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Making Space at the Queer Intersections of Sex and Gender

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Sex Workers: The Outside/r's Outsider

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Abstract

Brit Schulte posits that the sex working person is confronted by ever-increasing demand as well as proportionately increasing criminalization and persecution. They also see the sex working person as representative of queer and trans* – truly, of outsider subjectivity. The tension produced by these coextensive increases creates the conditions that compel an outsider (sex worker) to fight for an end to stigma and marginalization. This necessary struggle that they outline takes place in broader movement spaces, grassroots collectives, smaller mutual aid networks, and between fellow workers. Their essay highlights experiences within the above categories of queer and trans* sex worker-led community organizing, specifically drawing upon full-service sex worker-run mutual aid networks, harm reduction formations, tech-centred activism, and fetish provider-led collectives. Through personal and broader movement analysis, Schulte links sex workers' political fights to the broader struggle for labour justice under capitalism, locating sex worker organizing in our contemporary moment in a rich tradition of hustle and survival.

Keywords: sex work; queer subjectivity; criminalized labour; community organizing; trans*; mutual aid; harm reduction

What does it mean to be outside of the outside? Sex workers are often imagined to be on the outside of leftist and community organising spaces and formations; queer/trans*/gender non-conforming workers are often marginalised from the broader sex working community. Further, these marginalisations are compounded by the persistent lack of solidarity from labour movements because sex workers are too often not imagined to be workers at all. If revolutionary and leftist formations, cis and 'straight' sex work organisations (which feels like an absurd statement since sex work is queer and deeply gendered), and organised labour joined the fight to end criminalisation, stigmatisation against sex workers would represent a

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very different set of (organised) politics in our current moment. There are of course potential risks for the most marginalized sex working people moving from the outside inward; however, threats on the margins result in little choice but for sex workers to mitigate harm while crossing between ‘outside’ and ‘in’.

The sex working person in the United States is confronted by ever-increasing demand from clients as well as proportionately increasing criminalisation and persecution from law enforcement.⁷ The tension produced by these coextensive increases creates the conditions that compel some outsiders (sex workers) to fight for an end to stigma and marginalisation. This necessary struggle takes place in broader movement spaces, grassroots collectives, smaller mutual aid networks, and between fellow workers. The experiences of sex working people is also coextensive with those of queer and trans* people – truly, of outsider subjectivity (Laing, Pilcher and Smith, 2016). Yet discussions around supporting workers in the sex trades or efforts towards decriminalization are often not broadly held tenets in queer rights spaces (Shah, 2012).

Calling Upon a Critical Whore’s Lens

This piece will highlight experiences within the above categories of queer and trans* sex worker-led community organising, drawing from experiences with full-service sex worker-run mutual aid networks (Red Canary Song), harm reduction formations (Reframe Health & Justice), tech-centred activism (Hacking//Hustling), as well as fetish provider-led collectives with which I have direct knowledge or experience (Support Ho(s)e Collective). I will draw upon queer, feminist, trans*, autotheoretical, and labour teachings and methodologies to constellate experiences, lessons learned, and deeply held insights about outsiderdom.

This is not empirical research. It is also not neatly or easily classified under a singular discipline. What I find is most needed to think

⁷ See for example “Craigislist’s Effect on Violence against Women” (Cunningham et al., 2017) for an extensive survey of the effect of increased policing and criminalization leading to and resulting from Craigislist’s curtailing of sex work advertising.

through the outsider's outsider are the elaborative ways in which we actually learn, express, and explore our experiences and realities. As such, I will fashion and fabulate, grounding myself in autotheory, queering time/space and storytelling practices. Autotheory to me means blending both narrative and political/theoretical arguments toward work that centres the self and lived experience in meaning-making. I call on Paul Preciado (2013), Katherine McKittrick (2021) and Lauren Fournier (2021) specifically to form a constellation of thinkers that inform how I make sense of my own personal and political experiences and how those shape my whores' lens and praxis. The narratives I relate undergird the research and praxis-based theory and reflect both my own and other sex working people's experiences in the trades and organising. I also borrow from Jack Halberstam's (2005) conception of queering time as I move between, through, and against various queer movements and historical timelines, rendering a kind of alternative history as I proceed. Queer temporality is just another way of saying resistance: against capitalist, hyper-productive, ableist and heteronormative conceptions of marking time and the passage of time. Queers organise our lives, survival, and labour differently, and it comes with the force of all the exhilarating (which is to say, self-determining) and debilitating (in its routine erasure from master narratives and histories) realness (Halberstam, 2005). And I embrace bell hooks (1995) and Saidiya Hartman (2008) when I favour storytelling and personal narrative over data or accepted/able fact. The narratives I cite are not supplemental, they are experiential evidence, and, taking a cue from Black feminist epistemology, I take them and their speakers seriously.

As such, I bring my own stories, and those inspired by other outsiders, into this textual space. I would not be able to speak to any of these themes, topics, or ideas without my community of transgressors: queer, cis and trans*, disabled, sex working organisers. These stories will be anonymized, and recounted through narrative fabulation, meaning they are re-remembered in imaginative ways, whose central themes were told to me over the years by queer and trans* friends and comrades over

the course of conversations about working outside, disassociating and leaving one's corporeal form, missing labouring in the outside world during the pandemic, and considering oneself an outsider. Some of these stories directly mirror my own experiences; some feel more distant, if only due to circumstance. Sometimes narratives exist amidst the interstitial cracks of fully knowing, and critical fabulation (Hartman, 2008, p.11), or fiction, gets at the heart of a feeling or experience in ways that verbatim cannot. I try to probe the ways in which these encounters felt, which is to say: this is what they were, and remain, for me. I use 'remembering' because the process of memory, acknowledging, and the putting together of stories, people and experiences into a context (academic, institutional, mainstream, acceptable) that often maligns or ostracizes feels very much like re-attaching limbs, and is painful, yet productive, memory work.

Each of these frameworks is needed to coalesce into a 'whore politics' or a critical whore's lens, which accounts for messiness and the hidden, the survival and deep insights of those working and thinking at the margins toward liberation for the whole. These contexts demand intentionally broadening conceptions of gendered labour; this labour ought not to be limited to dissident sexual cultures and sex acts for pay, but rather expanded to include sex working people's unpaid or under-compensated labour in advancing community defence and advocacy and building safety. The specific gendered labour of sex worker community organising is vast and varied but most notably includes, in my direct experience: emotional, educational, protest-based, care-taking, research-based, artistic, and resource-creating efforts. I locate sex workers front and centre in the labour rights and queer liberation movements of our current political moment, but to do that, we must locate sex workers throughout all movement struggle history.

Naming and linking these political fights to the broader struggle for labour justice under capitalism locates sex worker organising in our contemporary moment in a rich tradition of hustle and survival. Exploring these types of labour and connecting them to sex workers'

capacious capacities to make, create, and navigate (often from positions of extreme cash poverty, law enforcement and neighbourhood vigilante harassment, online doxing etc.) must be accounted for and centred in any contemporary account of outsiderdom. There can be no political queer history without the living organising efforts of whores.

Acknowledging Sex Work/ers Amongst Outsiders

It is notoriously difficult to be out as a sex worker. It is especially difficult if you are a sex worker trying to occupy space in a publishing world, one that is often more interested in the voices of outsiders than they are in actual sex working writers. As a result, prostitutes like me are curious creatures of otherness and fascination. Typically depicted as oversexed beings, nothing more than a construct of male fabrication that exists as the absolute embodiment of patriarchal male privilege.

– Camille Waring

Waring’s comment illustrates a decisive contradiction in thinking outside outsiderdom, one I have felt in my own experiences as a sex working person working in academia. Being a ‘creature of otherness’ is reflected in the scepticism sex working people face in giving voice to their experiences – positive or negative, extreme or quotidian. At the same time, being a ‘creature of fascination’ means being subject to fetish and censure in equal measure, a difficult perspective from which to have one’s experiences taken seriously. Below are a couple of illustrative anecdotes from sex working people’s varied experiences of ‘outside’.

Story 1: “I’ve been working a regular stroll, what’s funny I guess is that I feel less safe outside the cars I get into, than in. The cars are like this zone-out zone. I’m outside, I get in, I do my thing – and for that time I’m working. I mostly know what to expect, how it’s gonna go, how long it will go, and what I’ll leave with – but then I have to get out, and go out, and be out. Outside is tough.”

Outside here represents the unknown; the worker deploys their expertise of the strolls to find work, and then feels safer inside. It’s ‘funny’ because outside they are a potential lawbreaker, perhaps, but ultimately just a femme-presenting person walking a street. Inside the vehicle, they become the insider, performing labour with which they are familiar, even if the client is not. Still, the subject position of the street-based sex worker

under criminalization puts them in more danger during the transaction rather than before or after. Theirs is among the most precarious venues for sex work; their outsiderdom is multiplied by criminalization and demand.

Story 2: “This one time I was going to dance at a club, and a client said he’d drive me. We’re driving, and he wants his session before I’m gonna go dance, fine by me. So we park in an area he knows, and get to it. Not ten minutes later someone rolls up on him and starts shooting! I don’t even remember how but I launched myself out of that car and behind some bushes outside, and was flat as I could make myself on the ground out there. They drove off, but I wouldn’t get back inside that car. Outside was fine by me. I called my own car.”

Here, the worker is ‘inside’, both in their relationship to the known client and the work venue of the vehicle, but as the venue is mobile, it ends up ‘outside’ where the worker can safely work. In their subject position, it is preferable to be literally and figuratively outside, anonymous behind the bushes under literal fire, than to associate themselves with a client who would put them in this particular harm’s way. Being outside is the known unknown.

Story 3: “This fucking pandemic. I don’t work outside of my place anymore. Now I work inside, inside of this tiny metallic box and screen, that sometimes I sit on my bed, or on the back of my toilet, or awkwardly positioned underneath me. I’m riddled with wires, and lights, and filters, and annoying fucking payment processors. I hate it in here. I miss working outside.”

This worker has been forced to forsake the outside, their labour one of many casualties of a mishandled and intentionally misunderstood pandemic. They are at once further outside the conditions of their labour, reduced to the transmission of image and sound, and at the same time deeply inside the systems of the Internet – technologies developed by and around sex working people, even as criminalization continues to pursue them there.

Containing multitudes, the sex working communities and people who create and care for them are queer and trans* folks, im/migrant people, disabled, MAD, neurodivergent, and parenting, drug-using, housing insecure, organising, harm-reducing, advocates and gender and sex radicals – often simultaneously occupying several of these experiences

and identities. I believe we cannot consider exploring or communing with outsiderdom without the deliberate inclusion of sex working people and criminalised survivors of gender-based violence.

Sex working, trading, hustling people and criminalised survivors of gender/race/class-based violence are constantly reminded that to exist is to be at the margins of access to broader community, society – that they/we are somehow at odds with the whole ‘inside’ project. Some of us are very much at odds with society, and draw power from this resistance, some are not so fortunate to see the development of a politics around labour because their outsiderdom places them squarely inside of a prison or dead. Sex workers and criminalised survivors’ stories, bodies, and lives are invisibilised, until it becomes convenient for inside/r institutions to draw upon, confiscate, or weep over our stories and then, typically, render outsiders disposable once again – for fear we use our outside voices too loudly. I feel compelled to name how outsiders come to find our bodies recognised or made by terms outside of oneself. In the vignettes above, outsider status is assumed, enforced, and chosen, often within the space of snap survival decisions. To those neighbours, friends, and comrades who are always perceived to be sex working because of their gender expression, be they high femme and/or non-conforming, because of the colour of their skin, and of course because of their audacity to be outside in public.

Returning to the violent conundrum of services increasingly being sought as the criminalisation of said work remains on the rise (Blunt, Lauren and Wolf, 2020): the aforementioned tension produced by the coextensive increases in calls for criminalisation, as well as the persistent demand for sex workers’ skilled labour, creates the conditions that compel an outsider (sex worker) to fight for an end to stigma and marginalisation. I can only fully evidence this through my own and direct experiences of other workers, recounted back to me. Collective formations such as Hacking//Hustling, The Support Ho(s)e Collective, Whose Corner Is It Anyway, Red Canary Song, Molly’s House, Philadelphia Red Umbrella Alliance, Aileen’s, Bay Area Worker Support, Strippers United

(formerly Soldiers of Pole), BARE NOLA, DECRIMNowDC, Women With A Vision, and BIPOC Collective are all active and organising toward safety, wellness, political engagement, and self-determination for sex working/trading people – bringing them inside formations that understand their sources of marginalization.

All these listed organisations, to my knowledge, came into being outside of existing, established leftist formations or labour unions. Though many sex working people, massage working people, and folks from all aspects of the sex trades consider themselves to be on the left or radicals, and support broader labour struggles, there has been a distinct need in the sex workers' labour and rights movement to have autonomous or unaffiliated worker and community organisations. Often this is because of the rampant disregard for our labour as labour, and the blatant sexism, transmisogyny, racism and whorephobia within the organised left – this often manifests organisationally as issues regarding decriminalisation being ignored, deprioritised or even organised against; of course, it also manifests interpersonally when we are solicited for sex by supposed-comrades or we are pushed out of formations because of how 'messy' these same supposed-comrades find our 'lifestyles'. Many brick wall moments happen because sex workers have tried to organise within socialist, anarchist, communist, and liberal union formations only to be derided, driven out, and even assaulted. One result of these barriers is the almost wholesale lack of organised labour acknowledging sex work: BARE NOLA organising (NOWG, 2018; Gira Grant, 2018) and the Lusty Lady unionization efforts (The Exotic Dancers Union, 2019) from decades ago stand as rare exceptions.

Nonetheless, out of real, devastating conditions, some incredible acts of resistance, love, and compassion develop, and the collective power and sheer force of will of outsiders must be acknowledged if not spotlighted as well. From needle exchanges, safer crack smoking kits, and fentanyl testing strip distribution, sex workers – especially those living with HIV and AIDS – take the lead in harm reduction expansion and efforts. Sex workers also lead the fights against unconstitutional gang

free-zones and their inheritors, ‘PFZs’, or prostitution-free zones (Ritchie and Schulte, 2018), condom theft (NBC New York, 2014), and destruction and criminalisation by cops. Sex workers have also built worker-owned cooperative bookstores, drop-in centres, free clinics, free stores, community free fridges (Bluestockings Cooperative, 2021), trans housing co-ops, childcare collectives and urban gardens. I have personally heard so many of these absolutely essential mutual aid and care organising efforts, so many of these crucial political education and community outreach formations, derided and dismissed by established, organised left groups. Some of these groups are now defunct, unable to maintain relevance in our present moment, or unwilling to reckon with the sexual violence they were harbouring amongst their leaderships – formations.⁸

When Outside/r Status is Fetishized

As Indigenous women living and working in the same communities that are targeted by ongoing colonial policies – like the ongoing criminalisation of prostitution and the increased political rhetoric surrounding human trafficking – we are here to shift the discussion surrounding MMIWG2S (missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people)... Explicitly, we are here to highlight the failures of many – including many of our own Indigenous leaders and mainstream Indigenous organisations – to critically analyse and counter the political rhetoric surrounding the dominant human trafficking/anti-prostitution narrative that continues to criminalise our communities, and replace it with a narrative informed by the principles of reconciliation: a meaningful and mutually respectful relationship, especially between Indigenous sex workers and non-sex workers.

– Colleen Hele, Naomi Sayers and Jessica Wood

The organisers above note self-evident resonances between valences of outsiderdom: indigeneity, the value of women’s lives, and anti-prostitution organising. What they refer to as political rhetoric inflects cultural discourses as politicians, police, certain segments of feminists, and leftist formations fetishize sex work and sex workers, ignoring the latter terms, focusing only on ‘sex’.

⁸ See “Inside the International Socialist Organisation’s Dissolution after a Rape Cover-Up” as one well-evidenced example: <https://medium.com/@isoleakss/inside-the-international-socialist-organisations-dissolution-after-a-rape-cover-up-b954e354143>

Story 4: “Maybe one day I’ll tell my family what I do for a living. But for now, I’m fine with them thinking I freelance, take bar work when I can get it, and consider myself an artist. Yeah, of course it makes me feel strange. Like, every time I feel I have to sidestep the reality of my life when I’m able to see my bio fam, it reminds me of how on the outside of society I am... that’s painful. I wouldn’t choose the feeling of being an outsider. But then again, when I’m around my chosen family and working, and everyone is taking care of each other, checking-in, not caring what colour my hair is, not caring I haven’t shaved my pits or legs, making sure I’m doing alright, asking if I need a safe call, bringing me groceries or recommending clients, using my correct pronouns. I dunno, being an outsider isn’t so bad?”

Biological family can make outsiders of anyone but being forced to keep secret one’s work is a particularly pronounced othering. The effect is chosen family becomes even more vital, being ‘inside’ within outsider community. The ‘society’ to which the worker refers is one that champions (cis-heteronormative) family and is sceptical or even paranoid regarding formal or informal organising around outsider statuses. While this worker has found a particular community around their work, it also stems from marginalization and the need and desire to participate in mutual aid.

Sex workers – particularly Black and im/migrant sex workers – have been maligned and obsessed over by the policing industry in the United States for at least a century. Sex working people have essential experiences and analysis to share about the violent ostracization of ‘rescue’ and white saviourism (Gira Grant and Moore, 2012), wrapped up in societal stigma, criminalizing policy and policing practices (Luis Fernandez, 2016). Under the guise of ‘saving women and girls’, popular media programming around police sting operations (entrapment) against sex workers and their clients, explosively profitable anti-trafficking ‘non-profit’ marketing campaigns, and the rampantly reported (and largely protected by law) cases of police perpetrated rape, sexual harassment and intimidation of sex workers, workers are always seen through the police officer’s eye (Gira Grant, 2014). As such, sex workers (though that term is rarely accepted or deployed by would-be rescuers) come to constitute another, separate, specialized segment of victim-survivors; another case of being on the outside of the outside. But it is not only the police who obsess over and target sex working/trading people. It is also so-called

fellow radicals and members of the organised left. An example from the reportage by Purple Rose (2021), a writer and community activist:

Af3irm is a feminist Filipina anti-trafficking organisation that believes in the abolition of prostitution. While their platform often uses popular movement language of the moment such as ‘Decolonization’, ‘Decriminalisation’ and ‘Defund the Police’, they prioritize the abolition of prostitution above all else, even if it means collaborating with various state agencies, police, and evangelical right-wing conservatives. They have fully co-opted the language of Prison Abolition: Af3irm calls themselves abolitionists (against prostitution or ‘Modern-Day Slavery’) in a way that dismisses how the prison-industrial complex is the true after-life of slavery.

This distorted preoccupation with sex working people not only locates patriarchal violence exclusively within the sex trades, but it also wrongfully pins sex workers themselves as the harbingers of such violence. Ostracising analysis like this is then coded as ‘radical’ – even ‘revolutionary’ – anti-colonial feminism. Returning to the story at the head of this section: one worker is well aware that their family will appraise her labour through the police officer’s eye, drawing conclusions regarding risk, unsafety, and ‘good’ sexuality. They are safer keeping that part of themselves outside of the family structure and its fetishization of control and procreative sex.

Outsider Histories Are Our Legacies

Y’all better quiet down. I’ve been trying to get up here all day for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail that write me every motherfucking week and ask for your help and you all don’t do a goddamn thing for them.

– Sylvia Rivera

We stand to learn a lot from sex working/trading people about care networks outside of the purview of the state. In the face of criminalisation, drug-using stigma, and whorephobic violence, sex working people have always sought to create our own systems of support and protection outside of the police, criminal legal processes, and other societally accepted channels. This sort of organised survival-resource creation arises because sex workers know state and ‘charity’ driven systems will never bring justice and have no interest in listening when harm happens. The example of STAR (Street Transvestite Action

Revolutionaries) House (a formation that had Rivera among its founders in the early 1970s) leaps to mind.

With its members in precarious living situations, STAR had difficulty actualizing its planned projects, which included dance fundraisers, another STAR home, a telephone line, a recreation centre, a bail fund for arrested queens, and a lawyer for queer people in jail. Equally important to establishing living situations and securing food was the need for self-defence against bashers and police. The generalized sharing of skills amongst queer street kids and sex workers focused heavily on discerning what situations were safe and which were not, and protecting each other from police. Police and imprisonment were violent and intense experiences, especially for broke street queens (Nothing, n.d.). Community self-protection for those outside the outside (of feminist and queer liberation movements) became indispensable.

I am also thinking of the 1978 Take Back The Night organising efforts in Boston, where sex workers from the Prostitutes Union of Massachusetts joined with the Combahee River Collective, Coalition to Stop Institutional Violence, Alliance Against Sexual Coercion and more radical anti-violence grassroots organisations – I want to share a brief passage that Emily Thuma (2019, p.137) wrote about this Black feminist-informed, multiracial and multi-generational radical coalition formation in her book *All Our Trials*:

Reflecting the breadth of the group's concerns, a lengthy manifesto of principles, demands, and solidarity resolutions outlined the group's opposition to violence against women on the street, on the job, in the family home, in locked institutions, in health care, and in the popular media. TBTN's variegated demands included more street lighting, stronger rape shield laws, the criminalisation of prostitution, and public funding for feminist self-defense classes, shelters, rape crisis centres, and a night-time women's taxi service.

Thuma later pointed out that this work was messy and uneven, and that there were intense debates. Her text goes on to illustrate how those involved still fiercely believed in engaging with debate to push their anti-violence work forward. Where STAR was made up of some of the folks furthest outside, a creation of community-minded individuals providing

basic survival needs, Take Back the Night was a coalition of particular interest groups recognizing shared, intersectional struggle. It is hardly a coincidence that sex working people were central to both efforts.

Because of my political organising work with Survived & Punished NY, I am constantly thinking about legacies of struggle – where we have been and what has already been tried. Prison newsletters are emblematic of the legacies to which I have turned. These documents of resistance, which are physical manifestations of mutual aid, also serve as archives of debate, strategy, and survival tactics. The first copy of “No More Cages” I was able to hold in my hands was brought by Mariame Kaba to one of our early organising meetings in 2018. In that 1981 issue, there was a review of the book *Prostitutes, Our Life* (Jaget, Valentino and Johnson, 1980), a document stemming from another radical sex worker formation, the prostitutes’ strike in Lyon in 1975. In other issues I would later see in the archives at Barnard there was extensive coverage of the fight against trafficking and exploitation in the sex trade, the need for decriminalisation, and stories of sex workers organising for their rights and against police harassment internationally. Seeing these struggles (prison/police abolition and decriminalisation) intimately linked was truly affirming, and it felt like I had found an ancestor for my own politicized view of sex work. To sit with these stories, these artifacts of resistance, was incredible. They represented another marker of movement history – a legacy for those of us fighting for sex workers’ labour rights, fighting to end criminalisation and exploitation, and working toward the abolition of prisons and police. We can be as unapologetic as were previous generations, by building on this expansive, radically inclusive freedom work. It is hard to remember this when our histories are so obscured from us. The work of obscuring and erasure is undertaken by strange bedfellows: mainstream society and the state have vested interests in keeping histories of resistance and outsiders out of the hands of younger generations for fear those lessons are built upon. Academic institutions likewise only offer certain glosses on our histories, enough to make them appear ‘inclusive’ – the inside/rs flirtatiously

winking at the outside/rs. But the most unlikely, most damning erasure comes from other outsiders – radicals, leftists, queers, and dissidents who too often look for someone else to punch down, giving the illusion of bettering their own position. Sex workers are the most convenient of targets.

Cautions and Declaratives

“Women must be heard,” says Ashley Judd. And I know that when she says women, she does not mean me.

– Lorelei Lee

For all the positive mutual aid work that has been, is being, and could be done, I would be remiss to overlook the very real and potential ‘perils of insider-dom’ or what it means to move outsiders in. In detailing the mixed blessing of being ‘brought inside’, I could discuss the ways in which visibility and representation might actually be harmful under current conditions. I could name how our shadows/margins can make battle lines clearer and avoid or limit co-optation (in this instance, harm-reduction/abolition language is already being stolen by Nordic modelers; see Reframe Health & Justice, 2021). Even legalisation creates new and equally harmful binaries of inside/outside. One variety of ‘peril’ is that the inside either becomes less well-defined, or it keeps shifting to marginalise those who were most harmed to begin with (certainly the case with legalisation models of some controlled substances as opposed to decriminalisation). Are you in the redlight district? In a sanctioned brothel/club? Documented and thus legally recognised and approved ‘to work’? If not, the ‘protections’ or ‘rescue’ of legalisation simply do not apply; your outsiderdom is reasserted and perhaps even magnified. Aspirations of ‘centring’ the outsider without considering the full spectrum of impact, and preparing for it, do very little for us.

Thinking about outsiderdom, while often an imposed designation, as a reclaimed, chosen identity, is so strange, even when it seems apt. It is a fact that sex workers, though easily marked as outsiders, are actually inside our neighbourhoods, schools, communities, families, and yet

society writ large, members of the organised left, and so-called radicals maintain sex workers' marginality through violence such as: policing, surveillance, attempted censoring from public discourse, inter-community harm, sexual violence, narrative erasure, incarceration and stigmatization.

Another peril of moving outsiders *in* concerns consent and the persistence of stigma. We must consider 'outing' and the security or insecurity of a government name, regardless of status under the law. Trans* and sex working people do not automatically choose or keep their birth names, however we can (to a limit) choose whether to keep using those names in various capacities. 'Outing' and 'doxing' exist as violent methods of policing name-identity and choice around moving in and out of the sex trades but also of the gender spectrum.

We are thus left with a triangulation of concerns centring on sex workers as outsiders. The violences of both state-sanctioned and leftist community outsiderdom are patent and shared in various ways with other communities and subject positions detailed above. Whether as a cause or as a symptom, these same subject positions are too-easily overlooked and written out of radical histories, leaving us to deconstruct and reconstitute institutional histories which are interested in easy narratives of progress and social evolution. Finally, to binarize (and thus homogenize) the experiences of outsiders as simply 'needing/wanting to be brought inside' overlooks the intersectional and interlocking perils of insiderdom for many of the most marginalized and precarious subject positions. As such, what is warranted is a rethinking of outsiderdom alongside the potential perils of insiderdom. What if sex workers are seeking community (we are) amongst the outside on our own terms? What does it mean to be fully recognised and included as an Outsider? We could stand to gain co-conspirators and co-strugglers, but also to contend with the potential loss of anonymity and the ability to 'hide in plain sight'. I think there is much to benefit from taking the plunge toward solidarity and demanding people take notice of our struggles, but I also recognize the privilege of writing as much in an academic journal. These benefits however are contingent

upon other outsiders' willingness to be true comrades. On this note, I offer a final vignette, this one concerning representing some of the outsider subject positions not traditionally validated in institutional settings.

Story 5: "I was the only one, to my knowledge and after extensive review of the programme, whose conference presentation focused expressly on sex working people and 'outsider' status. While I felt a warm welcome from organisers and fellow presenters, I was asked strange questions after my brief presentation that focused solely on my current working status – referring to a quip in my presenter's bio. Stranger still, I felt the need to respond, redirect, and underscore my participation as a sort-of outsider, a queer, non-binary sex working person, who has found themselves in the academy as a student again. The mixture of ironic humour and disappointment in being engaged with like this served to inspire my continued thoughts and writing about what it means to be included in an outside/rs conference, and yet still remain outside. No other (out) sex worker panellists to pair me with, no other writers or researchers bringing sex work or workers into their analysis of queer, trans*, body, labour, history etc. thought work."⁹

There can be no consideration of the 'outside/r' without listening to, and learning from, sex workers – and all criminalised labourers, for that matter. Linking the political fights of outsiders, alongside and within all those who might fall under that mantle, locates contemporary sex worker organising in a rich tradition of hustle and survival. It also moves us collectively toward a more complete consideration of outsiderdom.

⁹ This piece would not have been possible without the direct support of my fellow Support Ho(s)e Collective member, Dr Aaron Hammes.

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