

eXXXpressions
Forum XXX Proceedings

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Sex Workers Stand Proud!

Introduction

by

Maria Nengeh Mensah

The Forum XXX, entitled “Celebrating a Decade of Action, Designing Our Future,” was a first of its kind in Quebec. It was a historical moment, a time for dialogue and for sharing our thoughts on how to support sex workers all over the world. This meeting allowed us to consolidate a system for community support by and for sex workers, and to attack the stigma that marks people who do sex work—the myth that says prostitutes are dangerous vamps and vectors for disease transmission.

I’ve been working closely as a volunteer with Stella for a number of years now. Together, we’ve carried out a number of projects that have had major effects: among other things, we created the first edition of the *XXX Guide: A Sex Worker’s Handbook*, we elaborated a collective response to the report released by the Bloc Québécois’s *Comité sur la prostitution de rue* (committee on street prostitution), and we presented ethical, legal and human rights issues regarding HIV/AIDS to Justice Québec’s Interministerial Sub-Committee on Discrimination and Violence Against Sex Workers. For each project, we were nourished and supported by the friendships woven with other sex worker activists, and above all, we were driven by the conviction that our fight can only be won through self-determination. Many times we have wished for a meeting with our sisters from other countries to share the joys and challenges of community organizing. In May 2005, that dream came true.

A movement of many flavours

There were many challenges involved in organizing a forum. The issue of financial support, logistical concerns, and the international nature of the event all presented us with problems that at first sight seemed insurmountable. In addition, one of the biggest challenges for us was to find a common denominator that would bring together a very diverse range of individuals, associations and movements. “The sex workers’ movement” does exist, but it includes groups and individuals with different experiences and types of expertise, who come from a variety of legislative contexts and have distinct organizational cultures. To this, we must add the complex rapport that sex workers maintain with the idea of intervention, be it social, legal, health, feminist or media intervention.

There are service-providing associations, advocacy groups, state-managed groups, autonomous collectives and dozens of other possible configurations. Some people work alone, others are plugged into a solid network of alliances. In addition, because sex workers’ organizing is so varied, the movement itself intervenes at different levels, touching on health, citizenship, work conditions, safety, human rights and more. Action strategies include fighting against HIV/AIDS, violence prevention, the redefinition of sexuality, providing referrals and peer-support services, political lobbying, and so forth. This diversity helps in meeting the wide range of needs expressed by people who do sex work all over the world.

In preparing the Forum XXX, we wanted to call a time-out on these divergences because we saw a common concern: the desire to stop seeing our fundamental rights and freedoms contravened. So we set the wheels in motion to gather together representatives of sex worker driven associations, as well as their supporting members and allies, to share expertise and transfer knowledges about health determinants in the sex work and to empower sex workers to live and work in health, in safety and with dignity.

Project history

At Stella’s annual general meeting in June 2002, the members resolved to form a special working committee to organize an event to celebrate the organization’s tenth anniversary

in the spring of 2005. A decade of action—from creating personalized social services, to community organizing, to activism both local and international—deserves to be celebrated by everyone! Stella published an open letter online at the time saying that the chance to meet with other similar groups of sex workers would be the best birthday present ever, because that would allow us to “make our voices visible, audible and credible, and [...] recognize our ability to choose the meaning we want to confer upon our experience of social relationships, and our resulting needs and strategies for resistance.” It goes on to read:

“This work is even more urgent in the current context, where the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the worldwide increase in migrant populations, the generalized security paranoia that is disguised as a war on terrorism or as an exacerbated concern for peace and public order, and the phenomenon of human trafficking all work to create often-spectacular calls for censor, repression, arbitrary State regulation and social control. Times of crisis like this never fail to provoke an intensification of efforts to control women (among other things, our sexuality), who need to be policed, moralized and normalized—and sadly, that’s what we’re seeing now.”¹

Stella’s tenth anniversary seemed like the perfect time to take stock and talk about how far we’ve come after ten years of organizing and thirty years of the international movement. But collective thinking and discussion with other groups is also important, following two decades of HIV and AIDS prevention and education, work on health determinants (violence prevention, gender-based analysis, poverty reduction...) and support for people who have been affected by these issues. But in 2002, Stella was overwhelmed with the work they put into fulfilling their everyday mandate of providing information and support to sex workers. As a result, it took over a year and a half to really get started on the special working committee’s project.

At the same time, as part of my job as a professor in Université du Québec à Montréal’s (UQAM) School of Social Work and Institute for Feminist Research and Studies (*École de travail social et à l’Institut de recherches et d’études féministes*), I began a three-year project entitled *Analysis of feminist discourse on prostitution in Quebec*². This was a research-action project focusing on sex workers’ appropriation of feminism and on planning a collective action. Through the focus group discussions carried out, the idea of organizing a conference on sex work was formalized. At the beginning, it looked like the project would be an international academic-style meeting, bringing together Canadian researchers whose work could be helpful to the sex workers’ rights movement. Luckily, in 2003 and 2004, I asked for the opinions of various people who do different types of sex work, under various conditions and in different contexts, and it became clear that an academic tone for the event didn’t really match the needs of this diverse community. The greatest desire that they brought up was to meet with other associations and to share our history and the history of the sex workers’ movement as a worldwide social movement. In my informal survey, a number of women gave me their advice, their criticism and their suggestions for developing dynamic and relevant programming. I would particularly like to thank Jenn Clamen, Roxane Nadeau and Gail Pheterson, as well as the research participants, for their honesty and enthusiasm.

In the spring of 2004, a second draft of the conference project was developed, this time with a community focus, and an organizing committee was formed. This allowed us to outline organizational parameters, including the close collaboration with several associations that were celebrating ten years of existence in 2005, an active search for financing and a partnership with my university’s community assistance bureau, the *Service aux collectivités*.

Originally, the sex workers’ forum project was created to give three groups, all celebrating ten years of organizing work, the chance to meet and share their experiences and strategies for action. The groups in question were Stella (Montreal, Canada), Cabiria (Lyon, France) and the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (Kolkata, India). As the project took shape, other groups were added to the list. As a result, the forum fit within the mandate of the Federal Initiative to Address HIV and AIDS in Canada and consequently received a one-time grant from the Public Health Agency of Canada. While the financing may have seemed to be “too generous,” according to certain critics, we need to remember that it’s extremely rare to find resources allotted to services and programs specifically aimed at improving sex workers’

¹ Stella. *Stella et le débat sur la prostitution - Lettre ouverte*. 13 septembre 2002. Available at : <http://www.chezstella.org/stella/?q=node/182>.

² *Fonds québécois de recherche sur la culture et la société*, or FQRSC) and Université du Québec à Montréal’s program for financial aid (*Programme d’aide financière à la recherche et à la création*, or PAFARC). A research bursary was also provided by the Bank of Montreal through the University of Ottawa’s Women’s Studies Institute.

³ See: Bell, Laurie. 1987. *Good Girls, Bad Girls. Sex Trade Workers & Feminists Face to Face*. Toronto: The Women’s Press.

⁴ Sansfaçon, Daniel. 1999. *Rapport du Comité montréalais sur la prostitution de rue et la prostitution juvénile*. Montreal: Le Comité.

⁵ Sex Workers Alliance of Vancouver. 1997. *Report on When Sex Works*. Available at http://www.walnet.org/csis/groups/when_sex_works/index.html

living and working conditions—whereas programs focused exiting prostitution receive regular financing all over the world.

Essentially, the Forum XXX was going to be a method for countering the effects of marginalization by giving 250 people with experience in sex work or in organizations providing services to sex workers, as well as their allies, the opportunity to come together to network and learn from one another. Together, participants from the four corners of the world would collectively take stock of the sex workers’ movement, develop a common vision of the actions taken in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and brainstorm action strategies for the future.

In the summer of 2004, Claire Thiboutot and I took the opportunity afforded us by our participation in the 15th International Conference on HIV/AIDS in Bangkok to start spreading the good news: a forum by and for sex workers would be happening in Montreal soon! We very much enjoyed that networking process, and found it richly rewarding; it helped us to create more personal ties with well-established groups such as Empower, the Network of Sex Work Projects and the Debbys. Our counterparts from five continents showed a marked interest in our project, and that inspired us to go on. When we returned home, we hired coordinators for the project (Valérie Boucher and Jenn Clamen) and started coordination, programming and logistics work. We tried to maximize sex workers’ involvement throughout the process.

What is special about the Forum XXX

In Canada, there have been two major international conferences involving sex workers. In 1985, a conference entitled “Challenging Our Images: The Politics of Pornography and Prostitution” took place in Toronto. It was born following the reports submitted by the Badgley Committee (on the sexual abuse of children and young people) and the Fraser Committee (on pornography and prostitution) in the 1980s. Women and feminists aimed to draw both personal and political conclusions from the work done by these committees. To do this, they created a conference to bring together sex workers and feminists. Many conflicts and much dissension emerged from the meeting; the negative fallout created a major split between groups of women who do sex work and groups of women who do not.³

In 1996, a conference entitled “Quand le sexe travaille/When Sex Works” was held at UQAM. Its purpose was to bring together people whose studies or work dealt with prostitution and other forms of sex work. One of the meeting’s goals was to provide support for a recommendation to decriminalize prostitution, which was presented to the Canadian government at the end of the conference. A very diverse range of participants took part: representatives from various areas of government, and from the fields of research, sex work, feminism, police services and other social work groups. At the end of the conference, Montreal’s standing committee on street prostitution and juvenile prostitution (the Comité permanent montréalais sur la prostitution de rue et la prostitution juvénile) was struck.⁴ However, sex workers complained that their needs and their concerns had not been adequately reflected in the meeting’s content and organization (evidenced in part by the low number of sex workers in attendance).⁵ The Montreal-based Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers From was created as a result of that concern.

To set ourselves apart from preceding Canadian conferences, and in so doing to try to avoid previous pitfalls, the Forum XXX made it a priority to address questions of interest to people who do sex work. We systematically included sex workers’ needs as a central consideration at every stage of the forum’s development. For example:

- * The majority of the forum’s organizing committee, people actively involved at every step, was composed of people with experience in sex work.
- * Special attention was paid to the diversity of sex workers’ living situations and working conditions in Quebec, Canada and internationally. This diversity can be attributed to different legal contexts (prohibition, criminalization, legalization, regulation...); different forms and milieus of work (streets and bars; in-call and out-call escort services; telephone sex work; erotic dance; massage parlours; online...); various levels of risk and violence (poverty, verbal and physical assault...); and

various cultural issues that specifically affect First Nations peoples, migrant workers and ethnocultural communities.

* We reserved over 75% of the registration spaces for people who currently do sex work or have sex work experience, to ensure the highest possible degree of participation from the priority target group. In addition, some program activities were reserved exclusively for sex workers.

* We reserved the remaining spaces for our allies. In other words, people from organizations whose work, research or interests concern the criminalization of sex work, HIV/AIDS and STIs, drug use or other health and sexuality issues (including people living with HIV or AIDS; people affected by the epidemic; volunteers, care and service providers and intervention workers from the community, legal and union milieus; activists; and researchers and students). These people are considered to be major resources for sex workers, and while they don't have experience in sex work per se, they have a strong understanding of the various issues related to sex work in Canada and internationally. They recognize that sex work is a form of work, they support people who do sex work and they are involved in the fight to decriminalize sex work.

In reading the pages of *eXXXpressions*, it is clear that we reached our goals and surpassed them. The forum made it possible for sex workers to describe their work and living conditions, improve their capacity for action, control, resistance and autonomy, and develop a more solid network of alliances.

Expressions that shape our future

If we wish to grow in the direction of a society based on solidarity, we need to legitimize people who do sex work by equipping them with skills, nourishing their abilities, boosting their integration into the community, improving their access to legal, community and health services, and facilitating the emergence of non-stigmatizing social representations. Unfortunately, in this respect the current situation is cause for concern, because many societies tend to see the “problem of prostitution” from all sorts of angles—morality, ideology, deviancy, criminalization, stigmatizing, sensationalizing—that are very different from the way sex work is seen by the people who practice it. These societies do not necessarily see the interconnections between the structural determinants of health, such as stereotypes and laws, and the health of sex workers. It is essential to create a better understanding of the big picture when it comes to the issues faced by sex workers. The general thrust of our programming was to work towards this understanding.

eXXXpressions is divided into four parts, each one reflecting a particular aspect of the forum. In these pages, the proceedings of the talks given at the Forum XXX are interspersed with a fifth section called “From the Forum With Love” which includes illustrations, press clippings and fun souvenirs of our meeting left by the many activists, supporters and allies who joined us in Montreal from May 18 to 22, 2005.

The first section of the document is a transcription of the only forum session that was open to the public. The public conference entitled “Sex Workers Beyond Borders” aimed to showcase the international expertise of activists from Quebec, France, India and Australia. Nearly 700 people attended the opening talk, during which panellists painted a picture of sex workers’ situations in their respective countries, presented summaries of their support and organizing experiences, and explained their perspectives on the future of the sex workers’ movement with regard to living and working conditions and health concerns. The presentations were punctuated by four comic performances by the troupe Debbie Doesn’t Do It For Free, which unfortunately would be difficult to summarize here.

The rest of the Forum XXX programming was reserved for registered participants, and was built around three major discussion themes, each addressing individual and collective strategies for sex workers to affect the various factors that have an impact on health.

The second section of *eXXXpressions*, “Me and My Work,” deals with the way that individual strategies can contribute to collective action aiming to improve health, safety and

the respect of sex workers’ dignity. It highlights the importance of personal experience—in all its diversity—and the various roles sex workers occupy in life and at work. The three pieces presented at the plenary come to us from Québec, Israel and Thailand. Each one shows a vision of individual action and expresses how it can bring about change in the dominant social discourse and in the daily reality of sex work. Next, is included a summary of the participants’ discussions that took place in workshops on the topic, which include ideas about pride, coming out, personal health and safety at work, and clients’ perspectives.

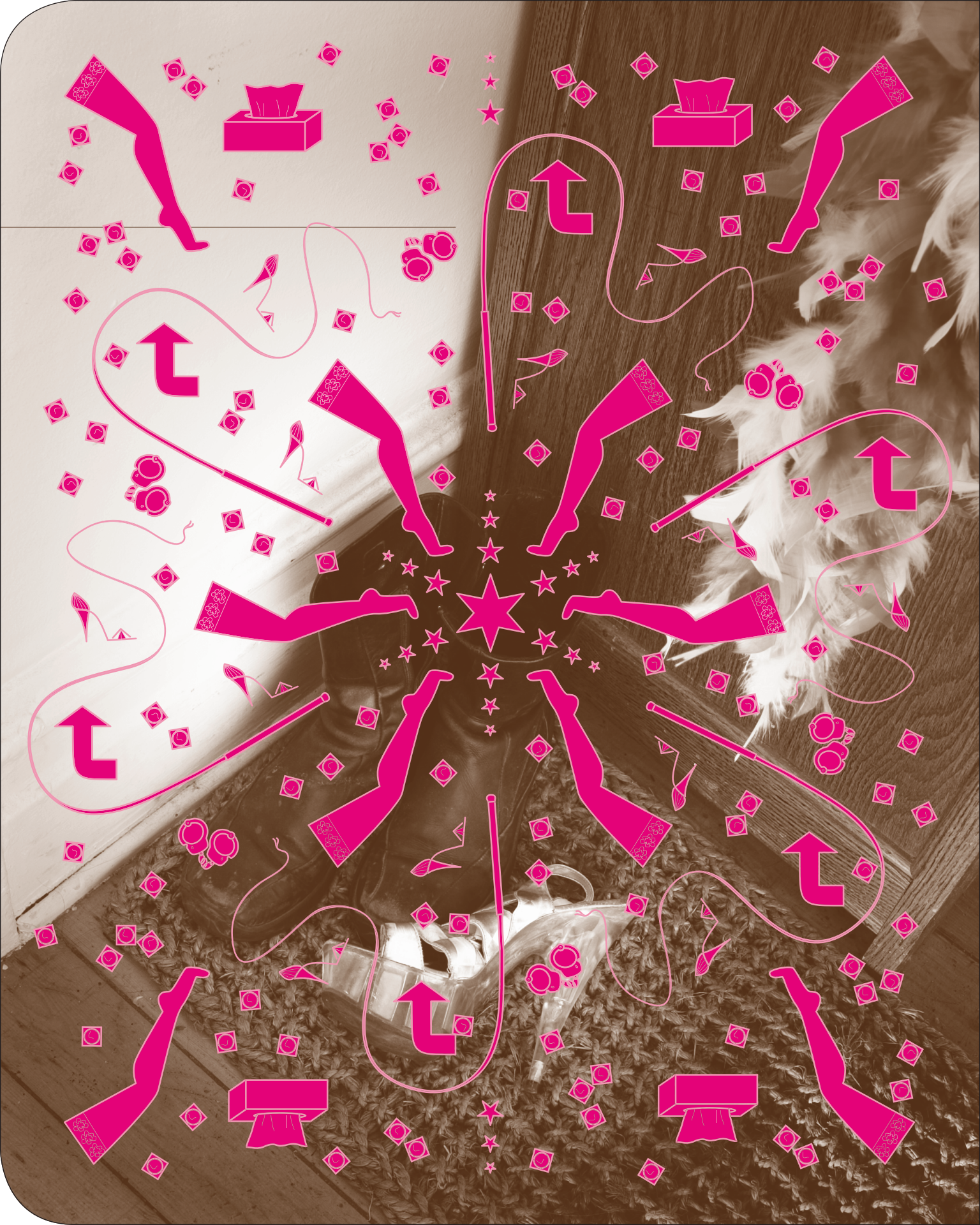
The third section, “Sex Work and Society,” spotlights the social environment in which sex work is practiced, and the way that sex workers react to the dominant social discourse. Speakers from India, Argentina and Canada share their perceptions of the social context of sex work and the means they have taken to respond to and resist stigmatization, discrimination and violence. Workshop participants reflected on the importance of diversity and of sex workers’ culture. The discussion summary deals with ways to change society’s attitudes about sex work, as well as bringing up various strategies for personal and collective organization and mobilization.

The fourth section, “Laws, Policies and Human Rights,” talks about social control measures that have an impact on sex workers’ living and working conditions. Speakers from France, New Zealand and Sweden—three countries where major legislative changes have recently taken place—offer critical perspectives on their respective legal situations. The papers also share the action strategies developed to help improve these situation. The workshop discussions on this theme brought up questions of language, legal reform and social accountability for the greater respect of human rights, including the rights to health, safety and dignity.

Lastly, the conclusion of *eXXXpressions* gives us insight into the forum’s immediate effects based on the evaluations gathered from its participants and from Stella members. Claire Thiboutot, Executive Director of Stella, sketches out a few of the lessons learned for Stella and for the sex workers’ movement in Quebec and Canada.

I have attempted to give you a sense of the context in which the initiative for the Forum XXX was born, the activities leading up to the event and the specificity of the personal experiences that helped us bring such a major project to fruition. Now, it’s up to us to continue the fight, and to bring the spirit of the forum to life beyond the borders of these pages.

Maria Nengeh Mensah
for the Forum XXX Organizing Committee



Celebrating

a

decade

of

action

Introduction

Celebrating a decade of action

In this section of eXXXpressions, you will find an opening presentation addressing current contexts within which sex worker activism takes place (Maria Nengeh Mensah of the University of Québec of Montréal, Canada). These include historical factors that have made it necessary to recognize sex workers' human rights as an essential component of the fight against HIV/AIDS. Next, three perspectives are developed from sex worker groups that initially emerged out of HIV-prevention initiatives: from Montréal/Canada (Claire Thiboutot of Stella), Kolkata/India (Rama Debnath of the DMSC), and from Lyon/France (Linda Bakiu standing in for Corinne Monnet of Cabiria). Their presentations describe the situation for sex workers in their respective countries. They highlight how challenging repressive social contexts led to the birth of organizations that have demanded respect and justice for sex workers beyond borders in clever and creative ways. Those present were brought along to share in the trials and triumphs of these courageous activists from all over the world.

The public conference of the Forum XXX was also honoured to have the Debby Doesn't Do It For Free Australian collective, performing for our audience. The Debbys offer a confronting, collective voice as sex worker autonomous organizing takes over the gallery, stage and screen. You will find no "Pretty Woman" amongst the Debbys. Their performance characters mock mainstream understandings of the sex industry and politicians, clients, sexual health professionals and present the real life experiences, ideas and humour of sex workers.

Beyond Borders

Université du Québec à Montréal (Canada)

by

Professor, UQAM

Maria Nengeh Mensah

The current Canadian social context within which sex work takes place is determined by its legal and political dimensions. Sex work is not “a job like any other,” because it is criminalized, and because of the persistence of the whore stigma (s/he is always and already corrupt, perverse or deviant), of violence (homicide, assault and insult) and discrimination (non-access to social, legal, police and health services).

A brief history

During the 1970s and 1980s, a process of international organization and action was set in motion among people who work in the sex industry. In 1973, the San Francisco group COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) was born, a pioneer of the American movement. Then came the church occupation by prostitutes in Lyon, France, to contest police repression. The International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights is created in 1984, and was made up exclusively of women, prostitutes and feminists, who advocated for sex workers' rights. A year later, in Amsterdam, they organized the first World Whores' Congress, which introduced a new “political grammar” that placed prostitutes and prostitutes voices front and centre. The World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights was published and an objective definition of “prostitution” was established in terms of a revenue-generating activity; “work” whose economic and organizational dimensions invoked a plurality of forms, locations and conditions. From the demand for official recognition of sex work as work was born, in turn, the demand that the people practicing it be integrated into society. This scandalized abolitionists, who considered that prostitutes could only re-enter society if they abandoned sex work.

Marginality, exclusion and social change

Marginality is about the relationship between the centre and its periphery, but it also carries with it the dynamic potential for contesting the symbolic borders that separate these two realms.

Understanding marginality in such a way as to take into account the point of view of marginalized people implies that we recognize the difficult articulation between an individual's place in a system and the sense they have of their own existence.¹ The difficulty that individuals at the margins encounter comes down to finding a way to stop society from holding them at arm's length, without having to sacrifice their own individuality.

On June 20, 1826, for example, six prostitutes from Verdun, France, walked from the suburb (*faubourg*) to which their activities were relegated to the centre of town, in a parody of a religious procession.² When relating the incident, police sources don't mention the protagonist's point of view, but there is good reason to consider such a transgression — both spatial and symbolic — as a deliberate and significant act. Their actions demonstrate a desire to call attention to the ostracism they suffered as outsiders on the part of the citizen population that benefited from social recognition.

The story is helpful for understanding marginality and social exclusion. These protestors cast off a state (i.e. a static situation) in which they were unable to make themselves heard, kept at a distance from society, in order to attract the attention of the centre to the injustices committed against them. It's appropriate to see marginality and exclusion as processes that can be reversed and that thus should be called into question.

For representatives of the sex workers' movement, prostitution is work, one among myriad personal decisions that people should be able to make in safety and with dignity. The

¹ Marche, Guillaume. 2002. “Marginalité, exclusion, déviance : tentative de conceptualisation sociologique” in *Figures de la marge. Marginalité et identité dans le monde contemporain*, ed. H Ménégaldo. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes. Collection Des Sociétés.

² Merriman, John. 1994. *Aux marges de la ville : faubourgs et banlieues en France 1815-1870*. Paris: Seuil.

movement refuses to take a position focused on misery: sex work is (considered as) a legitimate option as part of an endeavour towards autonomy, or a strategic decision for taking charge of one's own destiny. When seen in this framework, prostitutes, escorts, nude dancers, porn actresses and phone sex workers are not deviants or total victims, but people who share the same needs and aspirations as everyone else.

And the links with HIV...³

Stigma, according to Goffman⁴, is a powerful form of social labelling that discredits and stains the person on the receiving end. It radically changes the way that person sees herself and how she is perceived. Stigmatized people are generally considered to be deviant or scandalous for one reason or another, and for that reason are avoided, discredited, rejected, reprimanded or penalized. The "whore stigma"⁵ is one of the most powerful instruments of social control; it remains not only the basis for the exclusion of sex workers but also a potential threat hovering near everyone, female and male, who claims personal, financial, geographical and sexual autonomy.

To publicly declare oneself, to "come out" about one's experience working in the sex industry, is a courageous and meaningful gesture, but it comes with a price. This price can be prison, or harassment by the police or by neighbours; the risk of losing custody of one's children, of losing one's home...

Among the HIV-positive women I've known, none of them want to be categorized as whores.

Among the sex workers I've known, nobody wants to be associated with HIV.

... Are tightly woven

Since the beginning of the epidemic, people who exchange sexual services for money have been targeted, accused and stigmatized as responsible for its propagation. Prostitutes were assumed to be a major accelerator of HIV's spread to the "general population," because of their multiple sex partners. This prejudice has heightened discrimination and stigma against "prostitutes". At the same time, it helped reinforce the silence shrouding the topic of HIV within the sex industry. It's not hard to understand sex workers' reluctance to be associated with HIV.

By conflating sexual promiscuity with the propagation of disease, scientists attempted to convince us, women especially, of the impurity of the sexual act, by repeating that it's preferable to have only one sex partner. During this time, the "proof" of prostitutes' responsibility was being gathered. An article published in the reputable *Journal of Sex Research* in 1989, for example, proposed a complex mathematical formula (for transmission probabilities) to support the author's conclusion that "in five years, a single prostitute will infect 20 men and 0.8 unborn children."⁶ Projections such as this are questionable and contribute to perpetuating tenacious stereotypes.

In fact, this sort of specialized discourse distinguishes between two types of women. The first, the "very sexually active" woman, is considered to be a vector for HIV transmission to heterosexual populations. The second, the "pregnant mother" woman, is a vector for transmission to children. The first, the prostitute (the whore, the bad girl), is responsible for all sorts of transmission and remains the original source, the point of departure, patient zero — against whom we have zero tolerance. These distinctions reinforce the idea that sexuality is dangerous and that sex is essentially a destructive and negative force.⁷

Must we say again that sex workers are the first to insist on the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and on using condoms with their clients? Research carried out with people who do sex work makes a distinction between commercial sex and personal sex: people tend to use a condom regularly with their partners in a work context, but may continue to have unprotected sex with their personal partners and lovers (male and female). The above-mentioned mathematical model for HIV transmission should at the very least

³ Translator's note: As an opening to this section, the author included a personal anecdote about an anonymous letter she once received. The letter described a series of expressions particular to the French language in which common words, when applied to women, signify their status as "whores," whereas applied to men they do not. The anecdote has not been translated due to its language specificity.

⁴ Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Prentice-Hall.

⁵ Pheterson, Gail. 1996. *The Prostitution Prism*, Amsterdam University Press.

⁶ "... a preliminary model aiming to explain HIV transmission from a sexually active prostitute to her clients and the transmission of HIV from those clients to their sexual partners. The last link in this chain is the transmission from pregnant mothers to their foetuses." (Nahmias, Steven. 1989. « A model of HIV diffusion from a single source », *The Journal of Sex Research*, 26 (1): p. 15)

⁷ Rubin, Gayle. 1984. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." In *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole Vance. New York: Routledge and Keagan Paul.

⁸ Bastow, Karen. 1996. "Prostitution and HIV/AIDS," *Canadian HIV/AIDS Policy and Law Review*, 2 (2).

⁹ Mensah, MN. 2003. *Healthy Public Policy: Assessing the Impact of Law and Policy on Human Rights and HIV Prevention and Care*. Montréal: Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. Available at: <http://www.aidslaw.ca/Maincontent/reports.htm>.

¹⁰ There are also raising, early childhood development, and biological and genetic heritage to consider. See: Mustard JF, Frank JW. 1994. "The Determinants of Health from a Historical Perspective," *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 123 (4): p. 1-19; and the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health. 1999. *Toward a Healthy Future: Second Report on the Health of Canadians*, Health Canada.

¹¹ In Canada, research by sociologist and criminologist colleagues (Cecilia Benoit, Deborah Brock, John Lowman, Colette Parent, Pivot Legal Society and Frances Shaver) has added to our understanding of the ways in which non-criminal regulatory bodies and public policies (ex.: on health, social services, employment, keeping the peace, municipal regulations, federal laws and immigration) affect the health, safety and well-being of sex workers.

take into account that "prostitutes" practice safer sex at work, but risk contracting HIV in the context of their personal sexual relations; that they, too, are concerned by vertical transmission when they're pregnant; and that they themselves may be men, transsexuals and transvestites. Is it too much to ask that research go a few steps beyond simple prejudice?

According to this logic, the more faithful a woman is to the rules of monogamy, the less risk she runs of being exposed to HIV. But the most misleading message about HIV transmission has been around the idea of sexual promiscuity—an accusation made first against gay men and then against women prostitutes. While a high number of partners may mean the increased probability that one of them may be HIV-positive, what actually establishes the risk of contracting HIV is the practice of activities that include the exchange of bodily fluids. Sexual monogamy does not preclude the risk of infection if it includes unprotected sexual relations with an infected person.

The desire to blame prostitutes has given rise to a number of coercive measures in the name of HIV prevention. During the 1980s, for example, laws were created to institute mandatory administration of HIV tests for people found guilty of, or in some cases simply accused of, prostitution. HIV-positive prostitutes were released from custody on the condition that they agreed to be observed. The law could thus force them to abstain from certain behaviours, to undergo a particular treatment, or to remain in custody during the application of medical treatment.⁸ Major human rights violations took place in the name of preserving public health. Is it too much to ask that the law go a few steps beyond simple prejudice?

HIV transmission is caused by risk activities, and not by membership in a given group. A mandatory testing program would run into obvious problems in identifying the members of target groups, and exacerbate discrimination against targeted individuals while giving others a false sense of security. In Canada, imposed HIV testing has generally been rejected as a strategy, thankfully, but this is a fragile victory.

Determining factors in health

The scientific literature of the past 20 years shows that sex workers, both male and female, are vulnerable to HIV infection when they do not have the means, the information or the authority to protect themselves and their clients⁹. These writings highlight the fact that there is a strong link between the criminalization of prostitution and the health of people who do sex work, whether in the street or elsewhere.

Individual and collective factors combine to produce complex effects on health. Determinants of health include¹⁰ education, income, social support networks, employment and work conditions, health habits, personal adaptability, health services, gender and culture. Laws and policies also have a significant impact, structurally speaking, on the prevention of and care related to HIV/AIDS: these are the structural determinants of health. They provide the available range of options, influence choices, and create physical and social context. For example, convincing data show that laws and policies influence the HIV risk of individuals working in the sex industry, the pace at which their HIV infection progresses to AIDS and their capacity to integrate and live with HIV/AIDS¹¹.

In particular, criminal laws and police surveillance¹²:

- directly influence the level of risk by affecting both the availability of means of protection (new syringes and condoms) and the conditions under which their use is negotiated;
- and have an indirect impact in that they validate stigmatization, racism, sexism and oppression, which perpetuates the social anxieties that constitute some of the most significant and fundamental factors in HIV transmission risk.

Women, men, transvestites and transsexuals working in the sex industry all over the world now need to exert better control over their work conditions and develop skills and abilities (both personally and collectively) to help them live in good health and in dignity. Only the development of a social context — legal, political and media-related— free of prejudice

can contribute to promoting sex workers' health. This means we need to legitimize people who do sex work by empowering them, increasing their skills, encouraging their integration into the community, improving their access to legal, community and health services, and facilitating the emergence of non-stigmatizing social representations.

The proliferation of neo-abolitionist discourse in the last ten years has contributed to putting the criminalization of specific prostitution-related activities back on the national and international agenda. This discourse is mainly based in ideology, and it must be said that it has set legislative reform on the wrong path, along with strategies for promoting health among the individuals in question. In prohibitionist feminist circles, for example, the first stumbling block we've encountered resides in the fact that the expression "sex work" is taboo, and if it's used to analyze the realities of commercial sex, the person or group using it is quickly designated as part of the "pro-prostitution lobby" or discredited as illegitimate—as though the disgrace related to the subject itself produced a lack of legitimacy in those who speak of it. With regard to health in particular, the neo-abolitionist approach attempts to minimize public health initiatives, such as HIV prevention and care programs that intervene at the level specific working conditions. I am thinking of the United-States policy which, since 2003, refuses to finance projects to fight the spread of HIV unless they also promote an abolitionist stance...

Risks and vulnerabilities

We know that the sex workers (both male and female) most vulnerable to HIV infection are those who are incarcerated, who inject drugs, who share non-sterilized syringes and who have unprotected sex with partners (not clients). The risk of contracting HIV in the context of sex work is also related to the criminalization of sex work, to the use of coercive measures in contexts where sex work is regulated, and to precarious conditions that increase sex workers' vulnerability¹³.

In the early 1990s, when the fight against AIDS was consolidating everywhere so too were sex worker activists'. Their protestors' energy helped create a fruitful association between community health associations and sex workers milieus. This is how groups like Stella, Cabiria and the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee were born, as well as Maggie's, the Toronto Prostitutes' Community Service Project, the Sex Workers' Alliance of Vancouver, ZITeng in Hong Kong, Empower in Chiang Mai, the Network of Sex Work Projects at the international level, and numerous other associations, groups and coalitions. Tonight, you will hear from the groups that were first a product of public health initiatives intended to respond to specific HIV/AIDS prevention needs, but have since considerably evolved.

For the last ten years, these groups and their respective actions have created greater visibility for the concerns of people working in the sex industry, and in doing so have elevated the fight against AIDS beyond the individualistic approach. They have also shown that to face the HIV/AIDS epidemic, it's essential to address work conditions for sex workers, and that to carry out this type of initiative it's essential to confront criminalization and stigmatization.

Steps for the future

We should move beyond stereotyped images and statements.

We should forge solid alliances between people living with HIV/AIDS and the sex workers' movement.

But above all, we should avoid moralizing and sensationalistic slippage; we need to give the floor to protesting sex workers that no longer want to be kept at a distance from society, health and other human rights.

Over the next three days, sex workers will finally come together to discuss their issues and come to their own conclusions. And now, unlike that day in 1826, there are far more than six of them.

¹² Blankenship, KM, Koester S. 2001. "Criminal Law, Policing Policy, and HIV Risk in Street Sex Workers and IDUS," documentation from the conference Health, Law and Human Rights: Exploring the Connections, An International Cross-Disciplinary Conference Honoring Jonathan M. Mann, Philadelphia, september 2001, p. 879-883.

¹³ Mensah, MN. 2003. Op Cit.

A Montreal perspective

Stella (Canada)

by

Executive Director, Stella

Claire Thiboutot

I am very pleased to be speaking to you today on this panel with my wonderful colleagues. I'm particularly happy since I've been waiting for this moment for several months... waiting for the Forum XXX, where we've come from the four corners of the world to hear one another speak. Tonight, I'm going to introduce you to Stella, recount the brief history of our ten years of action—both practical and political—and give you a sense of the strategies we'd like to work with in the future. To do this, I'll share some bits and pieces of the process we engaged in this winter at Stella, in preparation for the forum, reflecting on the three themes we'll be discussing in depth this week: "Me and My Work", "Sex Work and Society", and "Laws, Policies and Human Rights".

Stella

But first: Stella. What an adventure! Stella was born at the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, like many of the groups represented here tonight. Some of these groups are more than ten years old—for example, Maggie's is coming up on 15 years, Empower celebrates their 20th in 2005... basically, the sex workers' movement is no longer wet behind the ears. Stella developed in a context where, at the outset of an epidemic, the public authorities were wondering if this might be a good opportunity to impose medical exams and mandatory HIV tests on prostitutes. The idea was to prevent women from infecting their clients, who in turn would infect their wives, who would then transmit the virus to their children. We refused to accept this additional measure of social and medical control—because, as you know, we've already got plenty of methods of social, medical and legal control aimed at us. The measure didn't take into account its potential effects on us, so we argued that we were already protecting ourselves out of self-interest, that we had already developed protection strategies—since HIV was hardly the first sexually or blood-transmitted infection in history—and that we needed to reinforce these existing strategies and fight the structural obstacles that were undermining our efforts. We certainly had no interest in becoming the epidemic's new scapegoats. In other words, we refused to be further stigmatized, this time as "vectors for disease transmission." We took up our agency in preventing disease in our community.

Stella opened its doors ten years ago, and started by giving a little wink to history. Almost a century before, in 1913, a woman from Philadelphia named Maimie Pinzer, who had worked in just about every field accessible to women at the time¹ including prostitution, opened a refuge in Montreal for sex workers she considered to be proud, worthy and autonomous women. A woman named Stella Philips often visited this informal meeting and resting place. Maimie always thought that Stella was a dynamic and lively woman. Like Maimie, we wanted to create a friendly space for ladies of the night, and we ourselves wanted to be like Stella—dynamic and lively. So we drew upon the history of our movement; we were inspired by the courage of our sisters in Lyon who occupied a church 30 years ago, and we took their slogan as our own: "We don't want our sisters, mothers, daughters, friends, girlfriends and lovers put in prison anymore!" We displayed it on our building for the World March of Women in 2000, and re-used the same slogan for the cover of the prison-themed special issue of our magazine *ConStellation*. We also drew on the experience of our Canadian sisters and brothers: the first version of our organization's by-laws was a direct copy of the ones from our big sister Maggie's in Toronto.

As sex workers, we gave ourselves the mandate of supporting and giving information to other sex workers to help them live and work in safety and dignity. Our goal was to educate and sensitize the general public as well as, more particularly, people working in the fields of justice, law enforcement, social services and health services in order to fight the

¹ Maimie worked in charitable services, and did office work, farm work, and domestic work in addition to prostitution.

discrimination and stigmatization experienced by sex workers. We wanted to demand the recognition of our work as work and to fight to have it decriminalized. As Maria Nengeh Mensah explains so well in her opening speech for the forum, criminalization is one of the biggest barriers preventing us from enjoying our fundamental human rights—which themselves are an essential prerequisite to the fight against HIV/AIDS.

We traded in our stilettos for sneakers, and we walked all over Montreal to explore every nook and cranny of the city's sex work milieu. Stella has above all always maintained a constant presence on the streets of Montreal, in the strip bars, at the escort agencies, in the massage parlours, on the sets of porn films—night and day. We provide an attentive ear, and give support that's tailored to people's needs. This is how we defend basic human rights. At midnight, in the emergency room at Saint-Luc hospital, we advocate for access to care by accompanying a woman who uses injection drugs and hasn't slept for three days. We deal with the hostile attitudes of the staff, and calm their fears. We insist... until she gets the care she needs.

Twice a month, we provide access to care in our own space, in collaboration with Médecins du monde (*Doctors of the World*). We help people who have no identification papers and people who've lost their papers. We help non-status foreigners. For starters, we don't ask questions. We're just there to listen. We provide *truly* anonymous and confidential services.

Stella also keeps up a regular presence inside the Tanguay and Joliette prisons. We accompany people to court, to the rental board, to youth protection services. Some people think we're a bunch of idiots, quasi-intellectuals, elitists, who don't know what we're talking about. But we come from the front lines, we work on the front lines and we spend time there every day. So clearly we're well placed to know that life ain't always a rose garden. Nor is everything black and white—there are lots of grey zones. We see that many of our sisters suffer from poverty, from the difficulties facing First Nations women, from the criminalization of drug use, from men's violence. We can also see how even those of us who have decent work conditions aren't safe from prejudice, violence on the part of clients, police brutality and abusive arrest. This is why it's so important to work together, collectively, to share our knowledge, confront prejudice and demand legislative change.

Me and my work

Throughout our first ten years of action, we've provided support to sex workers, developed political positions, contributed to innovative projects and created HIV/AIDS prevention materials that have received numerous awards. But probably the most important thing is that all this work has helped us to create a community of sex workers—a community that's growing all the time. This is one of the first things that came up during our prep meetings for the forum. For most of us, Stella helped us to break out of our isolation, to come out as sex workers and share our experiences. To come together with others and unite in our differences—as Inuit women, as transvestite street workers, as escorts and more. Black, white, yellow and red working together, in a place where we don't need to be afraid of being ourselves and where we can move out of the solitude that society forces us into all too often, preferring to look away from us or squeeze us into the narrow boxes of their prejudice: sluts, victims, delinquents. That is, when they're not putting us in the narrow box of a prison cell.

Coming to Stella has helped us to learn how others work differently, and to share tricks of the trade and essential information about safer sex, health and safety at work—for example, how to negotiate condom use with a client, and how to establish and respect your limits and make sure others respect them. We've shared personal stories and helped each other out in hundreds of ways. The gathering together of this information led to the creation of most of our tools: the *Bad Tricks List* and *The XXX Guide*, among others. Our participation in Stella's various activities and endeavours has also brought us face to face with our own prejudices, particularly with regard to various forms of work, and the social classes and economic conditions that differ from one type of work to the next—for example, the differences between street workers and luxury escorts. Stella is also a place of solidarity, where poor and not-so-poor people rub shoulders, as do drug users, homeless women, HIV-positive and

hepatitis C-infected women, dancers, escorts and street prostitutes. Stella is a place where we chat and provide information in a number of languages: French, English, Inuktituk and many others. There are many of us at Stella, and we all need to learn from one another and our differences. Stella is also a space that encourages self-confidence, where we feel our dignity is upheld, where we work in solidarity and feel we are respected, where we develop a sense of belonging. This sharing and solidarity is a source of strength. Because we want to stay alive and healthy, and feel safe. Because we want to be respected—ourselves and our human rights. Our individual stories, brought together, become the very arguments that provide the backbone of our organization and feed our collective struggle.

In preparation for the forum, we held group discussions at Stella. One of the key issues that we discussed was the mobilization of sex workers. How do we reach sex workers in increasing numbers? How do we get more of them involved? How do we allay their fears of getting involved, their fears of losing their jobs, of being stigmatized, of coming out of the closet? How do we let them know that Stella exists and make sure they have access to our information materials? How do we help them stop feeling alone?

One of the points that came up several times was the question of Stella's visibility. We always need to be as visible as possible. We need to be visible in everywhere sex work is practiced, but also in the public eye, particularly through our media presence.

We also said we need to start seriously thinking about how to get clients involved. Last year, we published a prevention guide intended for clients that focused on respecting sex workers' limits. It's a great little booklet that encourages clients to respect sex workers and the contracts they agree on together. But we said we should also get them involved in our actions—get them to come out of the closet, too, because everyone's asking, "Who are these clients?" We can say they're regular, everyday guys, but people don't believe us. So here's the message: dear clients, get involved!

We also want to get owners and managers involved in our interventions. Having them involved when we take action can only help them understand that sex workers need better work conditions. In so doing, owners and managers can be part of developing occupational and workplace health and safety guidelines with us. Why not?

We need to break the remaining taboos around HIV/AIDS among ourselves and in the industry. We talk a lot about educating others, but between one another we still have trouble. On the other hand, people have a desire to talk about it more, and to acknowledge that it is possible to do sex work while being HIV-positive. But how do we do that? How do we manage confidentiality, disclosure, and so forth? We need to provide better support to HIV-positive sex workers while networking more closely with groups for people living with HIV/AIDS. For the moment, there aren't very many links between sex workers' groups and support groups for HIV-positive women. So we need to work on these issues.

Sex work and society

Obviously we've done lots of work in the past few years—much of it in a similar style to the Debbys, the Australian sex workers' performance troupe, meaning colourful forms of protest, performance and even sometimes street theatre. For example, we did a performance and installation for the World March of Women, we also painted the city hall fountain red with the help of the Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers, and we invited Montreal's newly elected mayor (Gérald Tremblay) to come and eat pasta puttanesca with us. (*Puttana* means "whore" in Italian, similar to *pute* in French.) He never came, our dialogue strategies never worked with that mayor.

Using the media has always been, and remains, an important strategy for changing people's mentalities and demystifying the realities of sex work to help counter the stigmatization and violence we experience. Sex workers have spoken out in a number of ways in the last ten years, within Stella and elsewhere. Some of them have rewritten history to give the story from our point of view. Others have used painting, drawing, cartooning and photography to better represent our lives and concerns. Sex workers' art and creative work was displayed in

our windows at our old St-Laurent Boulevard location and at the Festival du 8^{ième} Art. Dozens of us have seen our work in the pages of our magazine, *ConStellation*, or as illustrations in our various printed materials. Increasingly, sex workers are taking up their pens or writing online to tell their stories and talk about the issues surrounding sex work. Some women have created websites where they publish information about sex work and the sex trade. Some have even written novels—among others, Emmanuelle Turgeon's *L'instant libre* and *Les beaux survivants*, and Roxanne Nadeau's *Pute de rue*. As a result, sex workers' voices, even outside Stella, have had a remarkable impact in Quebec society. And it feels great! Basically, the challenge is to continue moving beyond the eternal oppositions between mother and whore, between poor little victims and sinister collaborators, between being alienated women ourselves and being women who alienate other women. We need to get past these stigmatized images and insults.

We've had ideas, for example to create a red money campaign. We kicked that off at the launch of the *ConStellation* prison-themed special issue. The idea is to mark bills with red lines to make sex workers' presence visible in society, like gay people did in the '90s with pink money.

We've started once again to carry out high-visibility awareness campaigns in the media to help reduce stigma. These media campaigns encourage solidarity among sex workers, but also solidarity between sex workers and the general population.

We had the idea to create our own radio shows, films and documentaries. And why not our own Olympics, even!

Laws, policies and human rights

In terms of laws, policies and human rights, we've had a rough time! We've had to deal with a witch-hunt carried out by residents, particularly in the Centre-Sud area, after the failure of a pilot project which was to be created as an alternative to the criminalization of street prostitution. The project would have given us more autonomy to manage the problems related to street prostitution in Montreal, but we were never able to properly explain the project. People in the neighbourhood went nuts. We had to turn tail and stop the whole thing. But after that, violence just went up. We received death threats, dead pigeons were left on our doorstep, windows were broken and so forth. On top of that, some people thought we were a dream come true for organized crime—that decriminalization would be a benefit to the Mob. But many sex workers throughout the world have been killed, assaulted and threatened with death because of the activist work they've done, among others in India and Argentina. It's upsetting!

New for Montreal: police repression is no longer done via fines for breaking municipal regulations, such as walking off the sidewalk, loitering and that sort of thing. We halfway won our collective defence against this sort of ticketing, which was used specifically to target sex workers, young marginalized people and homeless people. On the other hand, Crown prosecutors chose to cancel the tickets instead of creating a legal precedent and admitting that the police had been enforcing the law in a discriminatory fashion. Since then, the morality squad police have taken up the torch, and are making arrests based on the Criminal Code: 38 in 2001 and 825 in 2004. (These numbers were released to the public by the Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal this morning.) From 2003 to 2004, the number of arrests went up by 42%. The Tanguay prison is full of women who've been incarcerated following these accusations. One of our priorities after the forum will be to address the situation. We will eventually need to reopen the dialogue with the City of Montreal—a dialogue that shut down after the failure of the pilot project. The City's is going overboard with intolerance aimed at people who occupy public spaces for one reason or another, and it can't go on.

As for Canada as a whole, we need to work on an effective strategy to bring about the legislative changes that are important for us. I'm very much looking forward to hearing Catherine Healy from New Zealand—a Commonwealth country like Canada—to explain how they managed to create legislative change when here, we still can't see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Internationally, sex workers at large will have to be vigilant. This is even more important for us as Canadians, since having the United States as our neighbours down south makes things more difficult sometimes. We really need to make sure that the Canadian government doesn't align itself with American policies based on the Religious Right's anti-prostitution positions—particularly when it comes to international aid and within that, particularly in terms of HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment.

What I can tell you, to finish up, is that all the women I work with fill me with joy every day, and are an immense source of inspiration.

We are Stella: immortal, insatiable, thirsty for social justice. We are the mistresses of our own resistance, the suffragettes of the Main, libertarians and illusion-breakers. We are the "I" that discovers solidarity, the "we" that creates the snowball effect. We are a wave that nobody can stop. We are here, there, everywhere. We are beyond borders.

A Kolkata perspective

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (India)

by

Representative, Durbar Mahila
Samanwaya Committee (DMSC)

Rama Debnath

Introduction of Durbar

The Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (or Indomitable Women's Coordination Committee), known as Durbar or the DMSC, is a forum of 65,000 sex workers (men, women and transgendered persons) and their children who are headquartered in Kolkata, India. Working among sex worker populations in West Bengal, DMSC actively networks with sex worker projects and groups in India and abroad, with the aim of uniting sex workers and raising demands for their rights. DMSC is explicit about its objectives of fighting for more secure legal status for sex workers and their children and for the protection of their rights. DMSC demands the decriminalization of adult sex work and is struggling to gain workers' rights, recognition and benefits for sex workers. Since its inception, DMSC has been an active partner in the implementation and management of the sexually transmitted infections and HIV Intervention Programme (SHIP, better known globally as the Sonagachi Project).

Our experience of ten years of activism and struggle has been manifold and varied. The main successes of that struggle can be summarized as follows:

- * We have created selfhood and self-esteem among sex workers and generated the discourse that sex work is an occupation and not a moral condition, and therefore sex workers are workers in the sex industry and not merely "fallen" or "aberrant" women, men or transgendered people who are entitled to a set of rights (*odheeka*).
- * We have united sex workers, both brothel-based and street-based, and organized them to form groups with a shared identity and shared aspirations centred on their rights.
- * We have challenged the stigma and discrimination associated with sex work and sex workers and demanded to be seen not as victims but as active agents who have the capacity to change their lives. The most visible manifestations of this have been the takeover by sex workers' organizations of the Sonagachi Project in 1999 from a government research institute, and the formation of the sex workers' cooperative bank.
- * We have built organizations for and with sex workers to make the community self-reliant and visible. Among the fruits of our struggle and activism are DMSC, the sex workers' activist organization; Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd. (Usha), a cooperative bank; Komol Gandhar, a multi-performance cultural troupe; the Durbar Education Programme; and the Binodini Labour Union.
- * We have replicated the Sonagachi Project experience and scaled up our health interventions among sex worker groups throughout the state of West Bengal. Having begun with intervention in one sex work site in 1992, the Sonagachi model for sexually transmitted infections and HIV intervention is currently being used in 47 brothel-based and street-based sex work sites throughout the state.
- * We have challenged existing constructs on gender, sex, sexuality and sex work and created spaces for the voice of the sex workers' community to be heard in the larger society.
- * We have challenged and changed existing power relations within the sex trade that stigmatize, oppress and exploit sex workers. We have successfully challenged and stopped old practices of bonded sex work. We have challenged and neutralized the power of the pimp-landlady-madam-moneylender-police-thug nexus that oppressed and exploited us. We have, through our struggle, usurped the power of stakeholders as arbiters in disputes and as those who decide the fate of sex workers.

- * We have instituted systems and procedures that build sustainable institutions within sex work sites to prevent trafficking of underage girls and unwilling women into sex work, particularly through the formation of Durbar Self-Regulatory Boards.
- * We have protested visibly and in force against police atrocities and other forms of violence against sex workers, and protested against violations of citizen's rights by state and government.
- * We have centre-staged the struggle for sex workers' demands for workers' rights, human rights and civil rights.
- * We have created environments and institutions where our children can learn, play and grow. We run two residential homes for children to provide them with educational opportunities usually denied them by "mainstream" society, which stigmatizes our children along with us.

The Durbar Vision

We seek a world where all marginalized communities live in harmony enjoying equal respect, rights and dignity. We work to make real a social order where there is no discrimination based on race, class, creed, religion, caste, gender, occupation or disease status and all global citizens live in peace and harmony.

The Durbar Mission

Durbar's mission is to bring about social and political change in order to establish rights and dignity and improve the social status and quality of life of sex worker communities (female, male and transgendered) as part of the global movement to establish the rights of marginalized people through:

- * Increasing sex workers' self-esteem and self-image;
- * Working to change anti-sex worker norms, policies and practices operating at all levels of society;
- * Empowering communities through processes of collectivization, organization-building and capacity-building;
- * Addressing and changing power relations within the sex trade and outside it;
- * Demanding the recognition of sex work as work and of sex workers as workers and demanding an end of their exploitation and oppression;
- * Preventing underage sex work, trafficking and all other forms of exploitative sex work by means of self-regulatory boards organized by sex workers;
- * Taking direct action through non-violent means to protest civil and human rights violations and stigma and discrimination against individual sex workers and sex worker communities—female, male and transgendered;
- * Creating formal and informal alliances with individuals, groups, institutions and movements to fulfil this mission.

A Lyon perspective

Cabiria (France)

by

Director of Cabiria

Corinne Monnet

We would first like to thank Stella for inviting us to this forum. We're excited to be here and to be taking part in this meeting—all the more so since the current socio-political context in France is creating an urgent need for solidarity, action and coordination both nationally and internationally. The meetings of the next several days will certainly have positive effects. We believe that together, we'll succeed in raising the energy we need to continue the fight for the rights of sex workers!

We'd like to begin by briefly introducing Cabiria. Created in 1993 as a community health action project in collaboration with sex workers, we've since taken part in creating an epistemological breach in the way prostitution is dealt with in France. At Cabiria, we have sex workers on salary, and they are present in every level of the association's activities. To briefly give some context, until then, France only had classic social work associations based on the idea of social reinsertion and rehabilitation for sex workers, where help was only given after you proved your eligibility by playing the victim. Among other things, these social workers didn't give out condoms, because that would be seen as promoting prostitution.

Cabiria is an association that does prevention work to fight against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, and works for access to health care and other services. To do our work, the team operates directly in sex workers' milieus, day and night, making rounds. Our mission is also to facilitate people's access to their fundamental rights, to fight against exclusion and stigma. When sex work is practiced in secret and rejected by society, sex workers' vulnerability is only reinforced. Our prevention work is closely linked with civil rights, physical and psychological safety, self-esteem and the fight against the stigmatization of sex workers.

We support sex workers as they encounter medical, administrative, legal and social services, and provide everyday help. We also welcome them into our space, which is intended to provide a friendly atmosphere and create a sense of community and closeness. As well as support and counselling, we provide legal clinics, meals, and we run a 24-hour hotline in case of violence or arrest.

In addition, the association has also developed a research department, primarily in social sciences and international relations, a publishing house and a website. We've also developed a network of international partners who advocate for sex workers' rights. Thanks to our policies and our research, particularly with migrant workers, the association has gained recognition all over Europe.

Lastly, since the end of 2002, the association has taken on another innovative project: the , which aims to give everyone access to learning. This endeavour was built on the model of people's universities and is open to all traditionally excluded populations.

Over and above Cabiria's everyday activities, we've developed a very strong policy for sex worker visibility, and to fight against the whore stigma and against repression. We support all endeavours developed by sex workers to fight for their rights, and we work continually in a number of ways to help their voices get heard and to deconstruct the dominant discourse of politicians, the media and researchers on the subject of sex workers.

In France, the "60s regulations", promulgated to combat certain social ills, define prostitutes as socially maladapted victims who need reintegration help. Sex work is not forbidden, because it's considered to be a private affair. But as an abolitionist country, France perceives sex work as unworthy and as putting the well-being of individuals in danger as well as that of the family and society.

The consequence is that sex workers, in addition to having the skills they need for their work, must deal with the omnipresent stigma associated with it. Repression is standard fare, through the various constraints that stem from abolitionism: the difficulty finding housing without going to great lengths to hide their profession and other elements of their lives, the impossibility of filing complaints, the restriction of private life, the inability to talk about work, the difficulty of associating with colleagues...

In addition to this, we must consider the constant abuse from the police, which starts with the systematic practice of keeping files on people. These files are against the rules, but their existence in high numbers says a lot about the police's desire to humiliate, dominate and discipline sex workers. But the worst is the confiscation of sex workers' speeches—confiscated because they're not fit to be heard, because they're judged to be false, because they're perceived as being dictated by vice, by procurement, or by the most sordid kinds of misery. Any excuse will do, as long as we don't have to listen to them. And especially so they don't lead any other women to believe that this kind of work could be an option for them...

And repression has once again gotten much worse.

One of our most recent battles—unfortunately, it's still ongoing—is against the Interior Security Law (*Loi sur la sécurité intérieure*) of March 18, 2003, which punishes solicitation with a two months of prison without remission and a fine of €750. The security policy isn't new, but it's getting wider and stronger. The zero-tolerance approach hasn't explicitly included sex workers until now with this new law, but now it's open season. The French government, along with the media, has declared war on prostitution.

Since then, we've continued to challenge the police and lawmakers' logic, which is only making sex workers' work and living conditions worse. As emblematic figures of transgression and disorder, sex workers have become the new scapegoats of security policy.

The application of this law, presented by legislators as a tool to help combat trafficking, has only served to encourage intimidation and police violence, facilitate the deportation of migrants, force people to work in secret and scale back access to health services and fundamental rights.

The institutionalized persecution visited on sex workers puts them in danger. The consequences for sex workers are dramatic. Today, sex workers are concerned about their safety above all, and have fallen into patterns of secrecy and day-to-day survival tactics—particularly migrant women. In addition to legitimizing stigma and exposing sex workers more than ever to insults and assaults everywhere they turn, this wave of security endeavours has placed them in a doubly precarious situation: a sex worker's difficulty earning a living is intimately tied to every other potential difficulty he or she may face.

These various coercive measures, which are supposedly intended to make people feel safer, have only succeeded in creating a pervasively poisonous climate. Constant anxiety, fear of the future and manifest insecurity have combined to make sex workers' concerns with safeguarding their work overwhelming, to the detriment of seeing to their own personal safety.

For the past two years, assaults, thefts, rapes, and attempted murders have been part of sex workers' everyday life (see Cabiria's *Journal des repressions*, or repression log, on Cairia's web site). These incidents of abuse are becoming more and more violent—a phenomenon directly related to the fact that many men enjoy a sense of impunity, knowing that sex workers are frowned on by the law, and take advantage of the situation. But violence also comes from the police. Sex workers commonly experience repeated police checks, harassment, insults, threats and other abuses of power. Money theft, verbal attacks, confiscation of identification papers and arrest have made a comeback. It's important to note that this state of affairs dates back to the law on solicitation, which opened the door to all sorts of violence.

In addition, condom negotiations has been made more difficult thanks to the atmosphere of insecurity and the fear of getting caught by the police, and increasing numbers of clients are pressuring sex workers to provide services without protection. Sex workers are forced to make service arrangements in a hurry and while staying hidden—this includes evaluating their clients as well as negotiating prices, services and condom use. And let's not forget that violence is always a factor that increases women's risk for contracting HIV.

Above all, the law gives police forces more power. Identity checks, threats, refusal to intervene in cases of assault, insults, humiliation and deportations are increasing to the point that they almost seem par for the course. To date, we've recorded more than 500 incidents of people being held for questioning or taken into custody in Lyon, including thirty charges of "solicitation." Evidently, sex workers are the ones who end up in court, sentenced most times to fines but sometimes also to jail time—or deportation, since a disproportionate number of migrant women are targeted.

A person who's targeted by police as a prostitute, simply for being in the street, can be arrested and taken into custody, and then the judicial machine is set in motion. Clearly, the Interior Security Law is part and parcel of the system that includes the Daily Security Law (*Loi sur la sécurité quotidienne*) and the Immigration Law (*Loi sur l'immigration*), which are no longer interested in criminalizing acts but would rather focus on criminalizing people. These security laws have brought about a rebirth of the "dangerous classes" and have simply paved the way and normalized the process of criminalizing misery.

The government strategy is equally focused on crushing solidarity among sex workers, re-stigmatizing migrant women and legitimizing the violence suffered by these groups. In addition, while sex workers have always been and still are veritable agents promoting safer sex, chances are that in the future, if they're painted into a corner outside the law and forced to work in the shadows, they'll have fewer and fewer options for practicing their professions in appropriate sanitary conditions.

The end goal of the law is clear: to sweep clean the sidewalks of France. Every day the situation gets worse. If a sex worker wasn't a victim before, through the application of this law she can easily become one. Regulation and discourse have never managed to make prostitution disappear... one might be tempted to think that the Interior Security Law is a band-aid on the failure of abolitionism, 60s regulations and reintegration injunctions. Since fifty years of abolitionist efforts haven't managed to convince sex workers that their work is unworthy and that they're nothing but victims, the best way to force them to admit it—paradoxical though it may sound—must of course be to name them criminals!

Policy manoeuvres, daily repression and the internalization of the double stigma (victim and delinquent) have concrete effects on women's lives, on their physical and mental health. When a person is accused of embodying every evil, eventually that wears them down... and when legislation gets involved, prejudice ends up being backed up by the law. Having been on the wrong side of morality and convention for years, sex workers are now also on the wrong side of the law.

Migrant workers are the first ones targeted. The French state considers them undesirables, not "good refugees," so of course they must be deported as a result. When these women request to have their papers processed, the Prefecture seems determined to prevent them—despite the fact that the women are not obliged to do so in the first place. Considering the mounting difficulties faced by migrant women, Cabiria has recently been obliged to enter into civil disobedience to fight the situation.

Since 1999, we have had a flexible structure designed to adapt to the needs of new migrant women arriving in Lyon, in particular with our innovative practice of working with cultural mediators. Today, in Lyon like in other major French cities, it's estimated that at least 60% of sex workers are migrant women coming mainly from sub-Saharan African and Eastern countries.

Cabiria has chosen to support these women from the moment of their arrival throughout their process of seeking asylum, and to work with them as we would with anybody else. At the beginning this earned us much criticism since it was perceived as support for trafficking. But it meant that far fewer migrant sex workers were deported from Lyon compared to other cities, where planes were regularly filled with women forced to return to their countries. Of course, solicitation is considered a threat to public order under the law, so arrests make deportation easier.

The solicitation law is applied in a racist fashion, and works in tandem with efforts to curb immigration, despite how it was supposedly intended to fight trafficking.

Lastly, Cabiria has contributed to enriching knowledge on the subject throughout Europe through action-based research carried out in close collaboration with migrant sex workers. This research has helped us to show the specific difficulties these individuals face due to their position as women, as migrants and as sex workers. It has also attempted to deconstruct the notion of trafficking and debunk the idea of the "sex slave"—a figure dearly loved by the media, public authorities and abolitionists everywhere, but utterly counterproductive for the women themselves. While the issue of trafficking is being debated widely all over Europe, the perspectives and experiences of the women themselves are rarely documented. Cabiria and its partners aim to fill the gap with an approach based on human rights, gender and empowerment.

In conclusion, we regret that we can't be more optimistic, but the situation of sex workers in France is critical—all the more so since the penalization of sex workers has happened quietly, and support for them has been meagre. While a few cases of injustice have been exposed, they've been mainly circumstantial; many people haven't been able to side with sex workers because of rampant and militant abolitionist views. Despite extreme circumstances that cut off part of the population from their ability to earn wages and live decently, we rarely encounter people who truly feel angered at the injustice of these laws.

With a "safer" Europe on the horizon, the future holds little hope. 2004 was not a good year, and 2005 has gotten off to a difficult start. On a positive note, however, we are continuing to focus on clear argumentation and commitment to the cause.

Thanks once again to you; I would like to stress the importance of these meetings. When faced with this much adversity, it's essential for us to be able to count on our allies.

Me

and

my

work

Me and my work

Introduction

Our first Forum XXX theme, “Me and My Work,” focused on how sex workers’ personal strategies feed collective action with the aim to improve health, security, and the respect of sex workers’ dignity. In the panel presentations and discussions on this theme, we highlighted the importance of individual experiences and how these feed into our collective realities.

The “Me and My Work” panel was complemented by two workshops where sex workers and activists provided interactive training on how to implement some of our strategies. The workshop entitled “Self-Defence,” led by Mai and Louise— two kung fu artists from Montreal, Canada—was designed especially for sex workers. We discussed how to exercise your right to say no, how to set boundaries with clients, and how to defend yourself in a situation where you are being assaulted. There was a particular focus on how sex workers can assess clients and how to prevent assault before it happens.

The second workshop around this theme was entitled “Working with HIV,” led by Tara Santini and Cynthia Lee of Stella (Montréal, Canada). Sex workers have been accused and stigmatized as being responsible for the spread of HIV. This has raised issues of discrimination, stigma and silence about HIV within the sex industry. We often talk about HIV and sex work, but we don’t necessarily talk about how to work within the context of the HIV pandemic. Is there a space where it’s safe to disclose that you are HIV-positive and talk about your concerns? If you are infected, what do you need to do to work safely and ensure that your rights are respected? These questions and others were addressed in the workshop.

In this section of the *eXXXpressions*, you will find panel presentations from Émilie Laliberté and Marie-Neige St-Jean of Stella (Montreal, Canada), Liad Kantorowicz (Tel Aviv, Israel), and Ping Pong of Empower (Chiang Mai, Thailand). Each presented their individual and collective experiences as part of the “Me and My Work” panel. Next, we’ve provided a summary of some of the discussions that followed the panel. Within each summary, we have included action strategies suggested by Forum XXX participants. Pride and coming out were both flagged as important mechanisms supporting our individual and collective work. Health and safety were also named as key issues both within our personal lives and within our work. The participants’ reflections presented here are by no means exhaustive when it comes to listing the issues addressed during the forum. Individuals or groups of sex workers worldwide will no doubt continue to work through these issues, and implement some of the strategies outlined here.

We complete the section on the Forum XXX’s first theme with a performance piece written by Mirha-Soleil Ross (Toronto, Canada) and performed during our closing presentation. In it, Mirha-Soleil talks about her personal experience with her clients and about clients’ place beside us in our struggle for our rights. By demystifying our clients, Mirha-Soleil shows how crucial it is to take pride in our work, and how valuable our individual contributions are to the collective voice of our movement.

Transforming Individual Paths into a Stellar Collective Project

Stella, Montreal (Canada)

by

Staff Members, Stella

Émilie Laliberté and
Marie-Neige St-Jean

The Expertise of Sex Workers: At the Heart of Stella's Work

Long live sex workers! Because we are women, transvestites, transsexuals—beautiful and proud, intelligent and sensual. Because for time eternal, we've been working all over the world; we work with our bodies, our sexuality, our knowledge, our softness. We are the lovers of the world! Because throughout time and history, we have been here, heads held high, fighting for better lives and better work conditions.

Because we are queens. Because we have chosen to exist fully, and not to submit to the moulds that were forced upon us. We are society's underground priestesses. And each of us has developed rich experience and knowledge. While our individual experiences may be very different, they can teach us a lot. It's important to come together and share our knowledge and expertise. Together, we have the power to make history. Together, we can fight for our economic, sexual and social autonomy.

Stella was born out of this desire for empowerment. Ten years ago, four sex workers united their strengths and brought together their knowledge to create a space devoted to the dignity and safety of sex workers. Over the years, the Stella team has grown, and has reached out to more sex workers every year. And the experience of our peer outreach workers has definitely been a major element in helping us reach sex workers in Montreal and surrounding areas, and to understand their needs. At Stella, we believe that an erotic dancer is hired for the thousands of "tricks" she's learned on the job, her human relations and social skills, and because having worked with thousands of clients and all sorts of other dancers, she's a professional in her field. Recognizing that experience and giving her credit for it—that's empowerment.

Also, by encouraging sex workers to get involved with Stella and bring to the table their diverse forms of expertise and wide knowledge of the milieu, Stella has helped sex workers come together from all areas of the industry. Dancers, masseuses, prostitutes and escorts have all been able to share their knowledge among themselves and with a variety of their peers. And above all, they've broken their own isolation and that of the other women they rub shoulders with every day. The street workers involved with Stella come from every area of the industry and understand the wide variety of dynamics around sex work. This diversity is what makes the Stella team beautiful and strong.

Stella is a space reserved for sex workers, where they can exchange information and openly discuss the realities that affect them without having to censor themselves or deal with others' prejudice. They can talk about menstruation on the job, clients' sexual practices, existing types of services, prices, employers, sexuality in general, body image, living with HIV or AIDS, family and children, police repression, drug use and more.

In addition, the key advantage of involving people who have experience as sex workers resides in their ability to develop trust more easily with other sex workers, because even those with a very different background can understand one another in a very unique way. How better to respond to the needs of sex workers than by understanding and having experienced those same needs? Who could be better placed to know what this kind of discrimination is like? We know firsthand how society judges and generalizes all too easily...

When personal experience translates into collective action

Stella places the contribution and involvement of sex workers at the heart of its activities, showcasing the fact that sex work is diversified. Our approach of creating materials using the knowledge acquired by sex workers illustrates how individual strategies can help inform collective action. Our materials suggest practical work tips, and they validate and reinforce our confidence when it comes to setting our limits.

Here are a few examples of the Stella’s materials, created by and for sex workers.

The XXX Guide

addresses the various facets of our work, and provides information and references to help us live and work safely and with dignity. The guide covers contract or service negotiation, safer sex, client relations, rights, stress, and ways to deal with institutions. All the advice and tips on health, safety and on how to respect our personal limits come from individual strategies developed by sex workers.

In *The XXX Guide*, you will find:

- * If the client does not want to use a condom: Sell the merits of using condoms. Statements like: “I am safe,” “I passed the test,” “I won’t be able to come,” or “I’ll lose my hard-on” don’t guarantee that he is healthy. Try to make him agree by using these lines:
 - Lubricant at the end of the condom makes the penis even more sensitive
 - Latex gets you aroused
 - The feeling of a textured condom excites you
 - You’ll give him a blow job while you put the condom on with your mouth
 - Sex lasts longer when you use a condom
 - You are an expert in giving pleasure to men who wear condoms.
- * Alternatives to anal sex: You can say no. Say you have diarrhoea and he should stop pestering you immediately.
- * When you go to a client’s place: Take the time to tell someone that you have arrived. Once you’re in the door, call or pretend to call your agency or a friend, indicating your exact location. Do it in front of the client so that he knows that someone knows where you are.

The Striptease Guide

The Striptease Guide contains all sorts of information for women who do nude dance. It aims to improve workers’ control over their lives and their work by straightforwardly addressing the realities of the job. For example:

- * The questions to ask when you’re looking for a club to work in
- * Client relations
- * Schedules and useful resources

Here’s an example of the sort of tips you will find:

- * Before going to see a placement agency, decide in advance what type of dancing you want to do, because you will have more confidence and it will be easier to ensure that your conditions, your choices, and your personal limits are respected.

These guides are distributed by the people involved with Stella, but also by sex workers themselves in their various workplaces. They’re particularly useful for people just getting started in the field of sex work. For example, a few weeks ago, some of Stella’s participants mentioned that a nude dancer they knew had given a copy of *The Striptease Guide* to a young woman who was looking for her first job as a sex worker. She handed the woman the guide and said, “Before you start, read this.”

Dear John

Dear John is a manual for clients. It was created to help them better understand and respect our limits. The manual deconstructs the myths around sex work, informs them about various

types of services, and provides accurate information about sexual health and safer sex practices to help them protect against sexually and blood-transmitted infections. It covers negotiation with sex workers and provides tips and tricks on how to behave with a sex worker. Sex workers decided to create the guide because they believe that to improve their work conditions, it’s essential to involve and sensitize their clients.

Stella is for the most part made up of and managed by sex workers. It places sex workers at the heart of its outreach work and its decision-making structure—members, volunteers, employees and members of the board of directors. The way sex workers have come together within Stella has helped establish solidarity and create a space where people feel a strong sense of belonging. It has also helped sex workers to recognize and identify common concerns and needs, and to translate them into collective actions and demands. Our challenge for the future is to continue working on collective mobilization by sharing our experiences in the spirit of diversity.

Stella’s impact on Émilie: a story of dignity

Before I started working at Stella, I had experienced isolation and the fear of being judged, despite the fact that I’d never felt I was doing anything bad... quite the contrary! With my fiery tongue, I made many people happy! But in experiencing the acceptance of this wonderful community of sex workers, I finally managed to breathe deeply and feel good. For the first time in my life as an escort, I felt alive, free and happy, accepted and loved, and seen for who I am. I finally had a positive view on my work.

Yes, Stella gave me a beautiful gift: they taught me to be proud of myself. When I became a part of the sex workers’ movement, I found my inner strength. Being recognized by my peers did me an enormous amount of good. My need to feel a sense of belonging was finally fulfilled, and today I can feel the power of pride coursing through my veins! As my friend and work colleague, Kathryn Delaney, says: “Once a ho’, always a ho’!” Well today, because of Stella, I can yell it loud to anyone: “Yes I am a ho’! And will always be proud of it!”

Stella’s impact on Marie-Neige: a story of family

For more than ten years, I hid the truth about my work from my parents, and my brother and sister, also sex workers, did the same. I lived in the shadows, in secrecy, and eaten up by the shame of having to lie all the time. Thanks to Stella, I found the confidence and the courage to tell my parents the truth. Today, I am extremely happy to have a relationship with my family that’s based on honesty and authenticity. You will have the opportunity to see my father play his guitar to accompany a good friend at Stella’s tenth anniversary show. My father respects Stella and sex workers’ fight for their rights as workers.

Solo Activism and Making Sex Work Visible

Tel Aviv (Israël)

by

Liad Kantorowicz

For some time now, I have been a sex worker and an advocate for the rights of sex workers in Israel. Currently I'm one of only two "out" sex workers working for the advancement of the rights of sex workers, and the only sex-work-positive activist. In order to better explain the work I've been doing for the past two and a half years, I'd first like to start by briefly explaining the circumstances in which the work I've done has taken place by giving a short background on sex work in Israel.

The majority of sex work in Israel revolves around prostitution, which has an "a-legal" status (not legal and not illegal). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Israel became the second most popular destination for migrating and trafficked women in the Western world, with most migrants coming from the former Soviet Union. Today the sex worker community is comprised of Jewish migrants from the former Soviet Union, native Israelis, transgendered people and Palestinian men.

As war and military occupation are top national concerns for the Israeli state and society, social issues constantly fall short of receiving the attention they deserve and Israeli society is very ignorant when it comes to progressive social policies. This is exemplified by the fact that the abolitionist feminist discourse has been the *only* "progressive" voice in the public debate regarding sex work, and a sex workers' perspective was never even heard of, much less considered, before 2002.

Along with Palestinians and transgendered people, sex workers are the most stigmatized, marginalized and oppressed minority in Israel today. Israel is a very small place with a very communal feeling, so coming out as a sex worker means taking the consequences of community backlash and even dealing with danger to oneself. Many sex workers are people who come from precarious situations and lack basic rights, so their ability to defend their rights or to speak out about their needs publicly is limited at best.

Sex workers make up a demographic that has never seen any autonomous collective organizing in Israel, whether for their inner-community needs or for outward, political purposes. The public image of and public policy pertaining to sex workers has been almost entirely shaped by outside forces, such as policy-makers and the abolitionist feminist movement, many of whom have never met a sex worker in their lives. Sex workers are considered to embody the stereotype of a faceless, helpless victim and a social outcast.

Given these circumstances the question that arises is: what needs to be done in order to promote the visibility and the legitimacy of the existence of sex workers? In addressing this question in my work, I have focused for the last few years on two fronts. The first is direct fieldwork with sex workers, and the second is advocacy for sex workers' rights in the greater Israeli public.

Grassroots organizing in Tel Aviv

In 2004 I started a pilot outreach project that promotes accessible health services to migrant sex workers. The project was conducted in conjunction with the Israeli NGO Physicians for Human Rights and the Health Department's Clinic for the Control of STIs. During the course of our work, we ran a hotline which was used by migrant sex workers. Its purpose was to help them reach accessible, non-judgmental doctors who could meet their healthcare needs without opting for formal healthcare. The sex workers were accompanied to healthcare services by Russian-speaking volunteers who provided support and mediation.

We distributed information about this project to sex workers by making regular visits to warehouses across Tel Aviv. The visits, the assistance and the accompaniment of sex workers to health services served as a gateway for us to make contact with this neglected and un-represented population, to hear them tell us about things that concern them, and occasionally to provide them with emotional support and give them helpful information in fields that extend far beyond health.

This was the first outreach program in Israel that was geared towards sex workers who are still working—not those who are imprisoned, waiting deportation or hospitalized in rehab. The project encountered many challenges, the first one being the difficulty that non-migrants had in entering the migrant sex worker community. This required trust on the behalf of sex workers, who were suspicious of undercover cops and con artists, and sometimes required the consent of pimps. In the middle of the year the Israeli police raided and deported a vast portion of the migrant sex workers in Tel Aviv, which tore apart the network of connections we had managed to establish and pushed the remaining sex workers further underground and into a place that is much less accessible or trusting of us. As local sex workers came to replace migrant sex workers, we found ourselves working with a completely different population, sometimes with different needs. Another challenge was the financial issue, as the project ran out of money in September and has since been at a standstill.

Perhaps the biggest challenge was getting the volunteers to extend themselves and learn about a different culture. Working with mainly Israeli-born middle-class activists from other organizations, I have found tremendous amounts of underlying racism and patronization. For example, a common belief among “professional feminists” is that the basis of the migrant sex workers’ “inferior decision-making capabilities” which led them to work in prostitution was their background, coming from an inferior and backwards culture that has no awareness of women’s rights. Thus the project also became a way to educate myself, the volunteers and other “professional feminists” about migrant sex workers’ lives, cultures and issues. Currently this project is on hold until the day we find proper funding to see its continuation and to extend it to the non-migrant sex worker community.

Advocacy for the visibility and rights of sex workers

In May of 2002 I first agreed to out myself publicly by getting interviewed to Israeli national newspaper *Haaretz*. The article stirred up lots of public attention, as this was a first time that a sex worker was outing herself and referring to sex work as a source of income rather than a source of oppression. It was also the first time that the term “sex worker” was used in Hebrew, the first time that the concept of sex workers’ rights were discussed, and the first time that a sex worker who does not see herself as a victim was discussing it. Since then, I learned that I don’t need others to write about sex work, and that I can write about it myself. I first started by writing a weekly column on sex work and feminism. Later on I moved to writing articles in both national and local papers, speaking at conferences, public panels and forums and giving lectures in various types of public locations. I also started getting interviewed for TV, a process that required me to completely come out of the closet—not just by name but also in that I would from then onwards be recognized by my face.

I found that the Israeli media does have an interest in discussing sex-work-related issues—first and foremost because of the sensationalist aspect of it. But I also found that coverage of sex-worker-related issues does not necessarily have to be done in a sensationalist manner. People find the fact that sex workers are speaking out for themselves and the things they say refreshing and they are genuinely interested in listening. I have used this as a lever for educating the public about issues affecting sex workers, to expand public perceptions about who these sex workers are and what sex work is, and to use the media as a platform to gain public support for a sex-worker-positive agenda.

In terms of media advocacy, I’ve tried to give a public front to the sex workers’ agenda in Israel by focusing on several issues, such as:

- * Sex workers’ right to self-definition and autonomy;
- * Sex workers’ right to take part in the development of public policy and laws that affect them;

- * Sex workers’ right not to be cast out from society or discriminated against in areas of life such as employment (both outside of the sex industry and within it), housing, raising children, and health services;
- * And finally, the right to have sex work considered a legitimate form of employment and to receive social recognition for sex workers’ rights as labour rights and migration rights.

Aside from focusing on a political agenda, it has been equally important for me to highlight the personal and cultural aspects of the sex industry, on the more human sides of it. One of the issues I’ve focused on is trying to break the stereotypical depiction of the sex worker as a victim—poor, uneducated and often a migrant—by giving as many diverse perspectives of sex workers as possible: masseuses both male and female, students who occasionally work as escorts and then go back to waitressing, webcam girls who work from home, a male professional dominatrix who works for Hassidic Jews in Jerusalem, or native Israeli prostitutes—just to give a few examples. The point is to acquaint the public with the facts that sex workers come in different shapes and forms and that they exist everywhere.

It has been important for me to highlight personal stories, to show sex workers as average people who often come from within Israeli society and often from precarious background—as precariousness is something that is increasingly common in Israel thus more and more people can identify with it. Until now, any time a public discussion arose, sex workers were presented either as a demographic or a problem if discussed by researchers, or as a political and social agenda if discussed by feminists, and any use of personal information has been manipulated in order to shape these groups’ public agendas. The strategy of showing the human faces of sex workers helps gain the average Israeli’s empathy towards sex workers and helps sex workers to be seen as people rather than a social phenomenon. I try to show how sex workers are integrated with the rest of Israeli society and how sex workers are people who come from within Israeli society and are a part of it. I do this in order to break the myth that sex workers are marginalized because they and their work are not a part of society, or that whatever they do is abnormal.

I believe that it will certainly take much more than the written and public work of one sex worker to overturn the tremendous influence that conservative feminists have over shaping public opinion about sex work, so there is still lots of work to be done. Nevertheless, this sort of advocacy is already showing results. One indication of change is that I have been invited, as a sex worker, to sit on committees that deal with policy regarding sex workers, and I have been treated as an equal to the parliament members sitting next to me; oftentimes, I have even been treated as an expert. To me, one of the most important elements in terms of advocacy work for the legitimacy and visibility of sex workers is that work’s influence on sex workers themselves—in trying to help sex workers lose their own sense of shame and start thinking of themselves in ways other than shameful. I am continuously being approached by closeted sex workers who feel comfortable coming out to another person without shame for the first time, who are surprised and grateful to be introduced to these new sex-work-positive perspectives and who want to get more information or learn about ways of getting involved.

Apparently solo activism is a common model in Israel, especially amongst marginalized groups like lesbian Palestinians and Ethiopian migrant women. Like in my case, both of these other examples take the form of having one outspoken and public woman who has gone through the steps of coming out and whose coming out has empowered and opened the way for others like her. Sometimes, this has led to group organizing. In the last year, the first group of lesbian Palestinians became an official organization. I hope that myself and other sex workers residing in Israel can follow this example and organize into an autonomous group in the near future.

How Personal Experiences in Thailand and Burma Facilitated the Creation of Empower Projects

Empower, Chiang Mai (Thailand)

by

Ping Pong

Hello my name is Ping Pong, real name Table Tennis. I come from Empower in Thailand. I am happy to be here visiting my family in Canada. I feel I am a migrant sex worker in Canada after being trafficked here by Stella, but please don't rescue me!

In Thailand, at Empower, we are a community. We are a community because it gives us strength, we share a particular sex worker culture, we are all away from our home communities and we are looked down on by mainstream society. Our community is rich and varied. Empower looks and sounds different every day. One day last week, Empower looked like this:

On that day, there were 58 women sex workers.

- * All of us were daughters.
- * 38 of us were mothers.
- * 24 of us were native Thai speakers; the others spoke a mixture of 17 other languages.
- * All of us had migrated from our hometowns to work. 36 of us had migrated from another country.
- * 15 of us had travel documents.
- * 14 of us have never been to school before. 39 of us can read and write, and 5 have studied at university.
- * 12 of us work in beer bars, 5 in go-go bars; 10 in karaoke lounges. 8 work in massage parlours, 12 in brothels and another 12 work freelance or as a sideline.
- * The reasons we each came to the Empower space today: 20 studied Thai literacy, 22 studied English, 1 had a nap, 15 of us work at Empower. As well as this, 8 also wrote love notes by e-mail, 10 ate together and 5 came for health advice.
- * 37 of us work with Western customers, the rest of us work with Asian tourists and local men.
- * 50 of us are Buddhist, 5 of us are Christian, 2 of us are Muslim, 1 of us has no particular religion.
- * 58 of us are sex workers

Warning: Do not try and make this into meaningful statistics or percentages. It is a snapshot of Empower one day, and Empower will never be exactly like this again!

I was one of the women at Empower that day. I am one of the sex workers who have been given an opportunity to work for the Empower community. I am a *Pi* in Empower. *Pi* is a Thai word that in mainstream culture means "older one." In Empower culture it is a term of affection and respect, and it acknowledges leadership. You cannot decide yourself to be *Pi*. I could be as smart, powerful or well connected as I like, but unless the other women in Empower call me "Pi Ping Pong," it is impossible for me to be a leader in Empower. It is a role and a title that my community gives me.

I don't see my individual experience in sex work as being much to talk about here really. It does mean that I have the heart and knowledge to be a leader in my community. It does mean that when I speak out in public I am respected for having firsthand knowledge of my subject. However, in a diverse community like ours, it is important to leave your ego at home, and remember that your individual experience is not relevant to everyone or important in every situation. At Empower we respect and use everyone's experiences together; no one has more value than another.

Society tries to divide us as women and as sex workers enough as it is; good women vs. bad women; freelance workers vs. employees, migrant sex workers vs. local sex workers. Empower works hard and has been successful at blurring all the lines that keep us apart. We are good at combining our strengths, skills and experiences; we are good at coming together. We are not so great at dividing ourselves up. Sex workers are Empower; Empower is sex workers, we can't feel the difference. The power we have is the power we share.

Participants' eXXXpressions on « Me and My Work »

Stella, Montréal (Canada)

Synthesis by

Jenn Clamen

Pride

Pride is one of the elements that drive the sex workers' rights movement—pride in our work, pride in our demands, and pride in ourselves. Pride, for most of us, means being able to come out and stand up for our work as sex workers and activists. It is tied in with empowerment and with the encouragement we give one another to go on, to build strength in our movement and in our individual lives. The ability to take pride in ourselves and in our beliefs is not limited to sex workers; it can be extended to our supporters, our clients and the general public.

Challenges to pride

The heavy stigma attached to sex work often stands in the way of our ability to take pride in ourselves and in our work. Negative stereotypes that misrepresent who we are can make it difficult to come out publicly and shine in all our diversity. Hierarchies and stereotypes of beauty also affect the degree to which we feel proud. Often, our strategies for creating positive images are met with the criticism that we are over-glamourizing ourselves and our work. But in truth, a hugely diverse range of people are involved in the sex trade, and more diverse representations serve to reveal that we are a multifaceted constituency. This diversity drives our efforts towards recognition as workers, and feeds our ability to survive as a movement.

Q : How can we be loud and proud?

A : We can...

- * Celebrate our victories!
- * Remind ourselves of our successes, rather than focusing on our failures.
- * Build on our individual skills and assign ourselves achievable tasks for our personal development.
- * Create safe spaces (like drop-ins or forums) for sex workers to gather, discuss, and strategize. Coming out and being part of a group can help nourish and foster pride in our work and in ourselves.
- * Organize activities, projects and days of celebration to help build pride.
- * Refuse to internalize other people's shame.
- * Educate those around us about the pride we take in ourselves and in our work.
- * Come out! How can we be proud when we need to be silent?
- * Refuse to let the abolitionist feminists get to us! Their shame is their own.
- * Create strength and solidarity amongst ourselves; infighting causes tensions and divisions, and is a barrier to our mobilization.
- * Foster pride in ourselves before trying to convince others to be proud of our work

The criminalization of our work and our lives can prevent some of us from breaking through our isolation, which stands as a barrier to creating the kind of community we need to help inspire our personal pride. Safe spaces for community building can provide an enormous boost to this process.

We all have a role to play in breaking down the stigma that acts as a barrier to our pride. Remember that we have the right to work, and we have the right to be proud of our work.

Coming Out

Coming out, for most of us, means revealing that you are a sex worker. Whether it's a cause or an effect, the coming out process is intimately related to the idea of pride.

Challenges

The choice to unmask ourselves as sex workers in our personal and social lives comes with its challenges. The stigma associated with sex work renders us vulnerable to discrimination, hatred and violence. In response to our continuous attempts to show our diversity as sex workers, the public demands that we reveal personal information about ourselves in order to be considered credible. Yet when we do that, they discredit us by saying we are not representative of sex workers if we don't fit their stereotypes.

Some feel that coming out is more or less difficult depending on what kind of sex work we do; there is a hierarchy of sex work, and some forms of it are more respected than others. But regardless of where one fits on that scale, there is definitely an emotional toll attached to coming out. Also, the criminalization of our lives and work helps to keep us invisible, and that can make it tricky to come out publicly. Choosing to be visible can be problematic because of the risk of being put in jail, suffering violence or being deported.

Why come out?

Coming out is one way to gain pride in our work and gain the ability to represent ourselves. Coming out to other sex workers, or joining groups, also helps break our isolation. It is difficult, though, to be one of the few "out" sex workers and to bear the brunt of public criticism alone. If more sex workers come out, we can more easily show our diversity. Unless we take up this challenge, our movement will remain one-dimensional, as people's impressions of and knowledge about sex work and sex workers rely heavily on stereotypes. We are stronger in numbers, and with the strength of other sex workers beside you, coming out can be an easier process.

When we hold onto and internalize shame and stigma, this impacts our ability to mobilize and organize for our rights. It is difficult to build a movement and advocate for ourselves if we remain anonymous or if the burden of pushing the agenda is left to a few people.

Why not to come out?

Coming out is often seen as a "privilege" reserved to only a few sex workers. And with reason—it is not realistic for all sex workers to come out because of the risks associated with stigma and potential loss of family, friends, and peers. There are risks entailed with being public about your work, such as losing your children and experiencing discrimination at work, at school and in your social circles. Coming out to peers may entail the possibility that you will be criticized for taking up too much space in the movement. If you choose to be an activist, an additional challenge can be your association with sex worker rights groups, which makes you still more visible; there are dangers in being identified publicly as a sex worker in the media or by your colleagues.

Some sex workers do not identify with the label, and as a result do not see coming out as necessary; they have a plurality of identities and don't want to be relegated to the one.

Some sex workers are cautious about coming out because, even if they aren't worried about any of these reasons, they realize that once they are out as a sex worker, it is difficult to go back in.

Coming out for clients and allies

Sex workers themselves are not the only ones to deal with feelings of shame about sex work. Our clients and supportive allies are often stigmatized, and in some countries

criminalized, for their association with us. Clients are often pathologized and their realities are not represented in the popular media. They are portrayed as victimizers rather than legitimate paying clients, and are shamed and encouraged to hide. Those clients who do come out publicly serve as a great asset to us in showing the simple reality of our industry, as well as helping to garner support for our cause. Allies who are public tend to lend more credibility to our movement as well.

Q : To come out or not to come out: how do we deal with the question?

A :

- * Prepare yourself for coming out; it takes a toll on the body and psyche.
- * Pace yourself through "micro" coming out before or instead of "macro" coming out; we can come out to some and not to others in our lives.
- * Address stigma and stereotypes by working to represent the diversity of sex workers; we have a plurality of identities.
- * Come out in ways that don't compromise you: come out as a supporter, work behind the scenes.
- * As an activist, help diversify the ways we allow people to get involved in the movement. We can publicly state our support for sex workers without saying we are sex workers, and it is important to involve sex workers who are not out.
- * Encourage allies and clients to contribute money to support your rights defence work.
- * Organize more conferences and forums: this is one way of coming out.

Personal Health and Safety

Health and safety at work is an issue that touches all of us, and our access to it is affected by our society and by the laws that govern us. Sex worker groups have, over time, created community networks and addressed health and safety concerns through peer education; we acknowledge that those who know the business are best equipped to teach others how to work safely within it. That being said, doctors, nurses, lawyers, and of course our bosses and colleagues can also be involved in the education process and in responding to sex workers' health and safety concerns.

Challenges

There is little recourse for sex workers working in unhealthy or unsafe conditions. The legal impediments to sex work make it difficult to demand safer working environments. Sex work is rarely recognized as legitimate work under labour codes, and as a result the right to require that a workplace meet occupational health and safety standards is accessible to only a small number of sex workers in a few areas of the world.

The dissemination of health and safety information to sex workers is also impeded by many factors. The reluctance of worksite owners to welcome peer educators, coupled with our criminalized status, makes it difficult for us to be open and public in our efforts to educate each other. As a result, our influence is smaller and it is more challenging to reach sex workers, or find ones who are interested in receiving that education. Sex workers who are interested in receiving health and safety information are generally not interested in getting it at work, but rather at a drop-in centre or somewhere else off-site.

In response to this state of affairs, some sex workers have set up groups and organizations to address concerns about health and safety in our work. Some of us also individually make a point of addressing these concerns in our own working environments. The reach of any given individual is limited, though, and groups and organizations require funding if they are to be effective. Funding is typically granted to groups doing work around health and safety issues specifically in the form of HIV and sexually transmitted infections prevention. But these are only one part of health and safety; our needs are not limited to condoms and the discussion of sexual health. The broader, human-rights-based approach to health and safety is often not recognized by funding bodies. As a result, funding for such programs can be challenging to acquire. So in addition to the work we're already doing, our movement needs

to dedicate time and effort to educating our funders about our human rights, and how our right to healthy and safe workplaces and practices is a key part of health from a more global perspective. Workplace health and safety considerations are paramount to our ability to enjoy a full spectrum of human rights.

In addition to all this, the language of the available health and safety information is not always accessible to sex workers. Many groups lack the funding and resources to translate the existing informational literature into language that will reach sex workers. Also, the way information is presented by doctors and nurses does not appeal to sex workers who do not want to identify themselves as being part of a stigmatized group. For those who do identify as sex workers, access to safe and non-discriminatory health services can be difficult to find. There are very few sex-work-positive health professionals available and this deters people from trying to access services in the first place.

How can we work towards health and safety in our work and educate others?

- * Conduct peer education in a wide range of worksites and make our knowledge easily available.
- * Encourage funders to look at our issues on a global scale: our health rights are inextricable from our human rights.
- * Find the resources to translate our information and make it more accessible.
- * Collect the contact information of sex-work-positive health professionals and circulate that information to other sex workers.
- * Make bosses accountable for workplace safety.

Dear John

Independent activist and artist, Toronto (Canada)

by

Mirha-Soleil Ross

¹ Copyright: Mirha-Soleil Ross 2002. Excerpted from “Yapping Out Loud: Contagious Thoughts from an Unrepentant Whore”, produced by Buddies in Bad Times Theatre as part of its 2004-05 season - www.buddiesinbadtimes theatre.com

The title of the original text in English¹ for this monologue makes reference to an anti-client campaign led in Toronto in the 1990s. During this campaign, the members of different resident groups were keeping record of the license plates of the cars of persons suspected of having solicited the services of street prostitutes. From these license plates, the groups could trace the names and addresses of the drivers of these cars and post a letter to their house to shame them, intimidate them, and with the hopes that their spouse or lover would open the letter that would start by saying: Dear John. ‘John’ is a generic term used to describe prostitutes’ clients, similar to ‘punter’ in England.

The following names, in italics, are heard in voice-over before Mirha-Soleil starts her monologue.

Alexandre, Camille, Abel, Sacha, Simon, Raoul, Jean-Pierre, François, Mathieu, Angelo, Kwan, Mohamed, Alain, Miguel, Gabriel, Rafael, Eduardo, Kori, Benoit, Thomas, Said, Gilles, Maurice, Albert, Réjean, Cédric, Carmine, Sylvain, Philippe, Carlos...

And of course I shouldn’t forget Johhhhhnn!

How easy it is to stereotype millions of men when they are all referred to as Johhhhhhn! Might as well call them Dick.

Sexist hypocrites cheating on their wives... Horny brutes willing to buy women’s bodies... Ugly boogey-men in trench coats objectifying women...

In my book: a bunch of mostly nice guys whose invisibility is perhaps the political missing link to the obtainment of prostitutes’ rights.

As prostitutes we too often focus on the few bad tricks: the abusive ones who sneak through our screening process, the jerks who set up appointments and never show up, the clumsy twits who squeeze our tits too hard, the ones with cheesy dicks and the foul drunks and the ones who purposely take more time than they paid for to come... Those make for vivid stories at dinner parties and at performance art events.

And feminism has had squat shit impact on these guys. All feminism ever did is make the sweetest of my clients feel guilty and make me have to spend extra time playing political therapist, having to reassure them that no, they are not hurting my sense of self... That if I feel exploited at a hundred and fifty bucks an hour, I need a serious reality check and that yes, they should continue seeing me ‘cause otherwise I’ll be stuck with only stinky assholes to sleep with as clients.

I don’t know if it is because they stand in such extreme contrast to the way they are portrayed by feminists but there is something in my clients, in their tenderness and gestures towards me that I find deeply moving.

It’s in their voices when they finally get a hold of me on the phone... It’s in their smiles when they open the door and invite me in ... It’s in the sparkles of light I see in their eyes when I say: “First I collect my money and then I tickle your nipples.” It’s in the way they tense their bodies and hold their breath when I very gently put my lips on those neglected areolas and start sucking on them... It’s in their shivering skin when I slowly work my way up to kiss their tight necks... When I start rubbing my body against theirs, it’s in these few seconds when

it feels like we're suspended in time and they hold on and hold on and hold on as long as they can before finally allowing themselves to release decades of repressed desires... It's in their nervously shaking moist hands trying to caress me with the intentions of the best lovers. Then it's in their goose bumps and gluttony and giggling and growling and glowing and glory... It is also in less poetic moments when they say things like: "Those are beautiful tits!" while caressing my implants, which actually feel about as delicate as a pair of five pin bowling balls. For the most part, it is in their courage to see me, a transsexual woman, again and again, because yes, in this culture, it takes courage for a man to get so close, so intimate with an individual whom a large percentage of the population considers a freak.

My clients constantly remind me that with reclaiming prostitution as a fundamental and legitimate service come responsibilities. I recently met Claudio, a very attractive, fit, 38-year-old Italian man, one who had a lovely penis—the kind I like—with enough foreskin to wrap all of next year's Holiday Season presents. Things were going quite well, we were both enjoying each other but he somehow seemed uncomfortable with his body. At one point he even interrupted our session to take a little break. He wanted to hold me in his arms and caress my hair, but while doing so, I noticed him examining his penis and looking quite perplexed. Just as I thought "Oh no, not another one who wants to know if I find it big enough!", he asked in the most innocent, childlike voice: "Am I circumcised? Because I really don't know."

Whether I am working with a 600-pound disabled man who can't reach his penis to masturbate or an intersex guy whose genitals are nothing like the ones you're used to dealing with or simply the average Joe Blow who wants to start under the blankets cause he's too shy, the men I meet force me to be sensitive to a certain reality: That I am not dealing with objects here but with complex and vulnerable individuals who can be stricken by as many body image problems, self-concept issues and fears of sexual inadequacy as anyone else.

Some of my clients are married men but it becomes clear when speaking with them that they love their wives, very much enjoy their companionship and, in most cases, want to spend the rest of their lives with them. It's just that sexuality has become limiting, lifeless, or is absent from the relationship. And every so often I meet a man whose dedication to his wife I find particularly commendable.

Anthony is one of them. He started seeing me years after his wife fell ill due to multiple sclerosis. Every time we'd get together, he would update me on her deteriorating condition and on his struggle trying to keep his family above water; working two jobs in order to afford a private nurse so that his wife wouldn't be locked up in a hospital room for the rest of her life. Last time I saw him he said she was completely incapacitated and no longer cognizant. He told me with tears in his eyes that he saw prostitutes because the idea of seriously dating any woman while his wife was still alive was emotionally unbearable. And THAT I thought brought true meaning to the word "commitment."

Ali is a man I have been seeing for years. He works for minimum wage at the coat check of a restaurant. He's been fighting for over a decade with the Immigration system, spending thousands of dollars in legal fees trying to have his wife—of whom he speaks with so much love—join him here. When I found out how much he was earning an hour and about his costly ordeal with Immigration, I felt concerned, so I told him that maybe he should reconsider spending money to see me. "Don't worry!" he insisted—rightfully offended—adding that it was all budgeted and that all his meagre tips were set aside just to see me. "If I didn't spend a few minutes of joy with someone, anyone nice every couple of months," he concluded abruptly, "I'd probably kill myself!"

Michael is a man I saw only once. He called me for an appointment and mentioned that he was sexually inexperienced, that he had been with very few women in his life, never with a transsexual, and that he felt very intimidated. It was a busy day, I was high on Jolt-Cola, juggling prostitution with a million chores related to my "political" and "artistic" life, so I said in a sales pitch tone, "I'll be right there to take good care of you." He was a tall, handsome 60-year-old who spoke and moved with the grace and grounded serenity of James Earl Jones. Our rendezvous unfolded perfectly so before we parted he said "Thank you!" which

they always do, so I replied very mechanically "You're welcome!" But he took my hand, held it over his heart; he gave me the sweetest "bisou" on the left cheek and said: "I mean *thank you!*" I could tell there was more to this "thank you" than simple gratitude for activating his vas deferens so I asked why. He told me that he had been with his wife for 40 years, that she had died two years earlier, that he had never been with anyone other than her in all these years and that he thought he'd never again feel at ease being intimate with someone, until he heard my French accent on an escort service line.

These are times when I feel like revolting against this system that is ready to condemn and even jail us for caressing, kissing, and holding each other... These are times when I rid myself of all the fears and anxieties I have about the long-term ramifications of being a prostitute, a social pariah... These are times when I feel like it's worth growing into an old, tired, bitter, dried-up whore... These are times when I feel like there was, indeed, a higher calling for me to sacrifice my personal reputation, comfort, safety, social status, and even my freedom for a greater good.

Sex

work

and

society

Sex work and society

Introduction

The second Forum XXX theme, “Sex Work and Society,” spotlights the social environment in which sex work takes place and the ways that we, as sex workers, react in the face of the dominant social discourse. As part of the theme, we discussed culture, collective work, social responsibility and community building. The plenary presentations featured Rama Debnath and Kohinoor Begum from the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, or DMSC (Kolkata, India), Elena Reynaga from the Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de la Argentina, or AMMAR (Buenos Aires, Argentina), and Kara Gillies from Maggie’s (Toronto, Canada). Each panellist explained described their respective social contexts and the ways in which sex workers have responded to stigmatization, discrimination and violence.

The “Sex Work and Society” panel was complemented by three hands-on workshops. Rama and Kohinoor from the DMSC presented “How to Communicate and Negotiate with Police to Neutralize Police Oppression.” They talked about the strategies they have implemented to decrease police oppression, violence and threat. Melissa Ditmore, from the international umbrella group Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), led a workshop entitled “Sex Work and Research Ethics,” based on a NSWP initiative that responded to questionable practices in recruiting subjects for medical research. This workshop offered practical skills training on how to speak with researchers—a timely topic considering that two unethical drug trials involving sex workers have been halted on two different continents in the past year. Input from sex workers is now being used to construct a set of guidelines for research involving sex workers and other marginalized people. The third workshop, “The Nuts and Bolts of Organizing,” was hosted by Carol Leigh (activist with the Prostitutes’ Education Network website, San Francisco, USA), Robyn Few (director of the Sex Workers’ Outreach Project, or SWOP-USA, Berkeley, USA) and Veronica Monet (certified sex educator, Woodside, USA), and it provided practical techniques and strategies that individuals or groups of sex workers can use when lobbying for political change at a local or national level.

In this section of the *eXXXpressions*, you will find the papers presented in the panel followed by a summary of the group discussions engaged in by Forum XXX participants, and the related strategies and action ideas they came up with. Participants expressed their thoughts on the diversity of sex workers and the many faces of our movement. We also talked about various cultural attitudes towards sex work, and the education work that we can do to impact those attitudes. In-depth discussions around organizing and mobilizing also helped us in developing strategies and action ideas for the future. We hope that individuals and groups of sex workers, in reading about what we discussed at the Forum XXX, will be inspired to continue to work on these issues and perhaps find inspiration in the strategizing and other work we have done.

From the Sonagachi Project to Women Building Best Practices

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), Kolkata (India)

by

Representative of the DMSC

Kohinoor Begum

Before the formation of DMSC (Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, or Indomitable Women's Coordination Committee, also known as Durbar), the scenario at sex work sites was one in which sex workers had no control over their lives. They were regulated, oppressed and exploited by madams, local hooligans and the police. Additionally, sex workers were marginalized, stigmatized and excluded from the larger society. As "fallen women," they were denied their fundamental and civil rights and criminalized by outdated laws on sex work and sex workers. The trafficking and exploitation of underage girls and unwilling women forced into sex work was rampant. The children of sex workers bore the same stigma, were deprived of access to proper schools and services and usually ended up leading a life of petty crime despite their mothers' efforts.

Strategies taken by DMSC to change the situation were carried out in two spheres: within the industry and within the larger society. Within the industry, the group's main actions were:

- a) Collectivizing sex workers, increasing their self-esteem and making them aware of their rights and entitlements and creating a "community of struggle."
- b) Initially negotiating with, and then later challenging, existing powerbrokers in the industry—madams, pimps, landladies, moneylenders and local hooligans—and then neutralizing their stranglehold over sex workers' lives.
- c) Creating institutions to reduce the exploitation of sex workers and stop the trafficking of underage girls through forming the Usha Bank (a financial cooperative for sex workers) and the Durbar Self-Regulatory Boards (boards of sex workers who oversee sex work practices and intervene in situations of abuse).
- d) Starting schools and cultural groups where sex workers' children could learn and play free of stigma and discrimination.

In the larger society, Durbar challenged the discourse around sex, sexuality and sex work through a range of activities:

- a) Making themselves visible in public forums—sex workers first "came out" at the Calcutta Book Fair in 1993. They distributed a pamphlet entitled "*Baarbanitara Bolchhi*" (or, "We, the Sex Workers, Are Speaking") even before the formation of DMSC.
- b) Describing sex work as work and sex workers as workers by referring to themselves in public and within the milieu as "sex workers." The mainstreaming and acceptance of the term in the media has been one of the most effective victories in challenging the stigma around sex work.
- c) Organizing public events—the National Conference of Sex Workers in 1997, the Millennium Mela in 2001, the Shanti Mela in 2002¹ and the 12 Years of Sonagachi event in 2004². At all these events, sex workers and their children fraternized with people from the larger society, discussed their lives and problems, participated in seminars, meetings, workshops and cultural events and centre-staged their demands.
- d) Celebrating days: March 3 was declared International Sex Workers' Day by Durbar—the day the Millennium Mela began as an assertion of sex workers' power. Durbar has also been celebrating International Labour Day (May 1) every year since 1998 with a midnight rally. This is an annual media event in Kolkata.
- e) Protesting visibly through rallies, marches and sit-ins against exploitation, violence and the oppression of sex workers.
- f) Organizing media events whenever Durbar is implementing a new strategy to improve the lot of sex workers and their children.
- g) Claiming citizenship by participating in other social movements, by protesting against religious and terrorist violence, by protesting against the state oppression of other groups, and by assisting other marginalized groups like indigenous populations.
- h) Networking with other organizations throughout India and globally and centre-staging rights-based and community-led intervention strategies.

¹ Both melas were international sex workers' carnivals organized by the DMSC in Kolkata. The first celebration, in 2001, was called the Millennium Mela, which means Millennium Carnival. The 2002 mela, following the events of September 11, 2001, was created in the face of growing global hostility and built around the theme of peace; it was called the Shanti Utsav.

² The Sonagachi Project is an STI/HIV intervention program.

The Drive for a Union: Why We Needed It and Why It Works

Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de la Argentina Buenos
Aires (AMMAR), Buenos Aires (Argentina)

by

Founder and General
Secretary

Elena Eva Reynaga

Good afternoon. First of all, I would like to thank Stella for the effort they made in bringing me to this country and for giving me the opportunity to be part of this event. I would like to introduce myself: I am Elena Reynaga and I am the general secretary of the Sex Workers Labour Union in Argentina. I am the mother of three children and I have two grandchildren.

Our organization was created at the end of 1994. We started to get organized because of the police repression that we were suffering. We started by ourselves, and then two anthropologists and two lawyers joined us. We then had a debate to decide whether we would work on HIV issues or work to revoke the articles that criminalized us. We decided that we could not talk about health rights when we didn't even have fundamental rights and freedoms. Therefore we started a political lobby, to organize political events in favour of decriminalization. Between the two objectives that we had been discussing, we chose to work for fundamental rights and freedoms by organizing political action at the national assembly.

As we realized that we could not make it by ourselves, we asked for help. In March 1995, we joined the Argentina's Workers Central (CTA). With the CTA and with other social organizations working for the defence of human rights, we put together a group called *Vecinos por la Convivencia* (Neighbours for Living in Harmony). We lobbied for three years, protesting and making ourselves visible within Argentinean society. In March 1998, we obtained decriminalization. The law was revoked.

We started all this work with no economic resources, only our own money and some money from a co-worker and a few others! At the end of 1998, the Health Ministry started to finance projects to train and to employ health educators in the area of HIV/AIDS. We not only work on HIV education, but we also provide primary school education programs because many of us didn't know how to read nor write.

Until three years ago we were only a civil association, but now we are structured as a labour union on the model of a corporate entity. We denounced police repression, child prostitution, and every person really involved in the Mafia surrounding child prostitution. Those fights were very tough. A year ago, a co-worker was killed; that's the reason you'll see us constantly protesting. Our mobilization is done not only with sex workers but also with all the workers who make up the CTA. We do not simply ask for support when we organize demonstrations; we also support others, for example, we support teachers asking for a salary raise, health workers, students... because we understand that "one hand washes the other and both wash the face!" Or in other words, if we each help one another, we're all stronger in the end.

The organization is made up of eleven organizations around the country and the country has twenty-four provinces. So there are eleven AMMAR offices in eleven different provinces. Each one has its particularities, but they all have to follow the same political line. We worked hard in making our colleagues realize that the organization relies on their support. Because we always have to ask for money, it's difficult to get away from our "victim" image—people think, "Here are those poor ladies again, the poor ladies asking us to give and give." If we ask for things, we also have to start giving. We are asking for the recognition of sex work as real work, we are asking to be considered workers same as any other worker in our country, and for these reasons we have to have rights. And with those rights we also recognize our responsibilities and obligations.

We, the national board, have meetings every three months. This means that the eleven representatives from the different provinces join the one at the Buenos Aires office and we define policies to adopt and actions that we are going to take, we evaluate the good and the bad stuff that's going on, and so forth. We also have a meeting once a year, a national meeting not only for the "executive board" of the organization but also for all the delegates who are members of the labour union. They have the right to speak and to vote as long as they are members of the labour union. We had to become formal because we realized that some co-workers were showing up at the annual meeting when they had not shown up at any other meeting during the year, and they were coming only to question what we are doing. Most of the time, the ones who are not doing anything *do* take the time to question and criticize instead of building with us... Because among sex workers there are different levels of involvement.

Now we have reached our ten-year anniversary, but we still have thirteen provinces without organizations. It is not up to us to go there, but rather up to our co-workers to start an organization of their own, having seen and heard about what we have done on television, on the radio, in the newspapers and through the AMMAR website.

I would like to thank Stella again for bringing me here, but I can't leave this place without being honest: I'm not the national secretary of AMMAR because I say what others want to hear, but because I always say what the sex workers want to say. That, you don't learn at school. Even if somebody is totally supportive, she or he can't truly explain police violation, bad treatment from society, family exclusion and the suffering of street workers if they have not experienced it. That's why it is so important that the ones who have the knowledge and the theory remember that they can't do anything without us, we who have the practice and the life experience.

Initiating With our Peers in Canada

Maggie's, Toronto (Canada)

by

Chair of the Board, Maggie's
Co-Founder of the Canadian
Guild for Erotic Labour

Kara Gillies

During the Forum XXX, we have explored how individual experiences are transformed into collective action in the face of broad legal and social repression. However, the form this repression takes is, of course, by no means static. Societal attitudes and hence reactions to sex work shift over time as well as across culture and region. This then necessitates that our activism and our strategies adapt accordingly.

What I would like to do today is trace, in a Canadian context, some of the key shifts in the dominant discourse over the past twenty years and examine the impact of these changes on sex workers' mobilization. Here in Canada, as in other regions, we have many brilliant and highly dedicated sex workers and sex workers' organizations. However, for my purposes, I am going to focus on Maggie's, the Toronto Prostitutes' Community Service Project—and that's simply because of the organization's rather unique origins, its longevity, and some of the perhaps unavoidable challenges it has faced due in part to the fact that it has been around for so long.

When I talk about Maggie's unique origins I do so because Maggie's was one of the first sex workers' organizations anywhere in the world to receive government funding. Now today that might seem very commonplace, but twenty years ago, the idea of giving taxpayers' money to hookers was really quite radical—and even more radical was the idea of hookers *demanding* public funds! Maggie's was founded in 1986 with the stated mission of assisting fellow sex workers in their efforts to live and work in both safety and dignity. Now at that time, the Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes had been lobbying for decriminalization for a couple of years. It was apparent, however, that legal reform was by no means forthcoming and that in the interim it was essential that we meet fellow sex workers' immediate needs as well as build a strong and supportive community to facilitate future mobilization.

Right from the start, Maggie's was clear in stating our call for decriminalization as well as our recognition of sex work as both legitimate and socially valuable labour. Maggie's also put forward a compassionate and rights-based response to HIV/AIDS—and indeed HIV/AIDS education funding was the first financial support that Maggie's received. And of course, as has been the case for many sex workers' groups across the world, this funding provided a strong foundation on which we could build not only effective and appropriate safer-sex campaigns, but also a wide range of services and activist projects. HIV/AIDS funding, however, was not without its tensions. As many people here I'm sure will recall, the mid-to late 1980s was a time when concern about the heterosexual transmission of HIV was reaching panic levels and sex workers were viciously scapegoated as so-called "vectors of transmission." At the time, Maggie's chose to subvert this portrayal by identifying sex workers as professionals who, far from being detrimental to HIV prevention, were in fact very well placed to educate others on the issue and to take an active community role in HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. Sex workers were also instrumental, along with members of the gay community, in shifting the focus from the concept of high-risk *groups* to high-risk or risk *activities*, reversing some of the scapegoating that had occurred.

So that was about twenty years ago. Where are we on the issue now? Certainly, while there is still a popular public perception of sex workers as a so-called HIV threat, policy makers—both within and outside the health field—largely recognize the falsehood of this perspective. And I do think that we have been successful in education, not only within the sex trade, but also for society at large. For example, in Canada it was sex workers' organizations that first raised the alarm about the HIV risks posed by Nonoxynol-9, something that is only now receiving attention across the country at large.

However, I would suggest that there are some areas of challenge. For one, within our communities, many sex workers' groups, including Maggie's, have been grossly negligent about providing appropriate HIV prevention and support to some particular sectors of the trade, especially transsexual and transgendered workers. For another, perhaps in the understandable zeal to promote ourselves as safe-sex professionals, many Canadian groups have propagated the simplistic and, I would say, dangerous message of "Just use a condom for everything all the time." This is, as we know, not realistic in all contexts, and the message fails to give workers the information required to carry out our own risk assessments and make informed health decisions.

Looking at the issue of sex work and HIV/AIDS education today, one important area of concern is that we seem to be seeing a return to the notion of risk groups as opposed to risk activities, except that now, the preferred language is that of "vulnerability" instead of "risk" per se. Of course, it is very important that we acknowledge the variety of social determinants of health and recognize that things like stigma and criminalization can have a negative impact on health, including HIV status. At the same time, we must remain vigilant that we don't slip back into oppressive language and positions that facilitate further repressive responses.

I would like to move now from shifts in HIV/AIDS discourses and strategies to other changes that have affected sex worker organizing over the past two decades. During Maggie's formative years, sex workers in Canada were facing a very heavy-handed law-and-order agenda. Changes to the Criminal Code (i.e. the introduction of the "communicating" law in 1986) made it easier for cops to bust sex workers, especially those who were street-based, for getting dates or negotiating services in public. In Toronto, the police crackdowns were further fuelled by very active resident associations who agitated—often aggressively—against street prostitution in what they defined as "their" neighbourhoods. Not surprisingly, this vigilantism coincided with massive growth in the local real-estate market, whereby areas that had been worked by girls for many years underwent rapid gentrification. This resulted in a certain middle-class aesthetic that was hostile to not only street prostitutes but to all street-based people and activities, including panhandling and gay park sex.

At this time, Maggie's worked very hard to support sex workers who were under attack by providing information and direct assistance as well as developing further strategies for mitigating the harm done by residents' groups, including intervention and mediation. Now in some, even most situations, this intervention proved to be futile. In many cases the residents' groups were simply not open to any reasoning or negotiation, and it became clear that the real issue was not the stated one of reducing nuisance factors in downtown areas but rather the morality- and property-value-driven position of "I don't want *you* people in *my* neighbourhood." We did, however, manage to have some success with one very large and powerful residents' association that, after a couple of years of work, did move forward with a call of their own for decriminalization. Unfortunately that group is no longer active, and with the passage of time, we find ourselves having to revisit issues and do work again and again that we have done in the past.

Over the past eight to ten years, however, we have seen a sizeable shift in societal responses to sex work, largely characterized by a move towards a so-called victim analysis. There has always been a paradoxical tension between the construction of the dirty, deviant, criminal whore and the parallel construction of the poor, exploited, fallen victim. But certainly we have seen the pendulum swing more in the latter direction of late. This shift has had multiple consequences. For one, there has been a huge explosion of social work agencies providing what they call "assistance" to sex workers, typically without consultation (or, to use their language, "needs assessments"). This has put Maggie's in the position of having to seriously re-examine how we present ourselves to our community to ensure that we are seen as a community-based group of sex workers and not yet another rescue organization. This has been particularly challenging since both service and "exit" programs are increasingly using the language of "peer" education to facilitate contacts with sex workers and build the illusion of acceptance and community. This dynamic has also had an impact on Maggie's funding options; we are constantly on guard to ensure that any money we pursue is based on *our* goals and that we don't fall into the trap of uncritically accepting funding based on "harm reduction" or "exit" strategies simply because these are the monies most readily available in the current climate. I'm sure other organizations are facing this challenge too.

There are political implications to this victim-based approach as well. As soon as one constructs a victim, one has to construct a perpetrator, or even better, a villain, and of course, clients and managers have been cast into these latter roles. We see this locally with the development of "john schools" and we see it at the governmental level, for example, in Sweden, with their new abolitionist legal approach that focuses the criminal law on clients and third parties. One of the responses that we have come up with at Maggie's is to insist that other social justice movements, academics and activists counter not only the criminalization and stigmatization of sex workers but also that of our clients and management. To do otherwise is highly pathologizing and buys into the false notion that the exploitation of sexual labour is somehow substantially different from, and more problematic than, the exploitation of any other form of labour, and it significantly undermines a lot of the work we have done to date to advance our social and legal standing.

Another area of change, in terms of sex worker organizing in Canada, has been the need to be inclusive of migrant workers while at the same time being aware that the revival of the radical feminist anti-trafficking agenda has posed major obstacles to this goal. We are however trying to be proactive, and in addition to countering some of the dominant anti-trafficking discourses, we are attempting to network with both sex workers' groups and migrant workers' groups to come to some mutual agenda and understanding. Unfortunately, it's been very difficult. It has been my experience that a lot of sex workers' groups, especially dancers' groups, take a very protectionist attitude towards the labour market and often a rather nationalist stance towards immigration matters, at least in regards to sex workers. This is not specific to the sex trade, of course; we see it in many labour sectors. The disturbing result has been increased hostility to, and lack of inclusion of, migrant workers in many contexts. Recently, the rhetoric has become less overtly hostile as members of sex workers' groups adopt the "save the victim" language of the anti-trafficking movement, thereby shrouding their self-interest in the guise of concern for the well-being of migrant workers.

On the other end, a lot of migrant and new immigrant groups have been resistant to the inclusion of workers in the sex trade; there are several possible explanations for this, but one key reason is an uncritical acceptance of the simplistic ideology that assumes that any facilitated migration of sex workers is trafficking or, even worse, that any migration of sex workers is trafficking regardless of circumstances, or even that all sex work is itself the trafficking of women. Needless to say, these perspectives are largely informed by the radical feminist revival.

Another area in which we are trying to be proactive is labour organizing and developing links and shared agendas with the labour movement and unions in Canada. This is something that in the Canadian context we kept putting off and putting off because the question was "How do we pursue this agenda while working under a criminalized system?" However, after almost twenty-five years of lobbying for decriminalization, we need to move forward in additional, creative ways. One of the tactics that we are hoping to use to bypass the obstacles to labour organizing presented by criminalization is the subversion of the current municipal practice of "back-door" legislation. What happens now in many municipalities across Canada is that, although most of the activities associated with prostitution are criminalized at the federal or national level, local city councils have introduced licensing and regulation around massage, escorting, companionship services and so forth. However, the only way municipalities are legally permitted to develop these bylaws is by pretending that the activities in question are not prostitution. Although there are many negatives associated with this system, it potentially provides workers the opportunity to seek recourse before labour boards, civil courts and so forth in the capacity of non-criminalized workers ("I'm a holistic health practitioner, Your Honour!"). While still highly problematic on both practical and political levels, it is possible that this approach will at least offer some labour rights and protections to certain groups of workers, especially those working for third parties.

This was a brief overview of some of the changes and challenges faced by sex workers organizing in Toronto, specifically at Maggie's. I am sure that the Forum and its proceedings will provide many of us with new directions and ideas.

Participants' eXXXpressions on 'Sex Work and Society': Diversity and Inclusion, Culture, Education, Mobilization and Organization

Stella, Montréal (Canada)

Synthesis by

Jenn Clamen

Diversity and Inclusion

The Forum XXX brought together sex workers from a wide range of races, backgrounds, types of work, genders, and countries. Yet the question of whether or not we could truly speak to the full representation of sex workers' issues was hotly debated. Diversity and inclusion are vital, but challenging, aspects of the sex workers' rights movement.

"Diversity" refers to the range of our experience, while "inclusion" refers to the appropriate representation of various groups in our discussions and actions. Inclusion is not limited to sex workers; it also extends to clients, allies and researchers in our movement. Making space for diversity and allowing for true inclusion need to be priorities within our work.

Challenges for inclusion

The concept of a sex worker identity is problematic. Is being a sex worker an identity or a job? While some people working in the sex industry internalize this identity, others reject it completely. The form of this rejection can range from seeing the work simply as a job, to refusing to be publicly, or even personally, linked to prostitution.

The stigmatization of prostitution creates a pseudo-hierarchy of types of work and types of workers, which can be very divisive. It can also lead people to distance themselves from the issues pertinent to some sex workers—for example, drug use, street work, migrant work, race issues or gender issues. Such separation creates tensions, and some groups of sex workers feel especially excluded because of these divides. Among others, transsexual, Aboriginal, male and migrant sex workers feel excluded because most of the movement is focused on other issues and many of the movement's participants remain uneducated about these groups' realities. Some dangers of exclusion include increased racism and the perpetuation of harmful working conditions for those not represented in our discourse or daily actions.

Many of the tensions within the sex workers' rights movement can be boiled down to issues of diversity and inclusion. Often certain sex workers feel left out, or not appropriately represented at the table. Three groups of sex workers in particular spoke to this during the Forum: caucuses were formed for men, mothers, and transsexuals.

The concerns of absent or uninterested sex workers still need to be represented at the table, but including these perspectives is hard when members of underrepresented groups are not able to take part in discussions and activities, or are not interested in doing so. With this in mind, it's important to realize that our movement is not necessarily representative of all sex workers, and there is danger in not acknowledging other voices that may exist.

Representation is an odd goal to aim for when the parameters for its achievement so varied and abstract. We can only represent those around the table at any given moment, while ensuring that every attempt is made to eliminate the exclusion of certain groups of sex workers. And we must bear in mind an additional challenge: as critical as we are of ourselves with regards to representation, the public is even quicker to criticize when we don't match their stereotypes. When we do represent ourselves fully and accurately, given individuals are often named as the "exception to the rule" and charged with claims that we do not represent "real" sex workers.

Also, allies, clients and researchers play an important role in our movement by lending a different type of credibility to our demands. But while the inclusion of these people is

important, our demands may be hijacked and misrepresented through their discourse. Allies and researchers can also claim space that should instead be given in priority to sex workers themselves. It can be hard work to achieve a proper balance between including valid outside perspectives and ensuring that our own voices and experiences remain at the centre of our activist work.

Q : How can we foster diversity and inclusion?

A :

- * Work towards a movement that reflects the many realities of sex workers: include more transsexuals, men, Aboriginal and migrant sex workers in our activities and activism.
- * Educate each other about our different realities through diversity training given by sex workers to other sex workers and to sex worker groups.
- * Find commonalities that override our differences, while still representing our position. Though we are not going to agree on everything, diversity means that everyone sits at the table.
- * Make links between the issues (poverty, drug use, etc.) in such a way as to help bridge our differences.
- * Create space for and provide education to sex workers who are new to the movement, so they can find their own voices.

Culture

Popular representations of sex workers in the media and in society at large have a major influence on our personal lives. Very often, the portrayals we see of sex work, and the different perspectives that people have regarding sex work, do not correspond with our realities. We are often faced with the challenges of responding to a dominant social discourse around sex work that is not reflective of our realities and demands. Where do these perspectives come from? And how can we work to change them to ensure we are appropriately represented?

Challenges

Everyone has something to say about us. There are plenty of different discourses about sex work. Some of these opinions and popular discourses help our lives and our organizing efforts. Others discourses, particularly those that do not reflect our realities and that theorize about us rather than with us, have extremely damaging effects on how we move through the world. The anti-sex-work movement, in particular, has been trying to discredit our demand for rights for as long as we have existed. Yet we continue to organize and set our own agendas to promote our rights.

The media, as well, contributes to creating images of sex workers that do not reflect our truths. The media rarely provides a critical perspective on sex work; most representations are stereotypical and do not represent our diverse realities. We are also often misquoted and pitted against other members of society. Images of us often portray us as victims and as people needing protection—and most recently, as being “trafficked” or exploited. The media often uses old, sensationalist footage rather than representing our existing diversity. Of course, with such limited representation available, the public is quick to stereotype us. In our organizing efforts we often use the media to counteract these negative stereotypes.

In the current context of the anti-prostitution discourse that’s permeating the media, academia, and many women’s organizations, we are faced with major challenges in our efforts to create our own discourse. The abolitionist feminist discourse and other anti-sex-work discourses have taken up a lot of public space. Rather than simply reacting to discourse that does not represent sex workers’ realities, or that is limited to discussions of women, most of us have been setting our own agendas and dealing with the issues we ourselves have named as priorities.

Self-representation is important but challenging in the face of so much criticism and backlash. Rarely is the diversity of our beauty, our strength and our lives shown in popular representations and discourses about sex work. Accurate and varied representations tend

to be ignored by society. We do not all conform to the same image; as a movement and as individual sex workers, we are constantly challenging this representation. We do this through various means. For example, Internet communication has changed the way we organize; we are able to network with more sex workers internationally, without necessarily having to come out publicly. Our actions are carried out faster and are more diverse in nature. Popular media such as magazines have also allowed us to get our realities out there and counteract popular stereotypes.

Q : How can we appropriately represent ourselves and our realities?

A :

- * Challenge anti-sex work agendas through a proactive sex work agenda.
- * Be prepared with a message before going to the media; consult other sex workers and find consensus about that message, so as to promote solidarity.
- * Collect and distribute sex-work-positive media representations to counteract negative images.
- * Target sex-work-positive media to help promote our messages.
- * Create sex-worker-produced media for public consumption.
- ☞ Use the media to expose police abuses and cases where people have not been accountable under the law and where this has impacted the safety of sex workers.
- * Educate ourselves and each other on various topics and build skills to be able to speak to the media; invest time in PR and media training.
- * Choose appropriate people to speak about specific issues.

Education

There are many people who need to be educated about sex workers’ rights, including sex workers! During the Forum XXX, we named groups who need education about the facts of sex work, and what objective that education would serve.

Educating the public

The responsibility often falls to sex workers to educate the public about our realities. When sex workers were less visible, people based their opinions about us on stereotypes. Over the last 30 years we have been taking the lead through our organizing, and people are slowly starting to see how diverse we actually are. The creation of online networks, magazines and popular media representations has helped us to educate the world and each other—the general public as well as official bodies, such as the church and the clergy, which can otherwise foster a climate of stigma and discrimination. We also educate students, who are the potential future decision-makers of our societies. Within our education efforts, we need to separate the issues and ensure that people don’t conflate sex work with problems such as trafficking and child abuse, a mistake that is commonly made.

As sex workers, we can educate our clients about sexual health, our realities, and all sorts of other things. We need to continue, or start, to educate our clients so that they, too, can contribute to more diverse notions of sex work. At the same time, we also need to educate the public about the diversity of our clients; during the Forum XXX, it was noted that our clients are often demonized and pathologized, and as a result heavily stigmatized.

Stereotypes and misconceptions about sex workers are often formed at a young age, and future adults are reared with misguided perceptions about us. By changing the messages that young people receive at an age where they are less biased, we have a better chance of creating a fair and just world for the future.

Some sex workers have had the opportunity to speak with politicians, whether on our own initiative or because our political situation has required it. It is vital that we continue to educate politicians and encourage them to see us as voters, as people, and as constituents. Educating funders is also important. Typically groups that receive financial and other resources are attached to a particular mandate. Funds are often allotted for merely a fraction of that mandate. Because our realities are so diverse, we need to ensure that funders understand how wide-ranging our work needs to be, and in what ways their funding would be most effective. The sort of deadlines typically imposed by funders do not correspond with the realities of community work and our funding providers should be taught to adapt.

We need to inform and educate outreach program creators and other potential allies in social services. Sensitivity training led by sex workers can minimize the divide often caused by services that distinguish between “us” and “them.” Outreach programs, or programs intended for a clientele that includes sex workers, should be designed using a bottom-up approach, informed by sex workers’ needs and experiences.

Sensitivity training for police is also a priority. The police are rarely held accountable for the ways in which they treat sex workers. They often do not respect our rights, and behave as though we were undeserving of legal protection. Though it does not necessarily mean working with them, educating police about our realities and informing them of our needs for protection may help them better respond to us.

Some of the most difficult, but also most important, groups to educate are feminist groups. Many feminist groups are swayed by abolitionist (or anti-prostitution) feminists who claim that we cannot speak for ourselves. Creating visibility for ourselves through education work can help break down the stereotypes that currently guide many feminist-driven services.

Educating ourselves and each other

Not only does the general public hold to myths about sex workers, but we carry stereotypes about each other amongst ourselves as well. We are a group diverse, and as a result we are not always familiar with one another’s realities. We come from different cultures, different countries, and different sex work domains. We need to take the time to conduct peer education for one another on a variety of subjects.

The process of developing community with other sex workers creates peer education opportunities. It gives us the chance to inform one another about health and safety at work. It provides a space for us to share tips and professional techniques. For sex workers who are not interested in developing or associating with sex workers’ communities, there are other options for sexual health education. For these options to be viable, however, health care professionals need to be sensitive to issues specific to sex work. Sex work projects, as well, need to create safe spaces and diverse environments in which sex workers can receive appropriate care, attention and education.

Q : Whom do we need to educate about our realities?

- A :**
- * The general public
 - * The Church and the clergy
 - * Students
 - * Our clients
 - * Younger people
 - * Politicians
 - * Funders
 - * Outreach programs
 - * Allies in social services
 - * Police
 - * Each other
 - * Ourselves

Mentoring is a unique way for sex workers to learn from one other and sharpen our expertise. A competitive and hierarchical approach to sex work often impedes the sharing of information. Creating a collective space instead can allow us to rise above this and to build an environment where we work towards keeping one another safe and healthy.

Various laws affect our work and our lives in different ways. Having knowledge of these laws will help us to work safely. Not all sex workers have an understanding of the laws that affect their work, and while they are antiquated and applied ambiguously, we need to understand them as they pertain to us. This is not limited to sex work laws, but also to immigration and labour policies and laws.

Various ideological and political positions affect the way we work and the way we mobilize. We are so often inundated with opposition and criticism; having a common perspective and reaction to anti-prostitution movements helps our movement. Some sex worker activists have more knowledge and historical information about these issues, and these individuals can be valuable assets for educating and helping feed others’ learning process. Lobbying skills are developed through experience. We can teach each other how to react to the media, advocate for our rights, and develop knowledge of the issues we need to address.

Our history as a movement is enriching, and knowledge of that history can be very helpful to current organizing endeavours. Many current and former sex workers within the movement are working on major projects and have vast amounts of historical knowledge. Quite a number of us are also involved in other social movements that serve as great allies to us as sex workers. We would be wise to learn from our organizing history, and take this knowledge into our current organizing work.

Q : What issues do we need to educate people about?

- A :**
- * Our diversity as workers and human beings; we are women, men, transsexuals, and transvestites. We must break stereotypes about sex work and sex workers.
 - * Ways to build communities and share working strategies and techniques.
 - * Our positioning as workers. This includes the concept of sex work as work, and what that means in terms of our labour rights and how to legitimize ourselves as workers.
 - * Mentoring each other and learning how to carry out peer education.
 - * Different legal contexts and our legal terminology, and the ways that laws, police repression and violence affect us.
 - * Different ideological perspectives on sex work and how they reflect our realities.

Mobilization and Organization

Many factors influence the way we organize and mobilize around our issues. Below are some of the ones that were named and discussed during the Forum XXX.

Inclusion in our movement

The coming-out process is a major challenge for organizing work within the sex workers’ rights movement. Many sex workers don’t identify as sex workers, many don’t want to come out publicly as sex workers or even be associated with sex work activities and be “outed” in the process, and many disagree on the actions that should take priority. Many sex workers are also very isolated or feel ashamed about their work, which makes it difficult for them to come out or find out about activities. As a result, the diversity of sex workers represented in our spaces is limited.

Diversity among sex workers is also a related issue for many organized groups. Often groups are exclusive and do not represent the range of sex workers’ needs or realities; at the same time, many sex workers are not interested in participating. Male, transsexual and Aboriginal sex workers are most often excluded, and we generally see only a limited number of street sex workers. Mobilizing certain groups can be difficult at times. Male sex workers at the Forum XXX expressed, for example, that they feel excluded because of the focus on women’s issues and that the stigma they face is different. It was also noted at various times how difficult it is to mobilize migrant workers, because of their precarious status and their risk of deportation.

The inclusion of allies in our movement is important, but the notion is ridden with questions. Sex workers need to be the ones taking the lead when it comes to the actions we choose to undertake and the direction of our movement, but our efforts are often thwarted by more “credible” allies. Problems arise when organizing efforts originate from non-sex-working people in positions of power. Such situations create unfortunate tensions and power dynamics; often, sex workers don’t trust organizing efforts by NGOs or allies, and these efforts don’t always represent sex workers’ needs. Some allies, however, have proven their dedication and at times need to be trusted and assured that their work is very helpful. The

sex workers' rights movement has been helped along by numerous allies, who have pushed our agendas with great success.

Clients are another group rarely seen in our organizing efforts, though they are present in some cases—certain groups in India, for instance. The inclusion of clients is paramount to the growth of our movement, but more importantly, we need to look at ways to de-pathologize our clients in the public's eye. If our clients are visible, their diverse realities will legitimize our work, and in turn legitimize the clients themselves. And last but not least, our families and loved ones also deserve a place in our struggle.

Q : How can we more inclusive in our mobilizing and organizing efforts?

A :

- * Include as many people as possible by functioning with an open-door policy for the actions and organizations that we set up.
- * Encourage sex workers who have not come out to contribute to actions and mandates without being publicly present.
- * Make efforts to find sex workers at different work sites and integrate everyone's needs.
- * Remember that inclusion means everyone sits at the table, even those with divergent opinions.
- * Ask allies (clients and family) to support us in our efforts.
- * Educate and find more allies in the feminist, labour, migrant and other social justice movements.
- * Ask academics and researchers to support us in our own research efforts and to let sex workers guide the process.

Horizontal hostility

Infighting, or "horizontal hostility," is present in most social movements and interpersonal relationships. The divergence of people's opinions and the diversity of our experiences often sets the stage for lack of respect and difficulty mobilizing collectively. Discrimination and exclusion are often a result of a lack of education. Our movement 's organizing challenges not only impede our mobilizing efforts, but perpetuate stigma, discrimination and ignorance with regard to certain groups of sex workers.

Q : How do we reduce infighting so that we are more effective in mobilizing and organizing?

A :

- * Put personal issues aside, and learn about each other's realities.
- * Find common points and work on one goal together; points of divergence can be worked on separately.
- * Don't take differences too personally; try instead to educate each other and keep our goals in mind.

Learning about each other

Education, or rather a lack thereof, impedes our ability to speak to all sex work issues at all times. As individual sex workers, we are not necessarily familiar with all areas and types of sex work and their respective challenges. Many of our misunderstandings can be traced back to lack of information. Also, sex workers are not immune to racism and other forms of discrimination amongst ourselves. Learning about each other's realities increases our ability to mobilize and organize effectively.

Education about mobilization methods is also an important factor for effective organizing. It is vital that we look to the history of our movement and to our past actions and successes to inform our future efforts.

Q : How can we learn from each other to help create more effective mobilizing and organizing?

A :

- * Take advantage of individuals' skill sets and designate appropriate tasks—for

example, media spokesperson work, organizing, mobilizing the troops, etc.

- * Organize training workshops and learn about the issues that affect us.
- * Teach each other about our realities so that we can all be involved without the fear of being misrepresented or discriminated against by other sex workers.
- * Mentor each other; help to develop each other's skills.
- * Learn from our history; sex workers of the past have paved the way for us today, and we can stand to benefit from their experience.
- * Work to create a more unified voice and to dismantle the hierarchy.

Funding

Funding is a touchy subject when it comes to community organizing. Some groups strategize around funding possibilities, while others outright refuse to take any funding. The consequences of accepting funding can be a compromised mandate, but on the flip side funding can help to strengthen our actions. Certain funding bodies may have intentions or mandates that run contrary to sex workers' agendas, such as the police for example. Groups working with an "exploitation model" of sex work rarely provide funding for sex workers' actual needs. In general, funding can limit the type of work we do, and it usually comes with particular objectives and restrictions.

Q : How can we secure the right kind of funding for our organizing efforts?

A :

- * Use our sex work money for activism.
- * Stop taking money with strings attached; maintain our integrity.
- * Try to find more allies that can provide us with resources.
- * Teach funding bodies about our realities.

Type of actions and organizing

The type of action and organizing that we carry out depends largely on our respective cultural contexts. Often the threat of police repression impedes our organizing efforts; our activism runs the risk, for instance, of making street sex workers more visible, and therefore more vulnerable to law enforcement. The criminalization of all sex workers can create major challenges for activism. Our organizing efforts are largely dependent on the culture and context in which we live, and the priorities for sex workers in a given region. Forum XXX participants were filled with inspiring ideas for future actions...

Q : What type of actions can we mobilize and organize around?

A :

- * Use elections to promote sex work issues.
- * Create organizations both small and large to move our efforts forward.
- * Sign global statements.
- * Organize more sex-worker-led conferences and forums.
- * Use Internet communication to create strong networks.
- * Link up with other social movements.
- * Spend time as a movement or as smaller groups creating a counter-discourse; at the same time, set our own agenda as sex workers and not always as a reaction to others' attacks.
- * Focus on the "work" aspect of sex work.
- * Balance service provision and advocating for change.
- * Mark the days that we can stand in solidarity with other groups (for example, May 1st, International Labour Day).
- * Infiltrate other movements and work sites (politics, governments, medical and legal systems).
- * Put less emphasis on demonstrations; instead, locate those in power and see if they can help us.

Laws,

policies

and

human

rights

Laws, policies and human rights

Introduction

The third Forum XXX theme addressed laws, policies, and other measures of social control that have an impact on sex workers' living and working conditions. We also examined the major legislative changes that have taken place over the past three decades and what their effects have been. Panellists offered critical perspectives on their respective legislative contexts and shared the action strategies that they have developed.

The forum panel was accompanied by two strategic workshops. Andrew Sorfleet, founder of the now-defunct Sex Workers Alliance of Vancouver (Canada), presented his project entitled "\$WE@&R: How We Can Be Active in Law Reform." \$WE@&R, which stands for Sex, Work, Education, Advocacy & Research, is all about the sex industry in Canada and how it should—or could—be regulated. The \$WE@&R project was a fun way to learn about laws and regulations that affect the sex industry: the \$WE@&R workbooks present various scenarios, and then ask for sex workers' opinions about related laws and regulations. Rachel Wotton, from the Scarlet Alliance and SWOP-Australia (New South Wales, Australia) presented "Safety Tips: Occupational Health and Safety in the Sex Industry." Rachel reminded us that no matter where or how we work in the industry, our health and safety are of paramount importance. The workshop drew on the New South Wales Work Cover Guidelines, as well as on Rachel's peer education experience and the personal testimony of sex workers.

In this section of the *eXXXpressions*, you will find the panel presentations from Corinne Monnet of Cabiria (Lyon, France), Catherine Healy of the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective (Wellington, New Zealand), and Johannes Eriksson of Riksorganisationen för sex-och erotikarbetare (Stockholm, Sweden). Each panellist explained the legal conditions surrounding sex work in their country, along with the methods that their collectives have employed to combat human rights abuses.

The presentations are followed by a summary of the discussions in the aftermath of the panel about law reform, policy and human rights. Among other things, we talked about the personal and collective strategies that we use to counter repressive policies and improve the respect of sex workers' human rights with regard to our health, safety and dignity. We have also included many of the strategies and action ideas that were suggested by Forum XXX participants. Again, this is by no means an exhaustive rundown of the issues, but it is representative of what we discussed at the Forum XXX. We encourage sex workers and sex worker groups to build on and implement some of the strategies named here.

On Law and Order: Impacts of the French National Security Act – Sarkozy Law

Cabiria, Lyon (France)

by

Director of Cabiria

Corinne Monnet

Repression and Prostitution in France

On March 18, 2003, the new Interior Security Law transformed sex workers' previous status as victims and assigned them a new one as delinquents by means of penalties for solicitation. France nonetheless remains a country that's dedicated to its abolitionist position—in other words, the country wants neither to regulate prostitution nor prohibit it by law. Firstly, we will explore the construction of sex worker as victim through the legislation and social lenses used to frame prostitution, and the consequences of this construction for individuals. Secondly, we will look at the construction of sex worker as delinquent. We will not be focusing on abolitionism, but we do need to make mention of it because along with reactionary and victimizing security policies, abolitionism has laid the groundwork for the new law criminalizing sex workers.

The prostitute as victim

Since France became an abolitionist country, prostitution has been neither prohibited nor regulated. It has no legal definition. Neither a recognized profession nor an offence, prostitution is considered a private act left to an individual's personal moral judgment. However, many public policies do affect sex work, whether in the realm of law enforcement, social policy or tax regulations. This puts a number of contradictions into practice, since the public expression of sex work, which may endanger public order, can be penalized (i.e. as incitation to debauchery or solicitation).

Between 1960 and 2002, the entire system framing prostitution barely evolved. Major changes were made when the Penal Code was reformed, specifically concerning the suppression of passive solicitation and procuring. The new Penal Code cracked down most severely on the coercive and violent forms of these acts.

Solicitation

The solicitation offence was born in 1946 when the brothels were closed, to deal with concerns about the disorder that could be created when many women wound up on the sidewalks.

Solicitation charges were on the decline since they're generally difficult to prove. The number of fines shrank steadily until 2003.

The social framework for prostitution

With the Marthe Richard Law, signed in on April 13, 1946, France in part cast aside its regulatory regime. Police filing officially disappeared, but the repression of procuring got stronger. In 1960, France ratified the UN convention, which promoted the rehabilitation and social treatment of prostitutes; they were considered as victims, and their autonomy and consent were not taken into consideration. As a result, prevention and social re-adaptation measures had to be put into place for prostitutes. This led to the 60s regulations, which allowed the French government to take the necessary measures to "fight certain social ills" including alcohol consumption, homosexuality and prostitution. With these regulations, the social hygiene approach was dropped and specialized social services in each area were recommended.

Laws on procuring

The Penal Code is very severe with regard to procuring. It describes more than 15 types of procuring, of which two are crimes, as well as 10 aggravating circumstances and nine related sentences.

Laws concerning clients

Sex workers' clients were long ignored by the Penal Code, but they have come up in recent debates. From a legal point of view, clients are not charged, except in the case of sexual trespass on the person of a minor of less than 15 years old, or for an infraction related to sexual tourism in foreign countries. Also, though the charge is infrequently laid, a few clients were sentenced (to minor penalties) in 2002 for sexual exhibitionism.

Abolitionism

Abolitionism paints all prostitutes as slaves, which means they cannot be punished; they are considered victims of a process they don't control. But this doesn't prevent France's tax administrators from considering revenues from prostitution. Of course, in case of tax adjustments, the only negotiations that are permitted with the administration require that sex workers prove their desire to "escape."

The consequences of abolitionism

While sex workers no longer need to be repressed or controlled, they now need to be taken in charge by social workers specially mandated to help them readapt and reintegrate into society.

One of the major consequences of abolitionism is that the words of sex workers are invalidated, and as a result, so is any form of collective action they may undertake. Sex workers constitute one of society's most silenced groups. Their words are rarely produced, rarely listened to; their statements are constantly weighed against people's suspicions of manipulation or alienation.

The prohibition of a private life

Public intervention in the private lives of sex workers is made possible by the very definition of procuring. Until 1994, any person living with a sex worker is considered by law to be a procurer; as a result, sex workers are condemned to live alone, without their children after age 18, without a companion. This means that unlike other women, sex workers cannot live with the person of their choice, and their private lives bear the heavy weight of public scrutiny.

Socio-psychological treatment of prostitution

Social work also makes a significant contribution to the social construction of the category of "prostitute." Specialized social work considers sex work to be both a symptom (of early-childhood traumas) and a pathology to treat (through reinsertion).

Epistemological split: community health and the mobilization of female sex workers

The first breach we can identify in the social arena is the occupation of churches by prostitutes in Lyon in 1975. The 1970s represented a major turning point during which sex workers, through their attempts at mobilization, reappeared in the social arena as their own spokespersons.

The second breach occurred in the 1990s, thanks to changes in the way that prostitution was considered in the context of the fight against AIDS. A community- and identity-based approach emerged, which took a different view of sex work. Alliances were formed with the appropriate individuals to create associations *with* sex workers rather than *for* sex workers. While these breaches remain the province of minority voices, they allow us to hear what sex workers have to say in diverse circumstances, and create an opening in the dominant abolitionist discourse.

Unfortunately, these breaches were called back into question starting in 2000; since then we have been seeing a major shift backwards when it comes to sex workers' rights.

The prostitute as delinquent

Prostitution as a new political issue

Until 2000, the subject of prostitution was not considered to be a key political theme, but we saw its resurgence in the public debate with the notions of "modern slavery," "traffic" and "sexual slaves."

In December 2000, France, presiding over the European Union, reaffirmed its abolitionist position when an additional protocol was signed by the United Nations in Palermo—the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, aiming to prevent, repress and punish the trade in human beings, in particular women and children.

But what truly launched the criminalization of sex workers was the May 2002 appointment of Nicolas Sarkozy as Minister of the Interior. The next day, for his first media foray, he took part in an anti-prostitution operation in Paris. A few days later, residents of other cities came into the streets to drive off prostitutes. Then, it was the municipalities' turn; they enacted anti-prostitution by-laws under pressure from residents irritated with the nuisance of prostitution. Now, we needed to include a new voice in the debate on prostitution: the resident, who is presented as being in greater danger than the sex workers. The resident's point of view, safety and interests take precedence over those of sex workers. Paradoxical though it may be, prostitutes, though perceived as slaves of the Mafioso, do not seem to deserve prime victim status here.

In any case, even when the women are seen as secondary victims, they only serve as alibis for the law; while it purports to be an endeavour to fight trafficking, it's more like a tool to serve police interests. When looking closely, it quickly becomes clear that the politicians and the media aren't interested in women's needs and circumstances; they simply use the women for their own ends. The migrant prostitute seems to hold a privileged place on the list of "victim alibis"; in fact, she is the prime target of repression.

Lyon's mayor (a socialist) signed a municipal anti-prostitution by-law in July 2002. The by-law affected only 10% of the city's territory, but 90% of Lyon's sex work territory. Starting then, apart from a few stubborn exceptions, sex workers were removed from downtown Lyon and pushed away to squalid and deserted areas outside the city. Cabiria began to mobilize along with sex workers through a street protest and a press release demanding that a delegation of sex workers be invited to meet with the public authorities.

In sum, in 2002 repression grew exponentially, with the government going to war on prostitution, open season declared on prostitutes by residents in a number of French cities and municipal anti-prostitution by-laws—which anticipated the enforcement of the Interior Security Law and set the stage for everyday violence.

The Interior Security Law of March 18, 2003 effectively prohibits prostitution by describing its related acts as criminal and threatening those who perform these acts with two months of prison time and a fine of €750. Prostitution, until then dealt with in psychosocial terms, is now being routed through punitive practices as well. As a result, the exclusion that sex workers have always suffered is now compounded by blind popular vindication and by the restriction of their freedom and ability to work.

As symbolic figures of transgression and disorder, sex workers have become the new scapegoats of interior security policy. In the past they were stigmatized but tolerated; now they are being painted as real threats to order and public peace.

Police violence

We started denouncing police violence committed against sex workers, and there is no end in sight.

Today, the police refuse to take sex workers' reports of assault, and they refuse to come to their aid when needed. All the human rights work we've done since the beginning

encouraging assault victims to exercise their rights as full citizens by reporting each assault is now being cast into doubt. Those who still “dare” find themselves facing an uphill battle, because according to the police, prostitution is now illegal; therefore sex workers have become delinquents. It’s also worth mentioning that in numerous cases, the sex workers who are victims of assault have quickly found themselves treated instead as though they themselves had committed the assault.

Constant harassment, along with excessive arrests, arrests of sex workers in their vehicles using flashlights and cameras, body searches, money theft, racist insults and blackmail are unacceptable trends.

Arrests are equally arbitrary, and basic human rights are rarely respected. Sex workers are forced to remain naked in their cells for hours. To get out of the police station faster, migrant women sign papers they don’t understand because there are no interpreters present. And while the vast majority of them ask the police to contact Cabiria to inform us of their situation, we’ve only received those calls ten times.

It’s difficult to record the number of arrests that have taken place since the application of the law, because they’ve become routine for the women. Victims tend to treat their now-daily experience of violence as banal. They feel that their insecurity is “normal,” simply one of the “risks of the profession.” It’s inconceivable that someone would come forward as the victim of an assault when they themselves are considered to be a delinquent.

Evidently, there are only a very few examples of police officers who have been charged for their actions, but a few of them have been indicted and incarcerated for gang rape of foreign prostitutes, and others for corruption or violent theft.

The law penalizing solicitation is also an excuse for forcing sex workers to change territories. Certain streets in Lyon have been the stage for a number of police actions. The police are now constantly at the ready, and many descriptions have been given of the heavy-handed methods they employ during their interventions. We have worked with sex workers to denounce this violence and to attract the media’s attention to the situation in the hopes of preventing things from getting worse.

Also, the “divide and conquer” strategy is working relatively well. The police, with the media’s help, have been seeking ways to divide the community and incite racial hatred. While some prostitutes already held racist beliefs against migrant women, the police’s help has greatly contributed to exacerbating the community’s internal tensions, by transforming territorial rivalries into battles tinged with contempt, with the aim of chasing out the foreigners. Individualist and commercialist approaches are starting to outweigh collective endeavours to gain access to rights and social recognition.

A minority of sex workers are trying to find other strategies to avoid arrest. Some of them now work at home, but they then run the risk of falling afoul of the procuring law; others have chosen to continue their work via Internet or Minitel. But the majority continue to work in the streets.

Proceedings for solicitation, a difficult-to-describe infraction

The first proceedings took place at the Lyon correctional tribunal in September 2003. Thirty of them have taken place so far. The cases have all shared a common point in terms of the status of the people charged: migrant female sex workers asking for asylum.

We provide legal support to all these women and accompany them throughout their proceedings. In general, for a first-time offence, they were given fines along with a list of conditions, but some women in other cities were deported, and a small number of others (for the moment) were imprisoned.

Some were required to appear in court immediately for insulting police officers, which made it easier to give them suspended prison sentences.

The vagueness of the law, deliberate or otherwise, has created a notable increase in police powers. Let’s not forget that among other things, the law was supposed to help police

enter into dialogue with prostitutes in order to better understand their social situation and to give them the opportunity to turn in their pimps. We haven’t heard of a single solicitation case that’s resulted in a pimp’s arrest, in Lyon or elsewhere. But informing has made its official entry into French law by way of provisional regularization offered to women who turn in their pimps (if they’re arrested, of course). This type of practice is not a form of cooperation with the police—it’s blackmail.

Clearly, women who aren’t trafficked in the legal sense—in other words, who have entered the country of their own volition, but nonetheless illegally—cannot speak out against either the sexist and poor economic conditions of the countries of origin they’re fleeing, or the closure of European borders that oblige them to come in secret and pay smugglers and intermediaries, for fear of discovery and deportation.

Conclusion

To conclude this talk on a positive note, I would like to remind you that we’ve seen many demonstrations by prostitutes in Lyon since the municipal by-law was announced. A national protest took place on November 5, 2002 before the Senate—the first national sex workers’ protest since 1975. Also, at the very moment when the Minister of the Interior asked prefects to “act more vigorously against prostitution,” Lyon sex workers were proving, by a demonstration against another cleanup operation, that the law had not totally reduced them to silence... that they could speak up, stand up when their rights were being trampled on, and send out the message that they were not victims, except in that they suffer social violence, legislative violence and police violence.

Under the cover of penalizing solicitation, under the pretext of work against trafficking in women, sex workers are treated today as though they were dangerous criminals. This may seem paradoxical, considering how it’s been hammered into us that these women are the most pathetic sorts of victims. But it does help us to better understand the enormous chasm between the law’s declared intentions and its reality. These women are presented as being slaves incapable of making decisions about their own lives, as though they were all sold, beaten, raped and forced into prostitution by dangerous mobsters. And this has given the law its greatest justification: the fight against organized crime networks. But saying pretty words in protest of violence against women, when that very violence is denied everywhere by the law itself, makes the whole thing questionable at best.

By openly targeting migrant women as a priority, the authorities have managed to amalgamate immigration and prostitution. This confusion has had a number of consequences, two of which we feel are of prime importance. Firstly, public opinion has been quickly won over. The situation has made it trendy once again to represent prostitution in the most miserable and victimizing manner—a representation that until now had faded somewhat thanks to the work carried out by community health associations in every area of society.

The second consequence: because migrant women are the main target of repression, that repression has only been feebly opposed, even by the sex work community itself and the associations that are supposed to be on its side.

The effects of the Interior Security Law are an undeniable affront to the respect of human beings and to fundamental human rights. They are a dangerous threat to sex workers’ physical and psychological health, and to their status as full members of society.

For these reasons—as we stated recently at an overview of the two years since the law was created, organized by the associations at the National Assembly—we will continue to fight for the decriminalization of sex workers and for the repeal of the law penalizing solicitation.

Decriminalizing Our Lives and Our Work: The New Zealand Deal

New Zealand Prostitutes Collective (NZPC), Wellington (New Zealand)

by

Co-Founder and National
Coordinator

Catherine Healy

The New Zealand Prostitutes Collective began in 1987 when groups of sex workers began to meet informally—in massage parlours, on the streets, in pubs and on beaches—with the purpose of decriminalizing prostitution. In 1988, we were offered a contract with the Minister of Health to provide a range of services related to the prevention of HIV/AIDS among people working in the sex industry. This loosely connected group of male, female and transgendered sex workers became an effective lobby group, and drove the agenda to decriminalize sex work.

On June 25, 2003, the Prostitution Reform Act was passed by the New Zealand Parliament with a majority of one vote. Brothel-keeping, soliciting, living on the earnings, and procuring for the purposes of prostitution were removed as crimes from our law books. What had started as an eleven-clause bill and ended up a 52-section act.

The Prostitution Reform Act, although badly named, is nonetheless mostly grounded on progressive principles. These principles serve to create a framework that:

- * Safeguards the human rights of sex workers and protects them from exploitation;
- * Promotes the welfare and occupational health and safety of sex workers;
- * Is conducive to public health;
- * Prohibits people under 18 years of age from participating in prostitution (either as clients or as sex workers); and
- * Implements certain other related reforms.

Our goal in crafting the law was to achieve a wide range of choices for sex workers. We wanted sex workers from all sectors to be able to work within the law without impediments, and to avoid the creation of an illegal sector within the sex industry.

While a long way from perfect, the Prostitution Reform Act has delivered many of our wishes. The law has mostly been shaped to fit in with the activities of sex workers and other participants in the sex industry, rather than trying to get sex workers to fit into a hostile legal framework.

Throughout the process of changing the law, there were many decisions to make—from arguing over the implication of the draft law to convincing members of Parliament to vote for it, from chatting to the media to writing and presenting submissions. All kinds of sex workers were involved at all levels in this process.

New Zealand is a small country with lots of individual connections. Getting a point across to the right person is usually possible, as is being in a position in which you can have it out with them if they tell lies about you or spread misinformation.

Nevertheless, change did not occur over a short period of time. It took fifteen years of wheeling and dealing, jumping up and down, and boring ourselves by repeating many of the same messages to new audiences to get this law changed. Governments came and went, and at times we felt we were starting from scratch. Public support, nevertheless, seemed to be consistently on our side, when people cared at all. Ironically, it was a male member of Parliament from a conservative party who, in 1991, was the first politician to speak out frequently and passionately about the injustice of the laws. He was re-elected with the biggest majority of voters soon after, and remains in Parliament to this day. I would urge your politicians to speak out in support of this issue and not be afraid.

Major women's organizations, such as the National Council on Women, the Young Women's Christian Association, and the Business and Professional Women's Federation, and others (including some feisty Catholic nuns) added their voices to the call for decriminalization. In most cases these groups were connecting with the human rights element of decriminalization. Public health groups and the HIV/AIDS sector were among the most obvious allies. Significantly, the Council of Trade Unions and various political parties also lent their weight to the cause.

There were, of course, those who vehemently opposed recognizing sex work. Typically their arguments started by labelling sex workers as victims while simultaneously supporting criminal sanctions against us. Predictably, a few high-profile anti-sex brigades of self-labelled feminists diagnosed us with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Opponents also clustered around Biblical literalists, and became more shrill in their claims towards the end of the debate, saying it would lead to "more, more, more" of everything. More sex workers, more brothels, more violence, more coercion, more child abuse. While an effective strategy to scare off supporters, evidence to back their claims was, and still is, lacking. However, they continue to generate headlines with their negative "more" claims about the impact of the law change.

Some politicians withdrew their support over the nearly three years the law was before Parliament, and others became uncertain under this onslaught of mixed messages, fearing an electoral backlash. Nevertheless, truth and reasoned thought won out, and the law passed. Recent attempts by a few members of Parliament to collect enough names for a petition to repeal the law failed by a long shot.

Embedded in the new law, there are some real victories. Street workers in New Zealand are often dehumanized in the context of law reform debates and are usually presented as a nuisance or a menace. So it was a big victory that the law contained no restrictions on street workers. Street sex workers can work on any street anywhere. They are not required to work in specific areas. They can cluster, or they can spread out. They can stand in discreet doorways off the main routes, or they can present in more visible ways.

And did more people flock to work on the streets as a consequence of this extremely liberal law? I don't think so. Two years after law reform, street workers have, in the main, stuck to their same old working habits. New sites haven't appeared as a consequence of the law. The numbers of those working on the streets have remained fairly static.

Prior to the law change, street workers were often picked up for soliciting, and hassled by the police. They were prevented from working indoors as they could not acquire the necessary police authorization to advertise in the newspapers for clients. In fact, prior to the law change, the police made up the rules as they went and applied them haphazardly to sectors of the sex industry—usually in accordance with their own beliefs and prejudices. But New Zealand police are not known for their corruption.

An important outcome of the new law is that individual sex workers do not have to register, or licence, or seek approval from authorities before they can work. There is no mandatory testing of sex workers. However, at the eleventh hour, politicians altered the reference to safer sex practices. Sex workers are required to "take all reasonable steps" to ensure condoms, etc., are used. We are not supporters of the 100% condom use policy, and find this part of the law disturbing—criminalizing sex workers for having unprotected sex is no solution. Brothels operators and clients are similarly required to "take all reasonable steps." As yet, no one has been criminalized.

Extraordinarily, some people felt sex workers gave away their right to say "no" to having sex with their clients when their work became recognized by contract and employment laws—despite the fact that criminal law states any person has the right to say "no" to sex at any time.

Of course, not all sex workers work within a context of ordinary employment or contract law. However, they are still able to access the benefits of those laws in most situations. Brothel

operators are aware that they can be challenged for malpractices, such as bonding and fining or constructive dismissal. These practices still occur, but our observations tell us that they have reduced under pressure from sex workers who are aware they now have rights.

Sex workers are able to work together in groups of up to four before being required to obtain an operators' certificate. There are no restrictions on the numbers of sex workers that brothel operators may have working for them. An operator's certificate is held by the courts, and the identities of operators cannot be accessed by the police or any other undesigned official or person.

As an indication of how secure this data is, recently the Ministry of Justice wanted to send information to brothel operators, but could not access the data held by the court. Instead they had to rely on information in the public arena, such as newspapers and telephone directories. It is important that law does not "out" the identity of people involved in the sex industry.

Of course, not everything that has occurred since the Prostitution Reform Act was passed in 2003 has been good. For many years, the sex industry, in its various guises, has been exposed to local authorities' desire to control it. We were fortunate that our Australian counterparts had gathered significant experience in dealing with hostile and supportive councils. We managed to prevent zoning from being a part of the Prostitution Reform Act, but were unable to stop a last-minute addition that gave power to local councils to make bylaws that say where brothels can or cannot be located.

Our decriminalization story is really a tale of two cities. Auckland, our largest city, brought in horrendous bylaws that require brothels to operate 250 metres away from schools, churches, "cultural" centres, residential zones and more, and from each other. You may think this sounds reasonable, but the effect has been to create an intense environment with a significant proportion of brothels and sex workers operating, once again, outside the law. A number of other city councils have followed this lead.

However, in Wellington, the capital city and the seat of government, the council decided before the law was passed to prevent "commercial sex venues" from operating within one-fifth of the central business district. Fortunately, brothels are now able to operate anywhere else in accordance with general zoning laws relating to all businesses and home occupations.

We feel that the debate over the decriminalization of sex work will never go away in this context. Local authorities are susceptible to the influence of conservative lobby groups and to changes among their elected members. We have been battling city councils on many fronts on this issue for years as they sought to inhibit massage parlours and escort agencies, even before the new law was introduced. We have been successful in some cases, and less so in others.

Other concerns about the Prostitution Reform Act relate to migrant workers. It seems hugely ironic that sex workers who are migrant workers, and are often cited as being very vulnerable, have been treated in what we perceive to be a callous manner by the Prostitution Reform Act. Late additions to the Act, while couched in terms of wanting to protect migrants from being exploited, have had the effect of pushing them underground, leading to a greater chance of exploitation. Inasmuch as I would like you all to come to New Zealand, this addition states "No permit may be granted ... to a person [who] has provided, or intends to provide, commercial sexual services." Any migrant worker who has received a permit may have it revoked.

As with all law, a lot rests on the interpretation. But despite these obvious flaws, we strongly believe that, overall, the Prostitution Reform Act has made a positive impact on the lives of most sex workers.

Thank you.

What's Wrong With the Swedish Model

Riksorganisationen för sex-och erotikarbetare (ROSEA), Stockholm (Sweden)

by

ROSEA Member

Johannes Eriksson

I thought I would start with a Eurocentric view of the world for you non-Europeans who might want to know where Sweden is in the world. I painted the borders red so you can see it's an actually very big country up in the North, but not many people actually live there—about 8 million or so.

To help you understand what this Swedish model of legislation is all about, I think I should tell you a little bit about Sweden. Sweden has had a social-democratic government for the last hundred years or so. So it's pretty much a politically stable country. State feminism is sort of the key word to understanding Sweden. For example 50% or more of parliamentarians are women. I think we were the first country in the world to have paid maternity leave and paid paternity leave. So fathers are also required to take care of the kids and so forth.

Our self-image is that we are the most gender-equal country in the world. As one of my friends put it, "the state religion in Sweden is not Christianity but feminism." You have to be very clear about this. In accordance with this, prostitution has been a very invisible phenomenon. Prostitution is not big in Sweden; it never has been because of the welfare state. But the little there is, has traditionally always been very invisible. And because of that, the sex workers' movement is really weak. The communities are pretty scattered over the country, which covers a vast geographic area. We are not very influential in the political debate, you could say.

Also, a key point in this is that we have a very good tradition of exporting social policies in Sweden. For example, in 1979 we were the first country to ban child abuse, to make it illegal. And we made a big deal out of exporting that to other European countries, which really took on this model of legislation. And so the Swedish government thought, "Well, now that we have done this so successfully, why don't we continue with prostitution and export that model?" So that's what they are doing right now. They are heavily promoting the Swedish model of regulating prostitution. What is it all about then?

It came into effect in 1999, so it's been six years. You could summarize it like this: activities that surround the sex work are illegal. That was also the case before 1999. So procuring and facilitating is illegal. Right? Selling sex was legal before the law and is still legal now. But the new thing here is that buying sex is illegal. So the clients are criminals but we are not... yet.

Since they're focusing so much on exporting it, perhaps you are wondering why the Swedish government thinks it is such a good idea? Well, the law is the result of a government report from a committee that sort of investigated prostitution. It dealt with questions such as what is prostitution all about, what do we want to do about it, and so forth. And they came up with the following arguments. These are not their words, they are mine. I summarize it like this:

First of all, they believe that the criminalization of the clients will empower women. Think about that! And I constantly say "women" here because that's what the government is saying. Officially, I don't really exist as a sex worker in Sweden since I'm a guy, and prostitution is all about women selling sex... no, selling their bodies to men, excuse me. All right. They feel that empowerment would be that if a woman sort of sits around at home and thinks "Maybe I should start selling sex," then this criminalization would make her actually think twice before doing so.

Also if someone were to try to talk a woman into starting to sell sex, she would benefit from this criminalization because she would be able to say "No, no, no, it's illegal so you can't talk to me into doing that!" And lastly, the thought was that many of those who are already selling sex would quit if it were to become illegal.

The second thing that the government thought was important is the symbolic value of all this. The argument goes like this: men in who buy sexual services are rarely focused upon. So by doing this, by directing the focus at the buyers and punishing them instead of the women, we may change the norm in society that currently stigmatizes prostitutes and instead stigmatize the clients. Which would be better.

The third set of arguments is pretty recent. This last set is becoming stronger now that they are promoting the model to other European countries. They say legislation like this can be used to combat trafficking. There was not a word about that when they actually passed it, but they sort of came up with the argument later.

Great. So now you have the theory. What about the impact on sex workers? You could say that the government didn't really intend to actually punish prostitutes by passing this law. But the practical results are of course that street prostitutes are the ones who suffer the most from it. Many women left the street pretty much immediately to work in other arenas like brothels or their own apartments. Many of them became dependent on pimps. So you could easily say that the Swedish model has given pimps more jobs—more work and more money. Those women who could not leave the streets for various reasons, for example because of drug use or a mental condition or whatever, their situation has become desperate and really much worse. I'm going to concentrate on this now because it's the most important thing of all.

The street workers have a lot of trouble with the police because the police are out there to bust clients. And when they do so they have to collect evidence. They have to collect evidence of 1: sex and 2: the exchange of money. A very good way of doing this, in the view of the police, is to videotape sex workers and their clients having sex in cars. And even if the sex workers are not formally charged with committing a crime, their integrity is pretty much violated every day as they are videotaped having sex. Another good thing that the police is doing—well, not good, but they think it's efficient—is to look for condoms because condoms are evidence of sex. I can see from your reactions, you see where this is leading! When the police bust a client, they regularly strip search the sex workers—they are still not criminals, yet they are strip searched, for condoms. And the police also strip search the clients for condoms. Of course, this gives people a strong incentive not to carry condoms. That's not very good, right?

What's happening now is desperation, of course. Many clients left the streets and went to indoor prostitutes instead. That means fewer clients and that also means less choice for the women who are working on the streets. They can no longer afford to say no to bad clients. Also the street clients are more stressed now because they don't want to get caught by the police. So they don't allow much time for negotiating anymore. So it basically works like this: a car comes up, the girl jumps in, the car drives away and the girl hopes that this is not a maniac. The decrease in the number of clients is making street workers more desperate. They are more likely now to agree to unsafe sex or to put their health at risk in other ways because they just have less choice now.

Undocumented immigrants are not having a ball right now in Sweden. When the police are busting clients, they sometimes come across undocumented immigrants. These are still not criminals, but they are immediately arrested and deported when found. This also is quite counter-productive because when they prosecute traffickers and pimps, there are no witnesses left to testify.

One last thing here. Before the law, clients used to be quite useful in the police's work against abusive pimps and abusive clients. But these clients are no longer willing to provide the police with any kind of information because they don't want to be prosecuted.

I don't have to tell you this, but contrary to the government's intentions, I see no signs that the whore stigma is diminishing in Sweden. And I don't see any sign of trafficking diminishing either. People are still coming to Sweden, legally or illegally, or being transported there. There's no difference for them. That's depressing, right?

This law was made in the offices of a few abolitionist feminists and social workers hired by the government. No sex workers were consulted whatsoever before the law was created, and we are still not able to be part of the public debate. So we have given up on fighting within Swedish borders. Instead, we have started an inventory of influential people and politicians that support sex workers' rights. Then we build this little personal database in our heads because these people might become useful one day. Because the political climate in Sweden is such that if you are opposed to this Swedish law, you are politically dead if you openly admit it. So politicians cannot be open about being critical of this model.

What we've been doing, which has been working, is to go international to prevent the "disease" of this legislation from spreading. For example, last year, together with our friends in Norway, we organized a sex workers' conference in the Norwegian parliament in Oslo. There was a debate going on there—people were saying, "Are we going to take on this Swedish model or not? It looks so good. Why don't we do it?" So we responded by organizing this conference, we made the politicians listen. And it seems that we have achieved broad political majority to not criminalize the clients in Norway. Activism can pay off sometimes.

And also, one strategy that I think we will have to take on, when we gather the energy to fight within Swedish borders again, is to go public. Because the reason that the Swedish government could come up with this stupid law is that there were almost no visible signs of protest. Because there were almost no visible prostitutes. So we really have to do that. I believe that will be the key strategy for the future.

Participants' eXXXpressions on “Law, Policy and Human Rights”

Stella, Montréal (Canada)

Synthesis by

Jenn Clamen

The laws and policies surrounding prostitution are major preoccupations for sex workers. Prostitution law, and most policies, render us criminals and infringe on our human rights. One aim of the sex workers' rights movement is to call for law and policy reform in favour of our human rights. Laws and policies often discriminate across workers' class, status and geographical location; we all suffer under antiquated prostitution laws and their ambiguous enforcement. Forum XXX participants named some of our current challenges, as individual sex workers and as a movement, with existing laws and related human rights issues.

Challenges

The criminalization of sex work through prostitution law renders sex workers vulnerable to the judicial system and to constant societal discrimination and stigma. Not only are sex workers criminalized through the criminal code, but other laws are applied in a discriminating way to sex workers; we often accumulate tickets or are “flagged” by the authorities and subjected to constant scrutiny.

Police repression, in the form of harassment and abuse, is a major problem for sex workers, particularly those who are the most visible. This harassment is both verbal and physical, and takes a number of forms: officers give sex workers needless tickets—for jaywalking, loitering, and other infractions—that are not usually dealt out to the general public, and subject sex workers to physical and verbal abuse. Street sex workers pay the highest price for police repression. As sex workers, we have little recourse due to our quasi-legal status.

Police harassment has many roots. One is the constant pressure on the police from residents and anti-prostitution zealots to arrest and detain sex workers, and to ensure the streets, in particular, are “clean.” Another is that police are rarely accountable under the law. Stigma, as well, plays a large role in how police treat sex workers. When we are victims of a crime, for example, we are rarely met with respect and we are considered criminals before we are considered legitimate victims. We are under the constant scrutiny of police authorities and are rarely protected by them. As a result, the sex workers' rights movement is constantly attempting to reform police behaviour and create laws that can protect us.

Our prison systems are filled with sex workers, who are often in and out of jail. Once in the judicial system, we are faced with discrimination, stigma, and a lack of respect for our fundamental rights. Often lawyers and judges are not sympathetic to our situations, and we are left to fend for ourselves.

Organizing for law and policy reform is difficult for myriad reasons. First, the language we use to voice our demands is different from place to place, and is often misunderstood. The word “decriminalization,” for example, typically means the removal of prostitution laws from the criminal or penal code, but to some the word also implies a certain level of regulation. “Legalization,” when used by sex workers in Western countries, is restrictive and more punitive, but when used by sex workers in Europe is often used to refer to an ideal model of law reform.

Nonetheless, “decriminalization” is a term that is used frequently in the sex workers' rights movement. To be pro-decriminalization means to be in favour of removing laws and policies that criminalize sex workers. Individual definitions of decriminalization vary, and what our industry would look with decriminalization is typically a point of divergence. Many sex workers fear law reform and the harsher penalties that may follow. But regardless of the

language we use to state our demands for law reform, we are seeking a change in the law so that it may be used to protect, rather than harm, us. We want laws and policies that do not come from a protectionist standpoint, that do not discriminate against us or against our work, and that do not endorse the stigma against sex work. Any type of law reform must not bring with it harsher penalties than the ones that already exist—the dangers that current laws have created effectively place our lives in danger.

Criminalization harms us all, and any reform needs to address our needs and be informed by sex workers. We are, after all, the ones affected by these laws. Sex workers are often the last people to be consulted in law and policy reform, and generally the people making recommendations on our behalf don't work in the industry. As a result, these recommendations often do not correspond with our needs or reflect our realities.

Our needs in the realm of law reform are not restricted to laws that affect sex workers, but include laws that affect our clients as well. The Swedish model of prostitution, which criminalizes clients, puts sex workers and their clients in physical danger. Policies designed with the criminalization of our clients in mind actually put sex workers in more danger by promoting a victimizing view of sex workers, and feeding shame and stigma around our work. An alarming number of "john schools" currently exist. "John schools" are an alternative to fines or jail time when clients are arrested; these "schools" are intended to discourage them from seeing sex workers in the future.

Other laws and policies that affect sex workers' lives do not necessarily fall under prostitution law. For example, many sex workers organize around labour laws and our struggle for status as workers. Some have even started or joined trade unions since they provide easier access to occupational safety and labour codes. Immigration laws also greatly affect sex workers. Like many other workforces, some sex workers have immigrated temporarily and may be working either with or without papers. Migrant workers are not only denied their human rights under laws that protect official citizens of a country, but are also placed under pressure because of criminal laws related to prostitution. Migrant sex workers are in a precarious situation with regards to both their status in the country and their status as quasi-criminals. Migrant workers and other sex workers are under even more pressure nowadays because of the effects of feminist and trafficking debates about sex work. Migrant workers' issues are often conflated with issues of force and coercion. Often, the policies that result from the work of feminist and anti-prostitution lobbyists are more dangerous and more discriminatory towards migrant sex workers even than what existed before. These issues need to be addressed at a policy level by sex workers themselves.

Q : How can we work towards our human rights and towards a fair legal system for sex workers?

A :

- * Fight against police repression by documenting human rights abuses.
 - Challenge tickets directly in court; create a precedent for new policy to be developed.
- * Encourage the application of sexual assault and coercion laws that actually do protect us.
- * Make police accountable under the law for their mistreatment and abuse.
- * Work towards common language and a comprehensive model of law reform.
- * Fight for the true inclusion of sex workers in the policy-making processes.
- * Fight against repressive legislation such as mandatory testing, the registration of individual sex workers, john schools, zoning restrictions, and certain anti-trafficking laws.
- * Find and work with feminist allies and other allies who are willing to stand up for our legal needs.
- * Join forces with other movements (labour, migrant workers).
- * Create coalitions and networks to put pressure on governments.

Designing our Future

Conclusion

by

Executive Director, Stella

Claire Thiboutot

So here I am, writing the conclusion to the Forum XXX proceedings in January 2006. It's snowing huge white snowflakes in Montreal, and the forum has been over for several months now. But it still seems like just yesterday to me. In the same way, it seems like January 2004 was only yesterday—when I came back from spending a year and a half with sex workers in Vietnam, and started working with my Stella colleagues to organize the activities for our tenth anniversary, and planning what would become the Forum XXX. And now it's all done, and we celebrated the anniversary in style!

Hundreds and thousands...

When I think about the forum, I can still hear the crackling of the walkie-talkies, the ringing of our cell phones, the murmur of conversations during the breaks we took outside under a chilly spring sun. I can see us running between television and radio studios and agonizing over a thousand organizational details, adrenaline rushing through our veins, stomachs a little unsettled from the sandwiches we swallowed too quickly and from lack of sleep. I remember the corridors and auditoriums of the university, where you could see red and saffron saris, piercings and lace. I can see us again, diligent, always present, listening attentively to the panellists' presentations, to what everyone was saying in the discussion groups, in the hall, at the parties. The atmosphere was one of joy—the joy of being there together and the pleasure of seeing old friends. The feeling of our strength, our pride and our solidarity vibrated in the air. There were more than two hundred of us; but in reality there were thousands of us, since we were channelling the voices and words of thousands of sex workers, members of our organizations on five continents... voices from India, France, Sweden, Thailand, Argentina, New Zealand, Israel, South Africa, Hong Kong, the United States, Canada, Quebec and more.

...Talking in a spirit of diversity...

Of course, not everything was perfect. For unilingual Francophones from Montreal and Quebec City, the language barrier created a lot of frustration. It was difficult to fully benefit from the discussions taking place in an international meeting when the main language used by the participants to speak to one another was English. This difficulty was also shared in part by others for whom English was a second language, after Mandarin, Thai, Finnish and others. But despite that barrier, the international aspect of the meeting was one of the elements the participants appreciated the most, if we go by the comments we gathered through our evaluation forms. Learning more about the situation of sex workers elsewhere in the world, the laws in other countries, the results of changes to those laws, and more—the participants not only enjoyed this, but it motivated us to affirm ourselves all the more, and reinforced their courage to keep fighting. For others, finding access to this worldwide vision of sex work helped us recognize the similarities of our needs and our struggles. The feeling of being “among family” with people from all over the world recharged our strength to continue working towards a better future! To paraphrase one participant's comment, I would add that “knowing that you're not alone in Montreal, not alone in the world, feeling that sex workers everywhere in the world are facing the same struggles we are—these things are extremely inspiring!” With the forum, our fight definitely took on an international flavour.

In addition to language, we faced several other challenges. People of every stripe and every gender attended: women, men, transsexuals, intersex people. We came from different cultures, with a wide range of sex work experiences, each socio-legislative context very different from the next. We had divergences of opinion, misunderstandings... a few times,

voices were raised, and here and there tears were shed. Our diversity creates constant challenges around issues of inclusion, representation, and solidarity. And this was not only the case at the forum; the Forum XXX simply echoed the questions we face in our organizing work and in our struggles as a whole.

Other issues that might be considered identity questions also came up. Some of us identify as feminists, while others are put off by the word, if only because it's associated with anti-prostitution and abolitionist discourse. This question, among many others, illustrates how enormously important it is to take the time to talk, to educate one another, to learn from one another and to help build a common language.

Our interest in diversity is also challenged by reductive representations that are imposed by our social environment, particularly by the media. This is what Ping Pong (Coordinator at Empower, Thailand) warned us about when she explained what a day in the life of the Empower offices looks like. Our community is rich and varied, and we're never the same from one day to the next. We're different from day to day in terms of nationality and status, religion, marital status, needs and so forth. We need to be very careful about snap generalizations, even among ourselves.

Sharing experiences that bring us together...

Given the challenges of dealing with our extreme diversity, how do we go about mobilizing, organizing and gaining power for our community? How do we make sure our community is autonomous, independent and visible? We talked a lot about community and organizational development during the Forum, and the discussions were so fruitful that it's very hard to give a short version here. The importance of working together was certainly at the heart of our talks. Together to break isolation and create spaces where we belong. Together to share our differences and the diversity of our experiences, to recognize those experiences and give them their proper weight. Together to create relationships between sex workers from all spheres of the industry, and to better fight for our economic, sexual and social autonomy. Together to create solidarity, to name our common concerns and needs and to translate those needs into collective actions and demands.

Together, I think we also managed to make people feel safe, create an atmosphere of trust, even though we were using an institutional location, a university. As one participant wrote, "It was wonderful to have a safe space in which to be 'out' and be myself." In this space, the participants had the opportunity to share and learn from one another on the basis of a multitude of shared experiences.

Collective action strategies can take different forms based on people's needs and the available resources: the creation of a publishing house or a website, peer-led health promotion activities, magazine publication, educational programs for sex workers and their children, or teaching in a multicultural and solidarity-based people's university to help everyone gain access to knowledge—these are just a few examples. Other initiatives, such as banking cooperatives, support sex workers' ability to take charge of their own economic autonomy. Organizations and groups have also developed cultural projects, where through artistic expression—video, dance, theatre, humour, performance—sex workers express their creativity and explore their own representations of themselves and their work. Among others I'm thinking of the DMSC troupe, Komol Gandhar, and of the Debbys from Australia.

...To increase visibility and make our voices heard

But many of these experiences require that some of us come out of the closet. The discussions about coming out, in my opinion, were some of the forum's most powerful moments. Maybe because the discussion reminded me of my mother's words when I came out. In the words of a popular song in Quebec, she said, "There needs to be one person to do it." Of course, revealing yourself as a sex worker is not an easy thing to do; in some situations it even means exposing yourself to danger. But as one participant wrote, it's necessary "to show yourself in order to put a face to the cause." Our visibility humanizes the cause, acts as testimony to our diversity, and helps us to be better heard by society.

The more sex workers come out as sex workers, without shame, the more others will have the courage to do so. And all the better, because as stigmatized as we are, the weight of that visibility needs to be shared. Coming out comes with a price, but it's worth it. As for me, I don't regret having done it. During the forum and again today, after nearly 15 years of activism, I feel so proud to be among my fellow sex workers and to have contributed to the birth of something in Quebec that has been growing ever since.

That being said, we need to continue to make room in our organizations for those who don't want to come out, for whom the consequences would be too huge or too dangerous. And we need to persist in our struggle against the biggest barrier of them all: stigmatization.

Fighting stigmatization

Stigmatization is pernicious, and to fight it we need to question existing social structures with regard to gender, sexuality and sex work. Whether it's through the law, the media discourse or certain feminist positions, many people persist in defining us as victims or corrupted people with no voice, or delinquents with no defence, or scandalous and excessive. During the forum, we learned that in France, the law itself defines prostitutes as socially maladapted victims who need rehabilitation. In order to get help from classic social work institutions that aim to rehabilitate prostitutes, you need to confess to being a victim, say you're ashamed and show that you want to "rehabilitate." So the stigma is reinforced: you need to "escape" prostitution to better "reintegrate" into society. Unless you follow the program, you get nothing—certainly not full citizenship!

As a parallel, abolitionist discourse also reiterates the stigma. Prostitutes are defined as voiceless victims of the patriarchy, globalization, neo-liberalism and human trafficking. And those who present themselves as "sex workers" are then defined as people who are necessarily corrupt, not credible, and whose words aren't legitimate—because they're supposedly "bought" by the industry, by pimps, and by organized crime. This discourse has devastating effects on our lives and our working conditions, as well as on the repression and violence done to us, not to mention being coloured with a good dose of racism. Migrant sex workers are considered to come from inferior and backwards cultures that don't care about women's rights, so these women must have inferior decision-making abilities when it comes to prostitution. This type of racist, even classist, discourse in turn feeds into various versions of the "not in my backyard" syndrome that's infused in urban development practices, immigration policies and national security policies.

To counter all these stigmatizing discourses and their harmful effects, we need to be proactive and focus on our own agenda. We must persist in demanding that our human rights be respected, that we be allowed full social integration (citizenship) and that our work be recognized as work. Sex work is not a moral condition; it's an occupation. We are not victims, fallen people or aberrations, but simply people who are the active agents of our own lives and destinies, able to act and make changes to our working conditions and environments, including social and legislative changes.

Promoting and taking part in social, legislative and political changes

We need to participate in and contribute to the process of reforming policies and laws that affect us if we want to see social change and policies that respect our rights, improve our social status and contribute to our quality of life. The examples of legislative reform in Sweden and New Zealand in the last few years are good reference points. In the former, sex workers didn't take part in the reform process, and the impacts of the law's enforcement are clearly harmful in terms of safety and working conditions. Why would we be surprised? In the latter case, even if things aren't perfect, the people who are most concerned made their voices heard during the development of the new law, as well as in its evaluation process. The effects of the changes are much more positive and are respectful of sex workers' human rights.

This last example gives us much hope here in Canada, where we've inherited the same British traditions as New Zealand has in terms of criminal law. I saw tears in the eyes of

many participants during the presentation by Catherine Healy (Co-Founder and National Coordinator of the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective). We were very moved to learn that our dream could come true, that it had come true elsewhere.

But we weren't only moved; we also felt that we were lagging behind. Our colleagues elsewhere, for their part, were shocked to hear how things are working in Canada, particularly with regard to street prostitution: arrests spiking, the imposition of zoning restrictions, frequent jail time and more.

The experience of New Zealand, Argentina and many other countries reinforces our conviction that to achieve adequate social and legislative changes, we need to form alliances with a variety of individuals, groups, institutions and social and political movements—including unions—and invest our voices and energy to bring our issues to the table in a range of places. We need to make these changes if we want to access concrete means for fully exercising our human rights and ensuring that they're respected.

Effectively fighting HIV

The recognition of our basic human rights—rights to health, safety, and dignity, for example—is a key part of our fight against HIV. To make those rights count, we also need to continue to counter the negative effects of stigmatization. The mechanisms at work here are problematic on a number of fronts. All too often, in terms of HIV, we reiterate the stigma by talking about “good” whores versus “bad” ones, the sex worker who's vulnerable to AIDS versus the sex worker who's guilty of being a vector for disease transmission. The first premise supports current American policies on AIDS and feeds the anti-prostitution strategies supported by the religious right and neo-abolitionists. As a consequence, people's understanding of the fight against AIDS is increasingly translated into a fight against prostitution and prostitutes. The second part of the stigma, the one that defines us as guilty, is no better since it too calls for unacceptable measures of social and medical control.

We need to stand up against these definitions and the stigmatizing policies they generate. We need to pursue and refine our strategies with a view to promoting the health, the rights and the empowerment of our communities.

Unfortunately, we've been scared off by the link between sex work and HIV and its stigmatizing effect that, at least in the West, we've virtually made it a taboo—forgetting that we need to remain open and create supportive spaces for our brothers and sisters who have the virus. In my opinion, it's time to remedy the situation. This is what we've tried to do during the forum, by creating a space to discuss the issues in a workshop on *working with HIV*.

As for prevention, it may be wise to remember that throughout the world, we have done incredible and imaginative work. However, we can't just stop and rest on our laurels. Vigilance is of paramount importance; the epidemic hasn't stopped, and in some countries, HIV/AIDS has been and continues to be a stumbling block to our organization work. The virus is still killing our brothers and sisters.

Conclusion of a conclusion

What I've written so far barely covers the beginning of all the thoughts that have been going through my mind since last May. I hope to have the chance to discuss and debate these things with my fellow sex workers again soon perhaps in the summer of 2006, at the International AIDS Conference? I can't wait to see everyone again, what can I say!

The Forum XXX was a wonderful and inspiring adventure. From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank everyone from here and from abroad, for coming to take part with such devotion and generosity. I would also like to thank Maria Nengeh Mensah for her dynamic energy and her boundless optimism. In difficult moments, she kept us on track. Thank you to Jenn Clamen and Valérie Boucher; after nine months of intense gestation, you gave birth to a major event that will live in our memories for a long time to come. Hats off to you! Thanks

to Irène Demzcuck; the Forum XXX was a welcoming and comfortable space in great part thanks to you and your team. And lastly, thanks to the entire Stella team, which had the patience to put up with us and to support us, the forum team, throughout all our preparation work. You provided the elbow grease we needed to make the forum run smoothly, even in the heat of the action! Many thanks to each and every one of you!

The Forum XXX was intended as a space for discussion and sharing about a diverse range of experiences, actions and mobilization strategies. The proceedings you hold in your hands are intended as a reflection, if only a partial one, of the meetings that took place in May 2005 in Montreal. It doesn't contain a miracle recipe for our struggle's success. It's only a list of ingredients, examples and possible combinations. Now it's up to you to make your meal, to take what's useful to you and adapt it to your own situation.

By increasing our strength, sharing our power and resistance, and spreading our pride, one day we will win!

Claire Thiboutot, Stella
January 15, 2006

Biographical notes

Appendix

Kohinoor Begum et Rama Debnath (Kolkata, India) represent the illustrious Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, a forum of 65,000 sex workers and their children. Working with sex workers in West Bengal, DMSC networks with sex worker projects and groups in India and abroad. DMSC has been an active partner in the implementation and management of STD/HIV Intervention Programme known globally as the Sonagachi Project.

Debby Doesn't Do It For Free (Australia) is a large group of "Debby-named" sex worker activists, artists, performers and film makers representing the diversity and anonymity of sex workers, both out and not, on their terms. Their punchy and educative performances have received critical acclaim after performing in Australia, North America and Thailand.

Johannes Eriksson (Stockholm, Sweden), law student, escort, and sex worker activist extraordinaire is a member of the Swedish Association of Sex Workers (ROSEA). Alongside working the hotels of Stockholm and Copenhagen, he also helped organise the next European Sex Worker Conference by the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) in October 2005.

Catherine Healy (Wellington, New Zealand) is one of the co-founders of the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective, and is currently the National Co-ordinator for the Collective. As such, she was the major campaigner for the Prostitution Reform Bill that decriminalised prostitution in New Zealand in 2003. Described by opponents of the Bill as "well spoken voice of vice" and a "harlot", she has been prosecuted by the Crown for providing services to men, but awarded a medal by the Queen for providing services to women.

Kara Gillies (Toronto, Canada) has been fighting for sex workers rights for over a decade. She works at Maggie's, Canada's first funded sex-workers' project. Founded in 1986, Maggie's is an original peer organization that has been a model for similar groups internationally.

Liad Kantorowicz (Tel Aviv, Israel) is a writer, student, activist and organizer in the joint Israeli-Palestinian popular resistance to the occupation of Palestine, as well as an activist for women's rights and sex workers rights. She is currently working on Israel's first feminist porn movie. Her sex work activism is inspired by 9 years of sex work experience in Israel and in the United States.

Émilie Laliberté (Montréal, Canada) is an outreach worker at Stella since 2004 who takes issue with airport security officers who comment on the amount of sexy lingerie her luggage can contain. She has had enough of judicial and police injustice against sex workers and donates herself entirely to the movement, so that our rights are not only recognised and respected but also celebrated!

Maria Nengeh Mensah (Montréal, Canada), professor, political advocate, and desperate housewife, has been involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS for sixteen years. She does critical feminist research on the determinants of women's health. Her alliance with Stella began in 1999 developing the Guide XXX, with the Forum XXX being her most recent brainchild.

Corinne Monnet (Lyon, France) is the director of Cabiria, a community health action and participatory research organisation for sex workers in Lyon. Best known for its actions against police repression locally and at national, European and international levels.

Ping Pong (Chiang Mai, Thailand) is a Thai sex worker from Empower. Ping Pong is one of the coordinators of Empower Chiang Mai and has been running the health program at Empower for the last seven years.

Elena Eva Reynaga (Buenos Aires, Argentina), rumba dancer and mother of three, began her work as for the rights of sex workers in 1994, in response to police abuse. Founder and current General Secretary of AMMAR, a sex worker unions, she is also the president of the Sex Workers Network of Latin American and the Caribbean.

Mirha-Soleil Ross (Toronto, Canada) is a transsexual prostitute, performer, video maker, community activist, and a sexy vegan flirt! In 1998, she founded MEAL-TRANS, the first publicly funded, multi-services program for low income, street-active, and sex working TS/TG people in Toronto. She also produced and curated, from 1997-1999, an annual multi-disciplinary TS/TG art festival called *Counting Past 2*. Her videos have been screened internationally and her play, *Yapping Out Loud: Contagious Thoughts from an Unrepentant Whore*, was recently produced as part of Buddies in Bad Times' Theatre 2004-2005 season.

Marie-Neige St-Jean (Montréal, Canada) has been working at Stella for 6 years and has 12 years of sex work experience. Socially involved for many years, Marie-Neige is interested in the struggle for empowerment, social justice and fundamental human rights.

Claire Thiboutot (Montréal, Canada), a long time activist and former stripper, participated in the founding of Québec's first sex worker association, AQTTS, in 1992. Founding member and current director of Stella, she also set up an HIV prevention program in Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City, for Médecins du Monde Canada in 2002/3. In April 2005, she was happy to be back in her stilettos and on stage to receive an award from the Farha Foundation, for her remarkable work in the fight against AIDS and her dedication to sex worker's human rights.

Contact information for sex worker groups

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Counselling line: (514) 848-2424 # 7880
Fax: (514) 848-2424 # 8630
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Action Séro-Zéro

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<http://www.cactusmontreal.org/fr/astteq.html>

Bulletin Solidarité

bulletin_solidarite@yahoo.ca

Cactus

1626, Saint-Hubert
Montreal, QC, H2L 3Z3
Tel: (514) 847-0067
Fax: (514) 847-0601
<http://www.cactusmontreal.org>
cactusm@videotron.ca

Canadian AIDS Society

190 O'Connor Street, Suite 800
Ottawa, ON, K2P 2R3
Tel: (613) 230-3580
Fax: (613) 563-4998
<http://www.cdn aids.ca>
casinfo@cdnaids.ca

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

1240 Bay Street, Suite 600
Toronto, ON M5R 2A7
Tel: (416) 595-1666
Fax: (416) 595-0094
<http://aidslaw.ca>
info@aidslaw.ca

Canadian Guild for Erotic Labour

<http://www.eroticguild.com>
cgel@sympatico.ca

Catwoman

505 rue Wellington Sud
Sherbrooke, QC J1H 5E2
Tel: (819) 823-6704
iris.estrie@videotron.ca

Comité des personnes atteintes du VIH du Québec (CPAVIH)
2075, rue Plessis, Bureau 310 (3^{ème} étage)
Montreal, QC H2L 2Y4
Tel: (514) 521-8720 or 1 (800) 927-2844
<http://www.cpavih.qc.ca>
c.coude@cpavih.qc.ca

Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ Sida)
1, rue Sherbrooke Est
Montreal, QC H2X 3V8
Tel: (514) 844-2477, # 0 (ou 21)
Fax: (514) 844-2498
<http://www.cocqsida.com>

Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers
Tel: (514) 859-9009
<http://www.lacoalitionmontreal.com>
lacoalition2000@yahoo.com

Dopamine
4560 Adam
Montreal, QC H1V 1V2
Tel: (514) 251-8872
beaulieu_maryse@hotmail.com

Exotic Dancers Association of Canada
2343 Brimley Road, Suite 708
Toronto, ON M1S 3L6
1 (888)-295-(PEEL)7335
<http://www.livegirlproductions.com/peel/speaking.html>

Health Canada/
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>

London Alliance to Support Sex Trade Workers
London, ON
Tel: (519) 438-2272
sbollman@home.com

Kali Shiva
kalishiv@mts.net

Maggie's
298 Gerrard St East, 2nd Floor
Toronto, ON
Tel: (416) 964-0150
<http://www.maggiestoronto.org>
maggies@rogers.com

Médecine du Monde
338, rue Sherbrooke Est
Montreal, QC H2X 1E6 (Canada)
Tel: (514) 281-8998
Fax: (514) 281-3011
<http://www.medecinsdumonde.ca/index.htm>

Montreal Native Friendship Centre
2001 St. Laurent Boulevard
Montreal, QC H2X 2T3
Tel: (514) 499-1854
Fax: (514) 499-9436
<http://www.nfcm.org>
info@nfcm.org

Pairs Aidants
Tel: (514) 847-8637

Passages
C.P. 1414, Complexe Desjardins
Montreal, QC H5B 1H3
Tel: (514) 875-8119
Fax: (514)875-9238
passages@qc.aira.com

Projet 10
6 Weredale Park
Montreal, QC H3Z 1Y6
<http://www.p10.qc.ca>
questions@projet10.qc.ca

Projet Vénus
90 boul. Lévesque Est
Laval, QC H7G 1B9
Tel: (450) 669-1680

Prostitution Alternatives Counselling and Education (PACE)
119 West Pender, Suite 416
Vancouver BC V6B 1S5
Tel: (604) 872-7651 or 1 (866) 872-8751
Fax: (604).872-7508
<http://www.pace-society.ca>
pace-admin@telus.net

Salam Queer Islamic Association

Sex Professionals of Canada (SPOC)
(416) 364-5603
<http://www.spoc.ca>
spoc@yahoo.ca

Sex Workers Alliance of Toronto (SWAT)
Tel: (416) 921-SWAT
s.w.a.t.@sympatico.ca

Sex Workers Alliance of Vancouver (défunt groupe)
<http://www.walnet.org/swav>

Stepping Stone
2224 Maitland Street
Halifax, NS B3K 2Z9
Tel: (902) 420 0103
<http://www.supercity.ns.ca/~stepping>
steppingstone@navnet.net

Two Spirit Circle of Edmonton Circle
Edmonton, AB
Tel: (780) 554-2327 (BEAR)
<http://www.twospirits.ca>

Africa

SWEAT and Sisonke National Sex Workers Movement of South Africa
Community House
41 Salt River Rd, Salt River
7915 Cape Town
Tel: 27 21 448 7875
Fax: 27 21 448 7857
<http://www.sweat.org.za>
info@sweat.org.za

Asia

Action for Reach Out (AFRO)
P.O. Box 98108, T.S.T. Post Office
Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon
Hong Kong
Tel: 852 2770-1065
<http://hkajds.med.cuhk.edu.hk/reachout>

COSWAS
<http://coswas.org>
coswas@mail2000.com.tw

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC)
<http://www.durbar.org>

Empower, Chiang Mai
57/60 Tivanond Rd, Nonthaburi 11000,
Thailand
Tel: 0-2526-8311
Fax: 0-2526-3294
<http://www.empowerfoundation.org>
empower@empowerfoundation.org

GAHUM-Philippines Inc.
Center for communications : Cyberscript
Document and Data Solutions, 192
N. Bacalso Ave., South Expressway,
Cebu City, Philippines, 6000
<http://www.gahumphils.blog.com/>
gahum_phils@yahoo.com

Sex Workers Forum Kerala
Kerala, India
swfk@asianetindia.com

Europa

ASPASIE
36, rue de Monthoux - 1201 Genève
Switzerland
Tel: 022-732 68 28
Fax: 022-731 02 46
<http://www.aspasie.ch>
aspasie@aspasie.ch

Cabiria
BP 1145 69203 Lyon Cedex 01
France
Tel: 04 78 30 02 65
Fax: 04 78 30 97 45
<http://www.cabiria.asso.fr>
cabiria@wanadoo.fr

International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE)
P.O. Box 51319
1007 EH, Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel: 31 20 693 1300
<http://www.sexworkeurope.org>
info@sexworkeurope.org

Riksorganisationen för sex-och erotikarbetare (ROSEA)
Sweden

SALLI-United Sex Professionals of Finland
PL 3, FI-01451 Vantaa
Finland
Tel: 358 40 510 2114
<http://www.salli.org/>

International

International Union of Sex Workers
PO Box 27465
London SW2 1YA
United Kingdom
<http://www.iusw.org>

Network of Sex Work Projects
<http://www.nswp.org>
secretariat@nswp.org

Oceania

Debby Doesn't Do It for Free
(See Scarlet Alliance)

New Zealand Prostitutes Collective (NZPC)

National Office
PO BOX 11-412
Wellington, New Zealand
Tel: 64-4-382-8791
Fax: 64-4-801-5690
<http://www.nzpc.org.nz/index.htm>
pcdp@globe.co.nz

Scarlet Alliance

PO Box 261 Darlinghurst NSW 1300
349 Crown Street, 2e étage
Surry Hills, Sydney
Australia
Tel: 02 9326 9455
Fax: 02 93269870
<http://www.scarletalliance.org.au>
info@scarletalliance.org.au

SWOP-Australia

PO Box 1354 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012
Australia
Tel: (612) 9319 4866 or 1(800) 622 902
Fax: (612) 9310 4262
<http://swop.org.au>
info@swop.org.au

South America**AMMAR**

Av. Independencia 766
(1099) Buenos Aires-Argentina
<http://www.ammar.org.ar>
nacional@ammarr.org.ar

United States of America**Bay Area Sex Work Advocacy Network (BAYSWAN)**

penet@bayswan.org
<http://www.bayswan.org>

Different Avenues

821 Upshur St, NW, Suite B
Washington, DC 20011
Tel: (202) 829-2103
Fax: (202) 829-2104
<http://www.differentavenues.org>
info2004@differentavenues.org

HIPS

P.O. Box 21394
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: (202) 232-8150 or 1(800) 676-HIPS
Fax: (202) 232.8304
<http://www.hips.org>
hips@hips.org

North American Task Force on Prostitution

2785 Broadway, 4L
New York, NY 10025-2834
<http://www.bayswan.org/ntfp.html>
prisjalex@earthlink.net

Prostitutes of New York (PONY)

PO Box 174, Cooper Station
NY City, NY 10276-0174
Tel: (212) 713-5678
<http://www.bayswan.org/pony.html>

SPREAD Magazine

PO Box 305
New York, NY 10276
<http://www.spreadmagazine.org>
info@spreadmagazine.org

St. James Infirmary

1372 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
Tel: (415) 554-8494
Fax: (415) 554-8444
<http://www.stjamesinfirmary.org>
admin@stjamesinfirmary.org

SWOP-USA

333 Valencia St. Suite 445
San Francisco, CA 94103
<http://swop-usa.org>

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Céline Crochetière, Responsible for organization of Le Salon

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