

## **ABOLISHING THE STIGMA: THE COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE AND RIGHT TO SEXUAL SELF-DETERMINATION AMONG COMMERCIAL SEX WORKERS IN TWO LOCATIONS IN TRINIDAD**

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This study, conducted in Trinidad, examined and documented whether a local Sex Workers' Movement has emerged through coalitions and the everyday resistances of commercial sex workers. To illustrate how such struggles relate to basic human rights advocacy, the study employed a qualitative methodology to flesh out two specific forms of sex work in two different locations. In particular, interviews were used to better understand the impact of socio-economic, cultural and political systems on the emergence of sex workers' rights activism and the challenge sex work creates in the transgression of societal notions of sexual norms. The study also explains how women's involvement in the sex trade has been shaped within the context of a globalising capitalist system and patriarchal hegemony. Conclusions from the study emphasised how stigma continues to surround the plausibility of sexual labour as a commodity and dominates current perceptions and societal unease.

**Keywords:** Commercial sex work, stigma, sexual self-determination, Trinidad and Tobago

### **Introduction**

My research explored the variances between two specific forms of sex work, indoor and outdoor (commonly known as street) prostitution. The significance was to emphasise the stigma surrounding the plausibility of sexual labour as a commodity; the current perceptions abutting societal condemnation; and whether the shared experiences of exploitation among commercial sex workers – a practice that is offensive to the rights of women – could galvanise people into action and spirit a movement for change.

Much emphasis has been placed on the social problems such as poor living and working conditions, physical abuse, economic conditions and health issues associated with the sex trade. Prostitution for example is commonly referred to as a social evil or disease (Kempadoo 2001) with very little emphasis placed on sex work being defined and experienced as labour. This has meant the everyday life of the sex worker, their local cultural histories, traditions and testimony about agency and subjectivity has been obscured and ignored.

Until recently, sex work and the wider sex trade in the Caribbean, commanded little attention from the academic field in spite of its long history in Caribbean societies (Henriques 1965). The

references to sex work that did exist indicated that sex work played an integral role in the region's past, was inextricably tied to colonialism as well as the power and control exerted by European men over black women; and stood at the nexus of at least two areas of women's existence – as an extension of sexual relations (forced or otherwise) with (white) men as highlighted by Harvey Neptune (2007), and as labour (Kalm 1975; Del Omo 1979; Martins 1984; Beckles 1989; Morrissey 1989; Bush 1990).

According to Kempadoo (2001) sex work in the region emerged as an activity that provided material benefits. Indicatively, the global location of the Caribbean as a service centre and playground for wealthier nations and peoples positioned Caribbean sex workers. This location reinforced not only global gendered inequalities but also long-standing patterns of dominance and subordination between the North and the South; reflecting concerns expressed by Frantz Fanon since the 1960s about the region being the “brothel of Europe” due to the neo-colonial relationships established through the global tourism industry.

Yet what would happen to the sex industry if some of its shaping constraints were lifted? What if sex work itself was decriminalised and destigmatised and we no longer believed it toxic? These are some questions posed by Pat Califia (2000). Such thinking reflects the perspective of this paper which seeks not to pathologise or condemn working women or even men for taking up prostitution to make a living, but instead casts a critical eye on the sex trade and examines the experiences and perspectives of sex workers.

To make a strong case and justify the struggle sex workers endure and the entitlements they are so often denied, our understanding of sex workers must change. This change involves viewing sexual workers as actors in a trade; the providers of sexual labour; a social group whose lives and voices are commonly dismissed or ignored and a population whose perceptions and experiences are not understood (Kempadoo 2001).

The fact that sex work is a highly stigmatised activity and women who provide sexual services and labour the subjects of discriminatory, often criminalising policies, laws and ideologies creates difficulties for academics.

Pre-conceived notions – prejudicial stereotypes – remain rigid amongst a large sway of the population in Trinidad and Tobago. The stigmas often function as a means to silence and degrade those it targets, and strips them of any form of legitimacy (Pheterson 1998). This study treated “stigma” as the main macro-structural arrangement that inflicts oppression on an already subjugated group (women) and the collective consciousness they experience, given their shared subjective realities, to resist disempowerment and become primary agents of social change.

### **What is Sex Work?**

According to PANCAP's study conducted in 2009, “sex work” and “sex workers” are not legal terms in any Caribbean country. The terms were first introduced to the Caribbean in the early 1990s by COIN (*Centro de Orientación e Investigación Integral*) of the Dominican Republic and the Maxi Linder Association of Suriname; two institutions that complete out-reach and empowerment-work in their respective countries. In fact the most common terms used within the

law, laws that date back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, define the prostitute and prostitution as a woman engaging in common lewdness. Such definitions have been refined somewhat and are not confined by any specific gender (Akaloo 2009). Such laws left long-standing heteropatriarchal ideas that obscure female roles as the providers of sexual services and given this discriminatory classification activists have aimed at abolishing this idea and relaxing the myopic view by advocating for the sex trade as a legitimate form of labour.

Globally, the term prostitution carries a stigma that has been used to denigrate women and as a result it has been exchanged for the concept of “sex work” – a term coined by sex worker Carol Leigh – which allows for prostitution to take on a legitimate position, and also should allow for the elimination of the social ills detrimental to a worker throughout their period of employment. It is commonly understood that this new term protects practitioners “from stigma, abuse, and marginalisation that comes with the perception of prostitutes as against moral, sexual and behavioural norms of society” (CAFRA 2004). As such, researchers concluded that sex work could be defined as “a gainful income generating activity that involves an explicit exchange of sexual labour or services for material benefits” (Kempadoo 1999). This perspective focuses on the ways in which sexual commerce qualifies as work, involves human agency, and may be potentially empowering for workers (Carmen and Moody 1985, Chapkis 1997, Delacoste and Alexander 1987, Strossen 1995). Therefore, it holds that there is nothing inherent in sex work that prevents it from being organised in terms of mutual gain to both parties – just as in other economic transactions.

Most studies on commercial sex work tend to operate on opposite ends of the paradigm, either employing arguments that highlight the highly negative experiences of sex workers – the uneven distribution of agency, subordination, and job satisfaction inherent within commercial sex work (Chapkis 2000, O’Connell Davidson 1998, Weitzer 2007a) – or at the other end, where they depict that sex work is not necessarily empowering but has the potential to be so (Weitzer 2009).

A sub-group of sex workers that is largely ignored in academic literature and often subjected to a variety of crude and positive stereotypes is that of the “kept” woman, which alludes to “an upper echelon type of prostitute” who engages in adulterous liaisons and a sexual-economic exchange with the invisible role of patron known as the “sugar daddy.” According to E.D Nelson (1993) man’s adoption of this role is thought to be strictly sexual. It is presumed to be interchangeable with other men who pay a “prostitute for sex.” However, it is framed by both men and women as richer, and as more benevolent than that, given that supposedly the sugar daddy relationship is not always a cynical, sex-for-hire arrangement. These kept relationships are framed under an ideology of romantic love, allowing denial of the relationship as merely one of social or financial expedience. But these “kept” women may have several “patrons” or “sugar daddies” whose aid upkeep her lifestyle and whose wealth makes her less conspicuous than your average street-walker or “curb-crawler.

This transactional sexual liaison also extends to the region as highlighted in Christine Barrow’s in-depth study amongst “at-risk” adolescent girls. She refers to a similar “sugar-daddy syndrome” involving “school-girls in unprotected sex with older men in exchange for brand-name clothing, jewellery and other material goods, even food and basic necessities.” She notes, “The principle motivation for the girls to enter these relationships is the receipt of money,

material goods and financial security from the men involved, though they were also said to be attracted by the sex, the notoriety and the protection provided within these relationships” (Barrow 2005:64). This suggests that a thin line exists between what could be defined as sexual labour. The “kept” woman may deviate from the negative stereotypes of prostitutes but in a financial sense, it is essentially the same thing. It shows not all sex work has been historically denigrated, and not all sex work as prostitution is actually seen as some sort of normative prostitution.

Although this article primarily focuses on prostitution as the type of sex work that warrants discussion, apart from the “kept” woman Nelson exemplified, Weitzer (2009, 2007a) also introduced several under examined dimensions that aim to broaden and enrich our understanding of sex work.

The sex industry is a distinct occupational sector subjected to social control and discriminatory treatment. This is partially due to the fact that the laws of most countries push many aspects of the industry underground giving rise to the variegation of illicit activities surrounding the sector. On the heels of Kempadoo’s definition (1999), commercial sex work could also include pornography, stripping and exotic or lap dancing, internet sexual services, call girls and escorts, gigolo or “rent-a-dread” services. For this article, all cannot be covered so the focus remains on prostitution – one specific type of sex work often associated with characteristics which are mostly determined by locale or third-party involvement.

Given that its social and psychological connotations are characteristic of women often associated with “whore,” sex work is a term suggesting prostitution is not viewed as an identity but instead as an income-generating activity or form of labour for both men and women. If work is defined as a productive or operative activity or as employment in some form of industry, especially as a means of earning a livelihood, prostitution falls appropriately into place.

Our understandings of sex work need to undergo a shift to allow for a rethinking of the activity in terms of contracts, safety, improvement of working conditions and sex workers’ ability to negotiate the different aspects of services they offer be they acts, rates and duration. This can help to support action about workers’ rights: the right to work safely and in health; the right not to be raped, harassed or discriminated against; the right to associate with other workers for protection; and the right to dignity and integrity.

## **Methodology**

In the classic work entitled “Prostitution and Morality”, Benjamin and Master (1964), remarked that “to study all or most facets of prostitution today, the investigator has no alternative but to go out and meet the prostitutes on their own varied grounds.” This is a very hazardous and painstaking job that takes some social scientists many months and even years.

The task of collecting data and facts for scientific inquiry in order to understand the various facets of commercial sex work requires gaining entry into that “world.” While much sociological research is quantitative, qualitative research can be useful for obtaining detailed, textured insights of the specific phenomenon in question. Within the context of prostitution, there was no

other alternative but to contact the workers personally in their brothels – for the purposes of this study – the streets, or any other work space.

In order to provide a dynamic and contextualised picture of the research, the study recorded digital interviews. Within Trinidad and Tobago, there is no reliable data on the commercial sex work population, so by relying on proven snowball sampling techniques passage through this arena of the sex industry was made possible. As a close relative engaged in relations with a sex worker during her formative years, the author's personal history allowed access to this sector. As a gatekeeper, the relative provided safe access into these areas in which indirect methods were subsequently used to establish some form of rapport with the sample population. I was also accompanied on my visit with a family member to provide another layer of safety.

Only female sex workers were interviewed – in the confines of a vehicle for those interviewed on the streets, and on the grounds of the hotel for those interviewed indoors – and they were sampled based on the given space where they ply their trade, and the key role they play in its daily, or rather, nightly operations. The sample population was generated from two locations in West and Central Trinidad: Murray Street, Woodbrook – a well-known sex workers' area; and Dads Dan, a.k.a Santa Maria Hotel in Charlieville, Chaguanas, infamously regarded as an “entertainment centre;” it moonlights as strip club, brothel and hotel all in one.

These two areas were chosen on the basis of preliminary research conducted in these locales. Fieldwork enquiry involved semi-structured interviews with seven individuals consisting of six female prostitutes and one manager conducted over a period of five nights, amassing to approximately thirteen hours engaged in naturalistic participatory observation. The recorded interviews were later transcribed manually and uploaded as Windows Media Audio files. With the exception of the sole manager interviewed, all informants were paid One Hundred Dollars (TT\$100.00) for their time. The workers were paid because on average a half hour interview equated a loss from upwards of Three Hundred Dollars (TT\$300.00) for services rendered to a client.

With the dearth of data sources on commercial sex work in Trinidad and Tobago, utilising qualitative methodological approaches through incorporation of semi-structured interviews, and observation of the locales under study, provided primary data.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The notion of prostitution throughout many societies is so tightly constructed that for years attempts to breakdown or rather redefine these otherwise impenetrable notions has proven futile. Undertaking the exploratory nature of this research allowed for the construction of an independent feminist “standpoint,” allowing for an effective focus on the individual, her subjective experience and the task of emphasising issues of agency.

#### *Contemporary Feminist Theorising*

Contemporary Feminist theorising radically challenges and deconstructs established systems of knowledge by showing their masculinist bias and the gender politics framing and informing

them. It also puts into theoretical perspective how gender in its relation to power invokes condemnation and stigmatisation of commercial sex work, and imposes on an individual woman's ability to freely explore, experience, and name her own sexuality lest she be labelled. Because commercial sex work is the deliberate attempt of men's perceived need and self-proclaimed right to buy and sell women's bodies for sexual use, prostitution operates under a system of male supremacy that is itself built along a continuum of intense feelings of power within a sexual context. This argument is based on the premise that the social behaviour of customers – in this context, men – does not reflect an interest in pleasing a woman but simply want to feel power over the “whore” who is by implication of her class and gender, someone beneath them. This inherent superiority of one sex and thereby the right to dominance is what has prompted the struggle amongst sex workers' advocates to reclaim and destigmatise the name (and the work itself).

This social behaviour perceived amongst customers, as the interview with one informant at Chaguanas depicted.

Imprisoned behind the barb-wired walls of “777,” in solitude I sit on a bench awaiting Kimberly, whom Gary, her manager, sent for me. Within minutes, the outlines of skin the colour of ebony, appeared from beyond the guarded doors of the club. Tall and slender, dressed in a short, red, netted dress which exposes a nude body beneath, Kimberly makes her way towards me with a Carib and a small purse in hand. She seems dazed, and upon sitting and explaining the purpose she was dragged from work, she indicates that she's an extremely emotional person who cries frequently. She asks, “Are you going to make me cry? Because I just smoked some weed and I've been drinking beers whole night.” The chatty, warm and inviting nature was appealing, most times matter-of-fact but appealing nonetheless. Though interrupted on several occasions, the end of the conversation was marred by contrived responses brought about by Gary's proximity to Kimberly. She was visibly put on edge, more hesitant and less relaxed than she was initially.

It's a tell-tale sign of how the opposite sex exerts superiority over women within the profession. Kimberly's demeanour attested to this as Gary's presence overshadowed the course of the interview towards the end. Her position within the community is indicative of how her profession is synonymous with the identity she holds. Within her short lifespan, she has been raped several times at gunpoint, barely escaped death to evade her rapists and sought assistance only from immediate family members as opposed to contacting the police. In spite of this she insists:

“Everybody knows I'm a hoe and I'm proud of it...in more ways than one. Nobody likes a prostitute, I don't know why, I guess its people's mind...they think like this. They get to walk the road free, with nobody watching them or saying anything about them. It's no one's fault, it's my fault, I accept that because I choose this life and I can't waste my time trying to change anybody. But I do believe I should do what I want with my body and I don't think people should tell me what to do and that's what everybody getting tie up with....I'm not using your body to do this, I am not using my friend's body to do this. I'm using my body, my strength, my night rest to do this and I feel I should just be able to walk the road in peace.”

The excerpt also alludes to the stigma surrounding the profession. Numerous accounts on the field highlighted the fact that sex work is commonly a highly stigmatised activity; and the women who provide sexual services and labour the subjects of discriminatory, often criminalising policies, laws and ideologies which often create difficulties for academics to persuade readers to dismiss any preconceived notions. According to Delacoste (1998) stigma represents an awareness of a defiled social construct, a mark of infamy or disgrace possessed by sex workers as a result of their engagement in the skin trade that defies the “normal” expectations/standards that categorises them as women within the society. As with Rachel, a 32 year old sex worker for whom the stigma hits a little close to home. She states:

“If yuh have any friend and they get to know what yuh doing, they look at you different, they say girl how you could do that, how you could sleep with different men on the same night. They look at you completely different and you just have less friends. Nobody would not really want to eat or drink from you, they would say you open to STD disease and all that. I had a couple of friends who found out what I was doing, and I no longer call them friends because they totally disagree with it and they don’t really want to be around me since I’m doing this work. The females are mostly discriminating, but the males like you more once they know they could get what they want from you.”

Stigma perpetuates a social identity that defines and sets them apart as stigmatised individuals and disavows any measure of respect that would allow for full integration within the social structure; as is depicted with Rachel, who becomes an outcast of sorts within her inner circle of friends. Upon discovery of her occupational stance, Rachel’s colleagues synonymously identify her with this label and have seemingly ignored the individual they knew prior to unearthing this knowledge. In the same way gypsies occupy the outskirts of the societies to which they belong, sex workers are branded. This pushes the trade further underground as it is not a legitimate form of employment, making it virtually impossible to shed the stain and escape.

Jennifer, a 37 year old sex worker who has been plying her trade in and around the Woodbrook area for more than a decade corroborates how the stigma extends to familial relationships and society at large. She states:

“If somebody pass and see us at the side of the streets and say we live in Chaguanas, they don’t even know if we liming in the casino, they don’t know if we waiting on somebody, they would go back down in the village we living in and spread the talk that discriminating yuh one time.”

Commercial sex workers are characteristically the stigmatised individuals that Goffman alludes to. Some have social constructs of themselves that defy the expectations/standards they are well aware of that categories them as women in society. They are also aware that this construct is a “defiling thing” to possess and as such engage in what Goffman termed *role distance* that perpetuates a virtual social identity that would accord them the respect which allows for full integration within the social structure. However, it is when sex workers no longer have a constructed social identity that differentiates them as “other,” that defines and sets them apart from “normals” and as stigmatised individuals, that they create roadways out of this dilemma.

It seems women vulnerable to the stigma are regarded with a denigrated status, silencing and stripping them of any form of legitimacy and opening them up to treatment as criminals, altogether dehumanising them and transforming human sexuality into a bestial force. Sex workers, along with other marginalised sections within the community, are identified as a vulnerable group in the Caribbean and specifically Trinidad and Tobago. The stigmas and discriminations at best cause and maintain such vulnerability. Oppression, not only controls the lives of sex workers but of all women and with a criminal status that encourages police harassment and abuse, rape, assault, lack of legal access to workers' rights, health care and benefits; it ensures that workers' remain in poor working conditions and that notions of sex workers' as disposable people are sustained.

These accounts detail how the concept of stigma results from a diversion away from societal norms. Our understanding must undergo a change in which they are viewed as one set of actors in the sex trade; the providers of sexual labour; a social group whose lives and voices had commonly been dismissed or ignored and a population whose perceptions and experiences needs to be centred upon if we are to make a strong case and justify the struggle sex workers' endure and the entitlements they are so often denied. Policies, conventions and activities still remain exclusively focused on eradicating trafficking and forced prostitution and do not actually deal with or offer any support for sex workers who are not trafficked (Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998). This largely negates recognition of the right to sexual self-determination and is thus a threat to the entire concept of women's human rights.

### **Importance of Struggle and Recurring Themes**

Sex work to this day remains one of the few forms of employment for unskilled labourers within Trinidad and the reality is that "a lot of women are saying they don't necessarily want out of prostitution, as Kimberly earlier portrayed, but they want better conditions, some of which involve the lifting of laws that criminalise the work" (Kempadoo 2005). According to Michelle, another sex worker who is formally employed in security:

"Yuh doh WANT the money, yuh NEED the money...as it surpasses the minimum wage in the country by far."

The plight of many to earn above their means (i.e. gain financial independence), given prevailing economic conditions, paints the industry as a viable source of income and as long as the opportunity for paid intercourse remains hidden and stigmatised, the black-market sex economy is booming. According to Kempadoo (2005) although sexual-economic relations can be sites of both oppression and liberation for women, the social reality is that there are streams of empowerment through sex work. This also sheds light on the class differentials within the profession as exemplified through the concept of the "sugar daddy" and "kept" mistress. Studies have shown that empowerment is high or increases among those working in the upper echelons of the profession. This is associated with a range of structural factors which includes education, income, control over working conditions and client base (Weitzer 2009). As one study concluded, independent call girls generally enjoyed the "financial, social, and emotional

wherewithal to structure their work largely in ways that suited them and provide...the ability to maintain healthy self-images” (Lucas 2005:541).

During fieldwork, another theme resonated amongst most sex workers where men, more so local men, have the mentality that women are treated on the basis of whether they are a prostitute or not. As Jennifer explains:

“When they know you is a prostitute, they like to treat you a certain way...Trini men especially. They know you are a prostitute; they treat you like a prostitute. You have no rights especially when a client ill-treating or advantaging you in any way at all.”

Jennifer also spoke of being raped for two days, beaten and tortured by two local guys in a deserted area in Santa Cruz, and luckily was able to escape with her life but with no form of redress given her status. Rachel corroborates:

“There’s no redress. No way. You go to the police station and tell them you making “fares” on the street, and a guy pick you up and carry you in the back and rape you, police don’t do nothing. Basically you gets no justice. You cannot go to any station in Trinidad and report that this is the job you are doing and you were raped. Even if you were stabbed, robbed...not only rape but any other thing, they would not take it on. They would in fact say that you look for that.”

Jennifer’s contribution reflects how violence and patriarchy are recurring themes throughout the profession. The fact that there is no redress and a client’s ill-treatment highlights how laws against prostitution and the stigma imposed on sex work provokes and permits violence, ensures poor working conditions, and continuously keeps sex workers locked in a struggle; a struggle which occurs on a more individualistic than collective basis throughout the two locations.

As Chocolate Fudge reveals in her own words however, there can be a disinclination to collectively support the reification of decriminalisation:

“Yes it is, it is very stigmatised. If it wasn’t, well...it would have been even more stigmatised because well people would want to know why then they put this...[sex work] as a legal thing...but it would not stop girls from coming to work because this is a money making business. People in society would still look at them...[sex workers]...as whores and sluts and stuff, that’s why I say it would still be stigmatised, it wouldn’t make a difference. It would just make the girls more comfortable to work...If have people who could explain the concept and the whole business thing to society, then the whole stigma would disappear...that’s the government’s responsibility. Yes, it’s our responsibility too, but we can’t just go out on the streets and protest for prostitution...Because of that stigma in Trinidad and Tobago, my parents don’t know I’m doing this, and my daughter, she don’t know I’m doing this. Well meh boyfriend know I’m doing this but I wouldn’t want to put myself out there. Ah done already know T&T have that stigma...yuh know how yuh mother would think about yuh, yuh know how yuh father go think about yuh, yuh aunts, yuh uncles, yuh sisters would know how...so I wouldn’t put myself in the forefront and protest for prostitution to get downgraded by my family...money is not

everything...but ah getting it and they don't have to know how ah getting it because ah not living with them, but I would not want them to know that this is what I do..."

She further states from her point of view:

"Everybody is for themselves. Here have different groups of people. It have Spanish, Jamaicans, it have the locals, everybody stick to they self. Some locals don't talk to locals, some locals does talk to Spanish, some locals does talk to Jamaicans, not everybody does talk to everyone...like if two girls does talk to each other, they would talk about their problmes, but they wouldn't go and tell everybody, they wouldn't go and sit down in a group and tell everybody about their problems...they don't do that...it not necessary...I don't think it's a bad thing, yuh come here to make money and really yuh not supposed to be studying anybody else problems. Yuh come and yuh have yuh problems, you deal with yuh problems on yuh own...I don't really want to know anyone business. Some don't have the mentality to sit down and talk about yuh problems and sort it out and say let we shake hands and be friends. We, some of them, well most of them don't have that kind of intelligence to sit down and do that...and I wouldn't put myself in the forefront to say don't do that, don't do this..."

The above suggests ways in which capitalism enforces competitiveness, individuation and a lack of solidarity among the women. It brings into question whether the sex workers' movement remains out of reach. Such movements allow societies to confront fundamental questions about social structures, sexuality, life and moral rights and wrongs. But the desire to fuel a movement within Trinidad seems suppressed because this position is at loggerheads with many conservative groups, institutionalised religions and feminist lobbies that are united in condemning prostitution. However, a support of sex workers' demands for decriminalisation of the work stems from the knowledge that these women are prime examples of the agency within this group.

### **On-going thoughts and discussion**

This small overview of my on-going research provides insights into the depths of stigmatisation and criminalisation within Trinbagonian society sex workers face. Whether there exists a force willing enough to shift this construction through which prostitution is understood is the focus of my future research. It is hoped that it will shed more light on the need for a movement within our society and a transformation of ideological patterns which has shackled us to archaic traditions and a period defined by colonial domination.

Feminism is of central importance in highlighting the struggles for social change within the society and a prostitute's rights activism that seemed lost in both districts. There are many hidden myths about prostitution and society seems to be apathetic towards counteracting these myths and embracing. It was obvious that whether indoor or outdoor, structural conditions are a key predictor of vulnerability amongst these women who entered the sex industry. These conditions are predicated on a gendered hierarchy and a systematic privileging of the male and the masculine which continues to be prevalent within the industry even though social relations involving sexual labour are not inherently tied to specific gendered roles or bodies. As such, "sex work" has been constructed where female sexuality threatens male control and domination

within a contextual arrangement of cultural, social, economic and political systems that produce the stigmas and the condemnation femininity defies. Hegemonic institutions within our society perpetuate the stigma, but again that story will be part of future research.

The severity of victimisation is frequented upon sex workers, not only by customers who advance the stigma and condemnation, but also by law enforcement officials who negate that in spite of their illegality, sex workers should not be stripped of their basic human rights. Indoor workers receive more protection and their invisibility renders them more capable of being discreet and less marginalised as Goffman illuminates.

Without any form of recourse, commercial sex workers within the Woodbrook and Chaguanas areas are deprived of fundamental rights. As a fixed group within the society, this denial of rights channelled from stigmatisation and criminalisation of the profession is derived from overarching structural and micro arrangements. These arrangements are a system of repressive strategies that effectually denounce the establishment of a movement. One thing rings true, is that in all societies people are selling sex, and it really comes down to a question of how honest we are as a society and how much we are respecting people's rights to make their own choices.

Moving forward, there is a need for a movement, a rallying of various organisations to give aid and for a transformation of ideological patterns. Without a movement, criminalisation of sexual labour pervades and leaves sex workers without freedom of occupational choice, protection of health and safety, and prosecution of those who commit acts of violence. Even if there was an emergence of a movement it would be difficult for the social and cultural climate to immediately change as there exists strong, social taboos against prostitution. A large space of tolerance is not offered to women who participate in sexual commerce but if we channel advocacy into the decriminalisation of sex work, maybe prostitution would be recognised as legitimate work and prostitutes accepted as working women, and for once an opportunity to eradicate the stigma would present itself.

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