



PALGRAVE ADVANCES IN SEX WORK STUDIES

Sex Work, Labour and Relations

New Directions and Reflections

Edited by

Teela Sanders · Kathryn McGarry · Paul Ryan

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Palgrave Advances in Sex Work Studies

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This series takes a broad and interdisciplinary view of the sex industry, prioritizing transnational and intersectional work and marginalized sex workers. It seeks to center underrepresented groups such as Black, Indigenous, and other people of color; transfeminine, transmasculine, and non-binary people; LGBTQIA+ sex workers; people with disabilities; and workers outside of the US and UK. Books in the series cover a wide range of sex industries including camming, full-service sex work in a range of contexts e.g. street-based, brothel work, and escorts), hostessing, phone sex, pornography, pro-dommes, stripping, sugar relationship, and other forms of individual sexual entrepreneurship online. They are attentive to lateral whorephobia which points to the privileges of certain forms of sex work over others and how sex workers practicing privileged forms of erotic labor often look down upon workers in more stigmatized sectors. This series also discusses criminal justice approaches to sex work and seeks titles that explore the complexities and wide range of sex worker experiences in the whorearchy to reflect the multiple positions, experiences, and perspectives of those within the sex work community.

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*We dedicate this collection to Laura Lee and to all those who use research as
a tool to fight for sex worker rights.*

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Teela Sanders is Professor of Criminology and currently Dean for Research and Enterprise for the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Leicester. She is a leading international scholar in research on the intersections between gender, regulation, governance, and crime, specifically in the sex industry. She has written 8 books, edited 10, and has over 60 peer reviewed journal articles, based on research projects funded from major research councils. She has completed large-scale projects on the online safety and regulation of sex work in the UK, on projects with partners in Kenya, and more recently rapid assessments of the impact of COVID-19 on sex workers in Nairobi. She currently works on a multidisciplinary international research project with peers on an ESRC grant: Understanding Sexual Violence in Sex Working Populations: Law, Legal Consciousness and Legal Practice in Four Countries that runs to 2024.

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Marjan Wijers worked as consultant, trainer, and researcher in the field of human trafficking, violence against women, sex workers' rights, and human rights in a wide range of countries. As one of the pioneers of the Dutch Foundation against Trafficking in Women, she was closely involved in the development of the Dutch policies on trafficking as well as the negotiations on the UN Trafficking Protocol. She is also for a long time involved in the sex workers rights' movement. Among others, she was one of the co-organisers of the first European sex workers conference

in 2005 and one of the founders of ICRSE, the European sex workers network, of which she was a board member for many years. She holds an LL.M. in law and a M.A. in social sciences. Currently, she pursues a Ph.D. at Essex University on human rights and sex workers' rights. She is a member of SekswerkExpertise, the Dutch platform to advance sex workers rights.

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Introduction

Teela Sanders, Kathryn McGarry, and Paul Ryan

This collection is a showcase of up-and-coming researchers' work, which is pushing the boundaries of the subject, asking new questions, carving new methodological terrain, and contributing new ideas and empirical findings to the existing literature. The edited collection reports on a

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wide range of new and yet to be published research projects which are taking place in destinations inside and outside of Europe. The chapters reflect a range of new topics which have been reported least in the sex work studies literature such as porn workers and their interactions with fans, romantic relationships, and humour at work, to name just a few. The study of sex work spans multiple disciplines and perspectives, a complex and fascinating tapestry of knowledge. Given the multidisciplinary nature of the field of study, from sociology, social policy, gender and women's studies, anthropology, public health and epidemiology, law, politics, geography, social work, media, and literature, the networking of academics in sex work studies has become an important connection and bridge in both a theoretical and methodological sense.

The Need for New Voices: Supporting Writing, Ideas, and Perspectives

In the process of proposal review for this collection, there were concerns that the book was 'just' based on work of students and early career researchers, and therefore, there was a sense that externals to the process saw this as a downgrading of expert writers and that the book would not hold new and valuable work that an edited collection warranted. Whilst the benchmarks of international excellence in writing and research have been noted and considered, this endeavour (as did the conference from which the chapters rose—see final section) has at the centre a desire to assist, support, and make spaces for new researchers in the publishing process. The European Charter and Code for Researchers (European Commission, 2005) acknowledges that the research career begins at post-graduate level and this edited collection contributes to international best practice in supporting early year career researchers. The editors have encouraged contributions from authors to include space for reflections on the research experience and the field of study to provide important lessons for all researchers in this area, especially those at the beginning of their careers. We want the work in this collection to be used to inspire others to use different methods, work through ethical concerns

and not be deterred from difficult subjects or challenging research environments. As the authors are largely early career researchers, some still doing doctoral studies, we want these chapters to inspire others about the journeys of research and learn from what has taken place.

The Challenges of Doing Sex Work Research

There is an inevitable need for alliances between academics and the sex work community to produce ethical, rigorous, and robust research which speaks to the decision makers who make law and policy which affects sex workers daily lives (Argento et al., 2011; Baratosy & Wendt, 2017; Hardy et al., 2010; International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe [ICRSE], 2015; Ryan & McGarry, 2021). The phrase ‘nothing about us without us’ has become synonymous with sex work activists (some of whom are academics) and has evolved from ideas around meaningful participation and inclusivity to rightfully challenge tokenism in research purporting to be collaborative and participatory. More recently, this catch call has taken on a new expression suggesting only research undertaken by sex workers is credible and ethical (Van der Meulen et al., 2011, p. 3) raising important questions about the nature of collaboration and the complexities of positionality in research. The contentions in this relationship are nothing new. The juncture between rights activism and institutional rights is an ever-evolving space within which academia and activism converge through important though complex alliances. The dilemmas this poses for feminist praxis have been subject to some scrutiny (see Molyneux & Razavi, 2003, for example, in terms of human rights and the global south) and can be usefully theorised through Nancy Fraser’s work on the politics of rights (see Fraser, 2010). The application of Fraserian ideas to issues of rights and representation in the politics of sex work in the Republic of Ireland is explored by McGarry and FitzGerald (2017). Their work interrogates processes in political spaces which delimit and exclude participation by sex workers and how sex work becomes politically misframed and sex workers become misrecognised and misrepresented. McGarry and FitzGerald (2017) draw attention to the ‘rules of formation’ for political

frame-setting (Foucault, 1980) and the need to reimagine these political processes through a social justice frame (see FitzGerald & McGarry, 2018). Foregrounding a social justice frame in our research endeavour is a commitment to, firstly, challenging the legacy of marginalisation of sex workers in research and, secondly, to realising real change for lived lives through research partnership.

The politics of sex work contributes to an often-hostile environment for researchers, specifically early career academics, who often struggle to gain academic legitimacy. If sexuality research is, as Irvine (2014) describes it, 'dirty work' that carries an institutional stigma, then study of sex work remains the dirtiest. Ethical processes in universities are often blockers to sex work research, offering increased scrutiny to subjects which are perceived to be 'risky', 'edgy', or generally fall into the ballpark of reputationally damaging (Irvine, 2012; Ferris et al., 2021; Simpson, 2021). Huysamen and Sanders (2021) note how research ethics committees have heightened controls over sex work research, making procedures additionally long winded, inefficient, and requesting changes to methods that impose distance between researchers and communities. Female researchers often face the most institutional barriers, with an academic culture deeming the study of sex work too dangerous bringing women into proximity of the 'deviant male client' (Hammond & Kingston, 2017, pp. 333–334).

Once the research has been completed, academics are increasingly encouraged by universities, seeking greater levels of public engagement, to enter the public domain to engage in often polarised debates with those seeking greater legal and criminal responses to sex work (Ryan, 2017). These infrastructure hurdles are coupled with the very real problems in getting sex work studies funded. Such a long-term and ingrained 'social issue', unless falling distinctly within a health remit or overtly about sex trafficking, rarely achieves research council funding. There is pressure on academics to address what are seen to be the 'problems of prostitution', and these are generally not the areas of interest, need, or desire for sex work organisations. However, academics can be at the forefront of pushing back on research funders who channel funding down certain pathways, focusing on global questions and less on localised agendas. Multi-disciplinary teams seeking to answer questions which

span across disciplines are as equally valid in producing knowledge as those small-scale qualitative studies which are critiqued for their lack of generalisability and distinct localism. Academics are well placed to bring in co-producers from a range of spaces: third sector specialist support organisations, police, health practitioners, government agencies, and activism organisations. These spaces are often the most challenging to assemble but are equally the most fertile in terms of knowledge which can produce real-life change.

As feminist researchers, we must reflexively acknowledge how our approach to our research and our means for knowledge building creates and recreates lived realities. Bacchi and Rönblom (2014) describe research paradigms and methodologies as having a political significance as they shape realities. Taking their lead which 'solicits feminist researchers to reflect on the political implications of their theoretical investments' (ibid., p. 170), our edited collection is a means to further prompt these reflexive discussions by engaging with and learning from early career researchers in their methodological journeys. Going further, Bacchi and Rönblom (2014), in their examination of the study of gender and institutions, invite us to question how theoretical perspectives produce lived effects. Their work draws on ideas from Mol (2002) on 'ontological politics', an important concept for interrogating how our approach to research endeavour is shaped by and had the potential to shape and reshape political contexts and processes (Fraser, 2010; McGarry & FitzGerald, 2017). For Mol (2002, p. 154), 'methods are not a way of opening a window on the world, but a way of interfering with it'. Taking this idea as a guiding notion for our work, for our collaborations, and for this edited collection, we question what our research activities mean for the political contexts we observe.

In the context of sex work research, of course the political effects of our inquiries can potentially be regarded as outcomes whereby research evidence informs or influences the direction of state policy and governance. Yet we require an interrogation of the wider political effect of our research activity in the field of sex work study. We need to be explicit about the rationale for conducting research, the inclusions and exclusions, the focus and the silences, the questions we ask, and the questions we fail to ask. In an acknowledgement of how as researchers we present

a politically charged picture of the social world, we can begin to unpack what our ontological politics mean for the field of sex work studies as well as for the lives of sex workers. The challenge for ourselves as researchers in the field of sex work studies is to unpack ways of knowing sex work, to uncover the modes of knowledge production on sex work, and to recognise how the knowledge we build and the way that knowledge is built have material effect (see Bacchi, 1999; Ryan, 2020). Bringing this critical reflection to our research is a guiding theme to this edited collection, and each contributor to this volume engages with the ontological politics which figure in their own work and in the work that informs their thinking on sex work.

What Does Academia Bring to the Cause of Sex Worker Rights?

In the multidisciplinary spaces where sex work research takes place, opportunities arise to strengthen the connections between academia and activism by dismantling modes of knowledge production which have long perpetuated the kinds of marginalisation our research seeks to challenge. There is space for joint knowledge production through collaborations and the use of participatory action research methods, including the use of peer researchers (Graça et al., 2018; Lobo et al., 2021; Van der Meulen, 2011). The purity of these approaches, whilst often at the forefront of the desires of academics, can often be less practical as money is sought from funders in short timeframes and through financial regulations that prevent collaborations. This can leave less time for consultation, engagement with initial ideas, or co-designing of research projects from the outset. This has particularly been the case over 2020/2021 when activist groups have been fighting for the survival of their own organisations and their community, turning attention and resources to act as emergency providers of welfare and care during the COVID-19 crisis.

There is also a conscious acknowledgement that sex work organisations are inundated by researchers with requests for their assistance, input, comment, and opinion—and generally this is requested without

payment. Connelly and Sanders (2020) note that often academics studying sex work as a research area adopt the status as ‘academic activists’ wanting to use their position, privilege, and resources to make change in the real world. Invariably, this means using research as a vehicle for knowledge production to fight for sex workers’ rights to safety, protection, well-being, and a private life. As researchers in this field, we, the editors and our networks, engage in work which seeks ‘to resist, question, disrupt and displace the rules of formation which systematically exclude and disenfranchise the most marginalised and which ultimately govern all our lives’ (McGarry & FitzGerald, 2017, p. 15). We sign up to research as an active vehicle for change and as a place to challenge the status quo and to connect evidence to policy and practice for real change. To do this better and more seriously, the democratisation of research (and here specifically sex work studies) should be at the fore of this objective.

We see these chapter contributions and these authors as part of this process and believe their work is important in the process of establishing ethical practice in research. The challenges we have outlined in this introduction, and finding solutions and pathways through them, have been the motivation of the editors to enable publishing spaces to take on these ambitions. Publishing, and getting on the publishing ladder, is at the heart of academic career paths and often the sole measurement of judgement for early career researchers. We do not of course support this but equally realise that spaces for writing in traditional academic processes need critically engaging and alternative aspirations to enable new knowledge and new voices to be documented permanently.

The Chapters: The Voices in This Volume

The chapters are a mix of theoretical reflections, literature reviews, and reporting of original empirical findings, providing the reader with a range of studies from an interdisciplinary set of scholars across social sciences and humanities. These studies carve out new and creative methodological terrain in sex work research (including a quantitative study and content analysis as well as qualitative approaches), presenting both process and method in the study of sex work. The collection is divided into two

parts to reflect the broad nature of the themes and commentary: firstly, labour, work, and relations and secondly, relationships, identities, and harm. These two parts represent significant theoretical concepts within sex work studies which have been reported on extensively in recent years. The studies presented in this collection take various concepts related to ‘sex as work’, or the relationships within and outside the sex work community, and develop these in different contexts or from different positions. These new perspectives contribute to and expand our existing knowledge, introduce new directions for scholarship, and prompt novel and exciting questions about sex as work and sex working lives.

Firstly, labour, work, and relations within the work context are the dominant theme which connects Chapters 2 to 6. This part brings together several important contributions on interconnections and relations shaping the experience of work in sex work environments. In Chapter 2, Caroline West provides insights from her research with porn performers and their relations with their fans, both online and at the industry-specific awards, exploring the construction of celebrity in such spaces. In Chapter 3, Marjan Wijers looks at the issue of human rights in relation to sex workers, based on interviews with sex worker rights activists and allies across several European states, to question how human rights discourse has been and could potentially be used to realise rights for sex workers. In Chapter 4, the focus turns to the lap dancing industry in the UK as Tess Hermann looks at the labour relations within this market. Chapter 5 brings a methodological reflection to the book as Donna Finer examines the use of tweets by sex workers in Amsterdam during significant changes to their workspaces. Chapter 6 sees Doris Murphy shine a light on the opaque policy of the Garda Síochána in the Republic of Ireland in implementing criminalisation of demand legislation introduced in 2017.

In the second part of the book, the focus of Chapters 7 to 12 is on relationships, identities, and harm experienced by individuals and the sex work community. Chapter 7 sees the first literature review relating to health and the ethics of commentary on sex workers’ personal romantic relations as Bella Matos and Jack Woods examine what the literature says thus far. Chapter 8 focuses again on methodological processes of working with gate keepers as Rachel Searcey explores wearing different

hats in a space where sex workers are recruited into a study. In Chapter 9, Carlos Iglesias explores quantitative data to examine the perpetration of violence by clients in Bogata. Chapter 10 brings new information about the trans community in Turkey with a refreshing account by Ezgi Guler of the role of humour in the lives of the sex workers. Chapter 11 sees Bea Fones deconstruct biblical interpretations of sex workers in a novel analysis of the role of Christianity in representation of sex workers. In Chapter 12, Nour Shimei examines how sex workers take care of each other, by utilising the concept of mutual care. These new findings and perspectives contribute to our existing knowledge, introduce new directions for scholarship, and prompt exciting questions about sex as work and sex working lives.

Networking, Collaborations, and Conference Outputs

This collection of chapters emerged from a conference for early career researchers hosted in March 2021 by the Irish Sex Work Research Network and the Sex Work Research Hub in the UK. The Sex Work Research Hub (SWRH—<https://www.swrh.co.uk/>) has been in operation for over a decade and is a network connecting 250 individual researchers and academics across a range of universities and disciplines researching trafficking, sexual exploitation, sex work, and sex working. We connect with sex workers, sex work support projects, and other stakeholders, such as lawyers, police, educators, youth, and community workers, to support and develop research and knowledge, as well as delivering tangible public benefit and impact. The approach of the Sex Work Research Hub (SWRH), based on ethical participatory principles that respect the lives and experiences of sex workers, has become a reference for scholars worldwide and has global expertise and membership.

In Ireland, the Irish Sex Work Research Network (ISWRN—<https://iswrn.org/>) was established in 2018 as a platform bringing together those interested in developing and supporting sex work and sexual governance scholarship on the island of Ireland. It emerged from a context of expert

testimony and debate within the public sphere surrounding the introduction of Ireland's sex purchase ban legislation in 2017. As with its UK counterpart, the network is a resource for sharing research on a range of issues related to and shaping sex work nationally and internationally. Moreover, the network promotes ethical and robust research which challenges oppressive practices which have long excluded and silenced sex workers and which have negatively impacted lived lives. Part of the remit of the network is to bring together knowledge expertise on sex work research which can influence law, policy, and practice on sex work in Ireland and contribute to evidence-based policymaking internationally. The network also seeks to collaborate with partner agencies and networks in Ireland and beyond. The UK Sex Work Research hub has worked with the ISWRN since its inception. Indeed, the supportive relationship between the networks was sadly precipitated by the sudden passing of the sex worker rights activist Laura Lee in 2018, who had been challenging the criminalisation of sex purchase through the Northern Ireland courts. Sex worker communities and advocates came together in Ireland and elsewhere in solidarity at her passing, and the UK and Irish research hubs cemented the opportunity to work together to advance rights-based research for sex workers as a fitting tribute to the life and work of Laura Lee.

Our cross-network research partnership continues to progress under the current award of ESRC/IRC UK-Ireland Social Sciences Networking Grant (2020/2021). This project has committed to bringing together UK and ROI academics, sex workers, NGOs, sexual health professionals, the police, government, and industry representatives in a way that is genuinely collaborative, and which does not privilege any one voice. The networking project offers opportunity for spaces to explore new knowledge on sex working in the context of changing environments including COVID-19 and Brexit whilst also looking at ways to facilitate genuine collaboration in sex work research through mechanisms which are inclusive and reflect a 'politics of doing' (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010).

One key connection established between the hubs has been the joint hosting of the Postgraduate Sex Work Conference (which originally began in 2007), with the inaugural joint conference held in March 2021 (and with the next scheduled for April 2022), following

pandemic-related postponement in 2020. Whilst the world was under the restrictions to daily life, travel, and movement due to the coronavirus, this online conference was a welcomed meeting of two networks. People across the globe presented and attended to join in the conversations and sharing of experiences of doing research in sex work studies. The event was a significant success for those involved, especially postgraduate students, post-doctoral students, and early career researchers, who were able to showcase their ideas, findings, and theoretical developments in a safe and ethical environment. This virtual event provided a supportive and engaging space for postgraduate researchers to share their ongoing or recently completed work. Given the range of empirical, theoretical, and methodological insights covered at the conference, the conveners felt this emerging scholarship required a platform, through an edited collection, to connect new knowledge with other students and the wider sex work research field. As organisers of the conference, we were compelled to maintain the momentum of the day and use the publication process as a legacy to this first joint conference and as a symbol of the need for audiences to come together in the research space to share, learn, collaborate, and support sex worker rights. We hope that this type of conference output will be testament to the rigorous, novel, and compelling work of both networks and motivate those who take forward these crucial spaces for researchers, particularly at a time when there is so much hostility towards sex workers and those who study sex work.

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