the happy-hooker card in order to get things.

I did manage to get sterilisation on the NHS, the only reason I got it is **because** I said I was a sex worker. They did not take anything else into consideration, as soon as I brought out the sex worker card, they were like: yes, tick. Stigma works in many different ways.

**VICTORIA:**

Sorry, what the fuck?! "Sterilise all the sex workers!" Wow! I do not even know what to say.

**ANDIE:**

When you mention trauma, it is like: 'That is why you are a sex worker!' So you are stuck in this cycle: you do sex work because you are a traumatised person but then they will not treat you as a traumatised person, because you do sex work.

**VICTORIA:**

For me the most traumatic thing about sex work is the violence from people who keep telling us to stop doing it. "You do it because you have been abused" or "you do it because..." Yes, maybe, but if I would be working in something else, would you be analysing me in that way? What is it about sex work? I mean, obviously, it is the sex. Catholic hangovers and moralistic bullshit, that is basically what it is.

It's complicated to talk about my mental health even to other sex workers. Can you just stop telling me how bad it is? I can analyse that for myself. I can make that choice. Yes, sometimes it is bad, but it has given me time to recover, which is something I did not have before. Do not fucking tell me how hard it is because I know better than you! This constant infantilisation. Argh! It just infuriates me. Then I am labelled as the angry woman.

**JAK:**

On respectability, stigma, sex work, I was going to bring in this focus on disabled clients. Because it is always presented as: "Yes, this is a really nice kind of sex work", "We need sex workers because that is the only way that disabled people can ever have sex." Which is really ableist.

**VICTORIA:**

What do people think that **our** bodies are?

**AYA:**

In autistic circles there is the thing of autistic men being so hung up over the fact that they will never

have a "normal" relationship with a "normal" girl, because autistic women are not valid options to them. There is a striking amount of internalised ableism and obvious misogyny going on there. Disabled women in heteronormative society are just completely desexualised. No one would ever consider the fact that lots of sex workers are disabled. Unless we are being used as a talking point: 'We all have PTSD and that means that the sex industry is bad'. Even if the studies never really talk about the source of the PTSD.

**MAFALDA:**

When people say those things about disabled clients, they completely erase the idea that sex workers can be disabled. Apparently, we are all able-bodied and perfect and we are just doing a service like a nurse or something [laughs]. It is only acceptable to be disabled when you are the client, and the only clients that are acceptable are disabled clients!

But we have discussed benefits and so how many disabled clients can afford to see us on a regular basis? There is an obvious thing around class and gender going on that we notice a lot as sex workers. Most of our clients are straight white men with high incomes, that can afford to see us on a regular basis, spend more time with us or book several different sex workers. Especially when you are doing independent work, you notice the class difference so much.

**ANDIE:**

Most of my regular clients are men of colour and working class rather than white middle class. A lot of my clients who are on the disability scale are also men of colour. It is interesting the huge disparity between sex workers, clients, and disability. In parlours, you get clients with physical disabilities coming in with their carers. The carers come in and help them get undressed and the carer will wait outside the room, or sometimes stay in the room as well whilst you are interacting with the client. It is difficult to talk about because we are talking about class privilege **within** disability. Clients who are more likely to see you on a regular basis with disabilities, probably have more disposable income.

**MAFALDA:**

I wonder about the legal situation of carers bringing in clients.

## SURVIVAL SEX WORK, SURVIVORS AND TRAUMA

### ANDIE:

Sex work, whilst it has added to my trauma list, it has helped me come to terms with my survivorhood. I do not want to sit here and say that sex work is empowering. I think that is a complicated conversation, especially as someone who has experienced a lot of violence at work. It has been empowering in the sense that it kind of gives me the space to make do with what I have got, in terms of my deteriorating brain and mental health and being able to survive. I also had clients who are survivors who have outed themselves to **me**. So in that sense that I can connect to other survivors through sex work.

It is difficult being a survivor, being out as a survivor and being out as a sex worker. Purely because the stigma not only surrounds sex work but you are **incredibly** stigmatised as a survivor. If anyone ever says to you "Come out as a survivor, it will be fine", that is **not** true in the slightest! I get death threats. I get that especially as an out sex worker who is a survivor, and is out about it.

### JAK:

All these words we use do not mean just one thing: sex worker, trans, disabled, survivor. There are a hundred words within each of those words.

### ANDIE:

When you meet other survivors who are sex workers, how interesting that is. We just: "oh yeah, it is fine! You know, just like humour and how sex workers use humour as well, humour and violence, to cope. How that is really beautiful when there is a shared experience amongst other sex workers. Which is why I **do** also like working in brothels for the reason that you have other workers there and it is less lonely. Especially when you have a collective experience and you learn to take care of each other and just sort of coexist within this situation.

We have come to a weird spot in sex work activism, previously you **had** to play the happy-hooker card in order to be taken seriously. That is no longer viable because we cannot talk about sex workers rights without talking about that violence that sex workers experience, at work and outside of work.

### MAFALDA:

The dual thing of recovery and sex work has made me have to think a lot around my own boundaries. At my own trauma and what I can do and what

I cannot do. When I come across people who cannot understand what it is like to be a survivor and a sex worker but they are sex workers. When you are in a space with people who have common ground, you understand each other in a way that other people do not. It is not about "oh, being a sex worker empowers me", it is about being around people who have similar experiences, that is what is empowering.

## RACISM IN THE MIX

### AYA:

In things like retail work and you can see the difference in how black workers are treated in the workplace in contrast to our peers. Sex work, if you are an independent worker, if you do not have a work place, you do not have that point of comparison. You have to go looking for it. In terms of income essentially.

But when it comes to fetishisation, you do not have to look for that, you are going to experience that. When you know your best chance of making money is basically fitting someone's fetish, you kind of have to structure your persona around that, and that is deeply triggering. It becomes a source of embarrassment when you have to show your profile to other people.

No **actual** black woman is **ever** going to speak like this, is **ever** going to talk about herself this way but in the context of sex work you use all of these godawful words to describe yourself.

### ANDIE:

Race is a weird one for me because I am white-passing. So my clients either assume I am white, and they specifically book me because they think I am white. Or I have clients who are like "there is something exotic about you!" I am always in this weird position with race. I am mixed race.

Where I work, there is a few of us who are women of colour and we stick together and as white-passing I know that I have huge privilege over darker skinned workers. As a person of colour you have to make a decision about how you are going to promote yourself as a sex worker. It is a very difficult position to be in in terms of sex work and race because often you have to do things that just are not right. I do survival sex work so I do not have the luxury of saying No to clients or to a session. So that puts me in a difficult position: Do I do it, do I not do it? This is so uncomfortable!

With sex work: it is role play for so many of us but at some point it intersects with your life and it is



very hard to remove yourself on a personal level from sex work. I think race has a huge part in that.

**AYA:**

I wanted to also talk about respectability. I make the point of calling myself British because of the point of respectability. There is a double stigma of being migrant and being a person of colour and I get an infuriating amount of clients who will come to me and be like "Yeah, you are definitely British, you sound British, that is really good! And then they will ramble about a bad experience they have had with an Eastern European girl and I am just baffled.

Even though I recognise how privileged I am to be able to say I was born in Britain, I have a British upbringing. I also hate that I have to do that in two ways: that I have to play into that respectability and I feel I am doing a massive disservice to the Nigerian women in the global north, Nigerian sex workers who do not have that privilege and who are targets of immigration and trafficking policies. No one talks about black women who are subject to those things and that is across all areas of the intersections of sex work in terms of disability and queerness. Okay, not necessarily with trans women, we are starting to have that conversation about trans-misogyny-affected people who are also black. But across all else there is nothing when there is an endemic of especially Nigerian workers, especially in countries with the Nordic model, and how they are affected by trafficking policies.

**ANDIE:**

There is a huge disparity between immigration and migration and then sex work and xenophobia and racism as well. There is the "right" type of immigrant, you know? There is this level of xenophobia.

**SUMMING UP DISABILITY AND SEX WORK**

**VICTORIA:**

Time and flexibility, and access to health care because I have more time and more money to do so.

**ANDIE:**

Better pay for less hours. I work a lot, but I just do it in a block, like four or five days and then take a week, two weeks off, and I can afford to do that. It also means that I can supplement other things in my life, my artwork and stuff. I think it kind of helps with having a community, that is very important, solidarity and community-building.

**JAK:**

I must appear able, athletically sexy, because that is my job. As a sex worker I could probably say I am a bit nuts, that might fit some quirky sex worker narrative but if I appear physically unwell that would be considered unsexy, probably disgusting.

**MAFALDA:**

Flexibility, more money, less hours, but also having to appear strong. I have marketed specific acts: face-sitting for example because I can just sit. Have minimal contact with the client and also not have to be physically active. Having time for myself to recover, to take care of myself. I would not be able to do with a "normal" job.

**AYA:**

It has taken me out of an abusive environment. I see it as a net positive of my life. It has given me time to navigate the system, with the knowledge that people of colour and women and non-binary people are more likely to be misdiagnosed or **not** diagnosed with Autism. When you want to access welfare, you need accommodation, documentation, proof. You cannot really get that if your ethnicity means you are less likely to be diagnosed and validated by the health system. I have been given more time to do that, to be treated in a way I think I deserve.



**ENGLISH  
COLLECTIVE  
OF PROSTITUTES**

**#MAKEALLWOMENSAFE**



AND WHEN DID  
YOU FIRST NOTICE  
THIS DESIRE TO  
EARN A LIVING  
BY WALKING THE  
STREETS AND  
ACCOMODING  
PASSERS-BY?



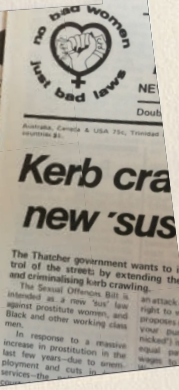
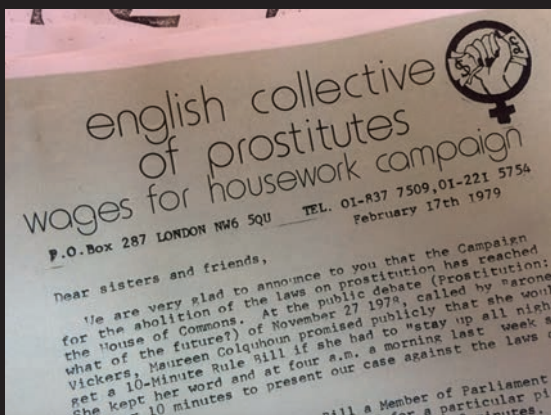
**Photographs:** From the ECP occupation of Holy Cross Church in 1982: Following in the footsteps of sex workers in France who occupied churches across the country to protest serial murders and police abuse, ECP occupied the Holy Cross Church, King's Cross for 12 days.



The English Collective of Prostitutes is a self-help organisation of sex workers, working both on the street and in premises, with a national network throughout the UK.

We campaign for the decriminalisation of prostitution, for sex workers' rights and safety, and for resources to enable people to get out of prostitution if they want to.

**Cartoons:** From the ECP archive and are signed 'Gigi'. Much of the ECP archive is now held at the Bishopsgate Institute.





# ABOUT RADIO AVA



Radio AvA is a free sex workers internet radio station streaming since April 2016.

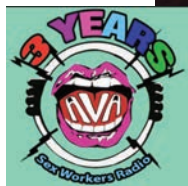
Our shows are a concoction of interviews, actions, arts, updates, histories, music, discussions, and stories.

Regular segments include:

- Wankers vs Keepers Corner
- First time stories
- Sex workers' agony aunt
- Sex worker news
- Radio B Easy: excerpt from tart literature.

Run by Xtalk, the migrant sex workers organisation, Radio AvA is a stigma- busting and isolation- dispelling DIY project, amplifying our voices through broadcasting complex sex work realities. By generating an intimate space where identities are partly shielded, sex workers on Radio AvA materialise as a motley range of multidimensional people, often feminists, not frequently chained to radiators. Spreading community knowledge through working, playing, and ranting together.

<http://www.radioava.org/>



## VENOMIST JAM (SICKENING SWERF SONG)

**Mavie Collins**

I say that I'm a feminist  
I'm merely, but a venomist

Repressive? Yes  
Oh no I joke.  
Wait, no I don't..

I'll take a swerf and terf  
"\* steak smothered in seafood?"  
I mean hate covered with 'do good'  
Ban the trans and slags  
And the trans-Atlantic fags  
Why cant they all stay where they should?

A woman without a womb is a man  
A woman using her cooch for cash is a victim  
No dicks, hen  
My feminisam is a big sham  
New veminism is the master plan

I'm progressivist  
Less off a suffragist  
They're far too pacifist  
I'm abolitionist

My heroine the suffragette  
Mary Allen in epaulettes  
Loose women she did arrest  
And put them to the test

...Don't mention the British Union of Fascists

But a great gay gender essentialist!  
Nevertheless..

You could say that I'm a feminist Fundamentalist  
I'll write freedom on my tits to fight Islamists  
But put away your nips if your not obedient to the state  
-us quo

Those ho's...  
You know?  
I know what's best for them  
That's how progressive I am  
Almost obsessive I am, damn!  
Compulsive washing of hands  
When I lend mine to the rescue fam

I'm a feminist a venomist  
Well mostly I'm an atheist,  
But also I'm a savourist  
Mother superior complex  
It's a contest  
between my hate of the church and  
God given mission to eradicate "sex workers".

So Thursdays are church days  
Where we move past our differences  
and make Pathways  
down the sordid streets  
And dingy hallways  
Finding solidarity in othering  
those poor, depraved strays  
Clogging strip clubs with our invasive gaze  
It always, Shows me new ways  
To ignore reality  
Feel vindicated in charity.

It's not within my constitution to consider  
prostitution as  
pragmatic execution or even temporary solution

A choice to avoid poverty?  
To escape abusive property?  
Economic autonomy?  
Nah, they need deterrents,  
Can we still do lobotomies?  
How about a douche of mercury?

I wouldn't use the word meritocracy  
But at least try to strive for mediocrity  
You make it sound like were in a plutocracy  
Some sort of patriarchal, neoliberal, fascist fake  
democracy  
Based on nepotism and scarcity!

I fight domestic violence because  
"yes all men!"  
Fight for the rights and choices of all women  
"Except for them!"

You know those pro's  
Just don't know what's good for 'em  
It's a bit on the nose  
Fucking all those sicko's  
Rapists and paedos  
Pimps and ultra scum  
The lot of 'em

I'm giving ab.olit.ionism  
a bad name  
Intersectional feminism  
You're all the same  
Identity politics?  
Next you'll want me sucking and growing dicks  
Just to have the right to have a say

You must be delirious  
It's not MY experience  
I'm dead fucking serious  
What does MY ethnicity have to do with this?  
White skin - soon we - will be the minority,  
You are the racists!  
I'm the priority!

I'm a feminist,  
A venomist  
Self righteous  
Gender essentialist

I'm giving abolitionist  
a bad name  
Uh oh tsk tsk  
Make the rules coz this is my game  
Uh oh tsk tsk  
Fuck you, you're not invited to play  
Uh oh tsk tsk  
It's rape if you make him pay

I don't want no tricks and dicks  
Go fuck your own self with your  
tricks and dicks  
You're not a womb-an if you trade sex or take  
HRT  
This is my venomist jam  
Agree with meeeeeee  
Uh oh tsk tsk tsk

# ELSC (East London Strippers Collective)

ELSC are a group of feisty, articulate, and fiercely independent women who also happen to be strippers - challenging stigma and smashing stereotypes! ELSC came into existence to foster the community of those working in clubs and to organise politically.

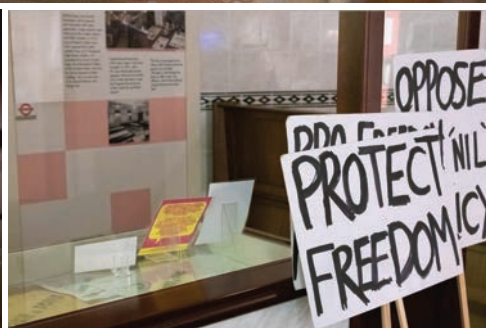
In 2011 Hackney council introduced a 'nil' licensing policy on strip clubs, sex shops and sex cinemas despite opposition 66 per cent of people who took part were in a public consultation being against the ban. Dancers held demonstrations outside Hackney Town Hall against the 'nil' licensing. As a result of the ban many work places were lost.



A short film made by members of ELSC for Nowness, based on 'letters strippers receive from clients' 'filmed in the White Horse in Shoreditch which is now sadly lost.

*"It was the best venue to work in, run by the typical East End matriarch with three generations of the family running the pub. Pauline was the grandma, Sue the daughter and Emily the granddaughter and it was like going to work with your 33 best friends all the time. It was great!"*





Other images: objects in the temporary exhibition and reading at Hackney Museum: 'Fighting for Space, love and loss: protest signs from the demonstrations by dancers outside Hackney Town Hall. Photo of the demonstration. A balaclava and police tape from the ELSC performance 'banned'. Flyers from ELSC events.

# DECRIM - PROTEST SONG

**It's time to Decriminalise...**

**Sex Work!**

**It's time to Decriminalise...**

**Sex Work!**

**We're fighting for our lives**

**It's time to Decriminalise**

**It's time to Decriminalise...**

**Sex Work!**

**Our work is not a crime**

**Decriminalise**

**Sex work is not a crime**

**Decriminalise**

**The right to organise**

**The right to advertise**

**It's time to decriminalise...**

**Sex Work!**

**Safe to work together or alone**

**To share workspaces or at home**

**On the streets and in the brothels**

**Online or in hotel**

**We are fighting for our rights!**

**Decriminalise!**

**(to the tune of**

**'She'll be coming around the  
mountain when she comes')**

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- ECP (English Collective of Prostitutes)
- X-talk/radio Ava
- ELSC (East London Strippers Collective)

And all those who shared their stories.

Produced with support from Arcola Participation.

Design by @Fiercelovedesign

**Resilient and Resisting**, an oral history and collaborative story telling project.