



# BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

## Justice and sex work: developing and de-centring debate

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### ***Silences of Archives: How Absent and Fragmented Archival Materials Affect the Visibility of Sex Work in Finland***

**Jaana Ahtiainen, University of Helsinki**

The Finnish archival system, particularly the cultural and societal archives, is among the most comprehensive and extensive in both Europe and worldwide. The contents of the archives are not limited to demographic data, but Finnish archives have also collected extensive oral history collections, as well as collections of personal and collective memories on numerous sensitive topics, such as illegitimate children, violence, and residing in a mental hospital. However, there are no similar archived materials on sex work, apart from law and jurisprudence archives. References to sex work in cultural and societal archival materials are fragmentary and almost completely absent, framing the field somewhat invisible.

My doctoral research, “Reminiscence Narratives of Commercial Sex in Finland”, focuses on sex work narratives and reminiscences, emphasizing the history of labor. In my research, I am exploring how the collection and study of sex work narratives and reminiscences are affected by absent, uncreated, and fragmented archival materials. In my presentation, I will explore how collecting and researching contemporary sex work narratives and reminiscences are affected by absent and fragmented archival materials, and how absences, gaps, or silences can be identified and acknowledged within archival collections. I will also discuss how absent, uncreated, and fragmented archival materials on sex work contribute to framing the phenomenon invisible and inaccessible. As a researcher, I am interested in how to study, challenge, and read against silences in archives, and how to address the invisibility of sex work in archive collections and help record the contemporary history of sex work on the terms of sex workers by including a broader range of voices in cultural and societal archive collections.

Archives have their own role in truth(s), justice, and memory, and they also operate as places of power. There are always phenomena, research themes, and voices that archivists, historians, or researchers consider belonging to archive collections, and those that will be excluded from collections. However, silences can contest recorded narratives. Paradoxically, speaking of absences and silences articulate some form of existence and presence. In paying attention to omissions, gaps, silences, and absences, a researcher can find the missing or alternative voices and ensure in the future that more voices are considered worth hearing and recording.

### ***Ambiguous Mobilization: Swedish NGOs and Sex Workers' Rights***

**Ines Anttila, independent researcher**

Since its inception in 1999, Sweden's ban on sex purchase has faced criticism for failing to protect sex workers' rights, with human rights organizations emphasizing decriminalization as the only framework that ensures their safety and autonomy. This paper examines how two major Swedish NGOs—the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU) and the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Rights (RFSL)—have responded to the impact of Swedish policy on sex workers, particularly transgender people and people living with HIV.



The study draws on content and discourse analysis of RFSU and RFSL's official websites, social media, and media coverage from two key moments in 2015 and 2019, when these organizations publicly supported the decriminalization of sex work for the first time. Their stance provoked significant backlash from government representatives, the public, and even their own membership bases, leading to a subsequent shift from acts of solidarity to inaction and a desire to be perceived as impartial proponents of *nyanserad debatt* (Swedish for "nuanced debate").

By focusing on the ambiguous and inconsistent responses of these NGOs, I explore how they navigate tensions between their principles of bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), Sweden's official prostitution policy, and their alignment with international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), and Transgender Europe, all of which support decriminalization.

This study applies the concepts of "neutrality" (Redfield, 2011) and "nuanced debate" as dominant discourse within the Swedish civil society organization where I am active, examining the broader implications of RFSU and RFSL's inconsistent positionality. Additionally, drawing on Gayle Rubin (1984) and Patricia Yancey Martin (1999) on bureaucracy and euphemism, I conceptualize "bureaucratic euphemism" in relation to organizations' middle-ground approach, which, I argue, allows anti-sex work alliances to control the narrative and reinforces the sex-purchase ban as a tool of harm and injustice toward sex workers.

Lastly, the analysis highlights "sex for compensation" as an example of bureaucratic euphemism, illustrating its flexibility across frameworks ranging from the Swedish government's "prostitution" to Transgender Europe's "sex work" perspective, as well as many spaces in between.

### ***Sex Work and Anti-Work between Ideologies in Czechoslovakia. Beyond "Sex Work is Work"***

**Barbora Doležalová, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University**

Czechoslovak state socialism required everyone to work but criminalized sex work, labelling it as social parasitism. Following the political transformation after 1989, this law was repealed, yet no new legislation has been introduced. Despite this legal vacuum, sex work continues to be perceived as a social pathology. The research question explores the (dis)continuity of narratives about sex work/prostitution from state socialism to liberal capitalism and examines how sexual politics have evolved in this context. Moreover, how relevant is the slogan "sex work is work" in post-socialist countries, where formal employment was mandatory, and sex workers were imprisoned or co-opted as secret police agents?

While most of the feminist approaches in Czechoslovakia have struggled to redefine rigid sexual and labour norms that state socialism imposed on society (Lišková, 2008), this study analyses sex work through the lens of anti-work theories (Weeks, 2011; Berg, 2021) as well as abolitionist feminism and its critique of prison-industrial complex (see Smith & Mac, 2020; Davis et al., 2022). Using feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2007) enriched by corpus linguistics, this research examines the criminological, medical, and legal texts, as well as Czechoslovak socialist and post-1989 popular press.

Preliminary results suggest that, despite the mainstreaming of pornography in the so-called "wild nineties" (Gjuričová, 2011) and differences between the regimes, sex work have not been destigmatized, and sex workers lack the cultural (O'Neill, 2010) and bodily citizenship (Dudová, 2015) and their actual needs are unheard. The political establishment and legal debate over potential new legislation fluctuates between the notion of dirty money and the "state as a pimp" and, on the other hand, state as a successful businessman taxing more working bodies. In practice, the state acts as a



punitive guardian of morality, neglecting even the "savior" approach, while sex workers' rights remain absent. Media analysis has shown that many socially pathological narratives travel freely from state socialism to liberal capitalism.

This study rethinks the "sex work is work" discourse as less liberatory, advocating for social justice beyond the state, legal reform and mere recognition (Fraser, 1997), while continuing to challenge carceral-capitalist and non-work ideology that harm the most marginalized.

***"Exposed from all sides": The role of policing in sex workers' access to justice***  
**Agata Dziuban, Jagiellonian University in Krakow**

Access to justice is a fundamental right that ensures everyone is treated equally under the law and able to seek and receive fair protection without fear of discrimination or legal repercussions. However, for sex workers, this right is usually severely restricted. Criminalisation, stigmatisation, and social marginalisation result in crimes against sex workers being infrequently reported, inadequately investigated, and rarely handled with the necessary care. Additionally, when coming into contact with the police as victims of crimes or when targeted as offenders, the rights of sex workers are often violated, and they are excluded from the legal protections to which they are entitled. Drawing on feminist participatory action research project conducted by the European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance (ESWA) in cooperation with 13 national sex worker-led and sex workers' rights organisations, this presentation examines the main challenges faced by sex workers in 11 European countries while interacting with the justice system. It focuses specifically on the impact of policing on sex workers' access to justice by exploring the role law enforcement plays in removing and reducing or producing and exacerbating miscarriages of justice against sex workers.

***The European Union's Red-Light Debate: Governance, Values, and the Politics of Sex Work***  
**Irena Ferčíková Konečná**

The Europeanisation of sex work in the EU has emerged as a specific area of governance, intersecting with the need to address human trafficking in the context of different legal frameworks across Member States. This contribution aims to explore the dynamics of the development of sex work governance at the EU level, analysing the phenomenon through the lens of Europeanization. The contribution discusses normative principles, the origins of Europeanisation, the role of EU institutions and the contested nature of sex work governance. The paper highlights the complex interplay between national values, different actors and EU policies, which it illustrates with the example of recent developments.

***Content and contempt in sex worker digital labor – How could we transcend the intentional devaluing of sex worker content and labor?***

**Teemu Helenius, University of Turku**

The platformization of cultural production has impacted on the production, circulation, and consumption processes of various cultural products e.g. in music, journalism, film, television, and video games (Poell et.al. 2022). Platformization processes have also made possible the emergence of content creation based digital labor which crosscuts a range of different fields of cultural production even within a single content creator's repertoire (e.g. Jarrett 2022). Unsurprisingly, sex workers have also adopted and in many cases further developed content creation-based labor processes to promote and sell content and services online and on platforms. Simultaneously, a key injustice has remained in the routine exclusion of sex workers from discussions in terms of digital laborer's rights and working



conditions (e.g. Rand 2019). Recent research has aimed to bridge the gap and to include the digital labor of sex workers into wider discussions while acknowledging the specific needs that sex workers have (e.g. Rand and Stegeman 2023). A range of research has illustrated in detail the multitude of issues sex workers face online and under platformed conditions which directly impact work safety and possibilities to control one's labor. Issues such as de-platforming, shadowbanning, non-consensual sharing of images (i.e. content theft), image-based sexual abuse, lack of control in data and privacy management, consent in regard to clients, malicious flagging, and generally platform policies and structures that promote creator precarity are among the key digital rights justice issues for sex workers but also for other content creation based digital laborers (Are and Briggs 2023; Blunt et.al. 2020; Easterbrook-Smith 2022; ESWA 2024; Hamilton et.al. 2024; Sanders et.al. 2024).

I propose that in addition to improvements in the identified issues, we need new perspectives on content and the contempt that sex workers face in order to move beyond the intentional devaluing of content creation labor by platforms, clients, and societal stigmatization. I ask two open-ended questions: Where in the content can the cultural, societal, communal, and monetary value of (online) sex worker content and work be recognized? How could the contempt towards content apparent in how platforms treat those who create it be ameliorated? In this view, justice for sex workers includes a holistic recognition of the value of a worker's labor from multiple stakeholders, which ties into questions of justice in relation to digital rights and stigmatization under platformed conditions for sex workers but ideally also beyond the online contexts.

This presentation will introduce my PhD project on the use of platforms and their affordances in online sex worker's digital labor. I will share some early insights from ongoing (n)ethnographic (Hine 2015; Kozinets 2020) observation of promotional content creation by sex workers on TikTok and beyond and discuss longer-term immersion and theory-based insights. The present findings aim to introduce perspectives for discussion on the competences and skills in both making meanings and using platforms that highlight the cultural impact of sex workers' labor on platforms as influential instigators and remixers of media objects into culturally distinct forms of communication and human expression.

***“But she looks just like a normal person” – Strategies to dismantle stigma and hegemonic categories in sex workers' self-representation***

**Laura Horsmanheimo, University of Helsinki**

In mainstream culture and media, the commercial sex industry and sex workers have traditionally been presented from the perspectives of those outside the sex worker community. Previous research has shown that these representations rely on black-and-white argumentation of sex work and stigmatize sex workers and their clients. However, already for decades, sex workers have collectively created alternative ways of representing themselves and their industry which has finally reached a broader audience in recent years in Finland where I study sex workers' self-representation and sex work activism.

I base my presentation on the analysis of my upcoming doctoral dissertation article *“But she seems like a totally normal person” – Performativity, Space for Becoming Visible and a Case of Helsinki City Museum's Sex Work Exhibition*, in which I study the exhibition *Hoes – Sex Workers' Speech* (2022–2023), co-build with sex workers and visited by 40,000 people, at the Helsinki City Museum. I utilize Judith Butler's performativity theory, outlining the strategies of a traditionally marginalized group in dismantling hegemonic perceptions directed at them. The paper answers the research question: How are performative strategies used to reframe understanding of commercial sex? To study this, I use multimodal rhetoric-performative discourse analysis which offers tools to examine meaning-making processes and to pay attention to textual, (audio)visual and spatial elements (Salojärvi et al., 2023).



***Konsomatris Work in Turkish Pavyons: Beyond the Sex Work Framework***  
**Tuğçe Kaban, Sabancı University, Istanbul**

In Turkish society, Pavyons—nightclubs rooted in local culture—are spaces where konsomatris women play a central role. While konsomatris work may seem to fit under the umbrella of "sex work," a framework often used to destigmatize and secure labor rights for those in prostitution, the dynamics of Pavyons reveal a more complex reality. Konsomatris work involves hostessing and dancing, similar to international nightclub roles. However, these roles are not merely entertainment; they are embedded in the sexual economy, as women's labor is commodified through physical presence, emotional labor, and eroticized performances. Yet, unlike prostitution, which involves direct sexual exchange, konsomatris work operates in a gray area where sexual tension is managed but not always transactional. This distinction highlights how konsomatris work blends three forms of sexual labor often grouped under sex work: hostessing, dancing, and prostitution. However, the Western "sex work" framework fails to capture the nuanced interplay between these roles and the cultural and economic specificities of Pavyons.

This study argues that konsomatris work cannot be fully understood through the sex work lens alone. Instead, it examines konsomatris labor through workers' narratives, emphasizing local cultural and economic contexts. Based on 18 months of fieldwork (Dec 2021–June 2023) in six Pavyons, with 11 interviews (6 workers, 4 customers, 1 manager), the findings reveal that konsomatris women navigate stigma, economic exploitation, and gendered violence. While they resist the "sex worker" label to avoid "whore stigma," they reinforce internal hierarchies by distancing from peers engaging in transactional sex. The Pavyon economy relies on debt bondage, where women receive advances for basic needs (e.g., housing, cosmetics), trapping them in cycles of exploitation. Mandatory alcohol consumption and customer harassment are normalized, yet women develop resilience through solidarity and performative strategies to mitigate harm. Despite legal recognition, weak enforcement leaves women unprotected, mirroring systemic neglect of informal labor.

This study challenges the binary victim/agent narrative in sex work debates, advocating for a justice framework that prioritizes workers' self-definitions and addresses intersecting inequalities (class, gender, rural-urban divides). By centering konsomatris voices, the research contributes to participatory methodologies in politically restrictive settings, offering insights for scholars studying informal labor and gendered exploitation. Ultimately, the konsomatris experience underscores the need to redefine justice beyond legal reforms to include economic dignity, safety, and collective power. Regulatory discussions must consider local cultural and economic variations, as policies effective in one setting may not address the complexities of another. This invites a broader dialogue on navigating labor rights within diverse sociopolitical landscapes while resisting neoliberal exploitation and anti-sex worker rhetoric.

***The gig economy: Learning from sex work***

**Jenny Kronman, Department of Social Work, Gothenburg University and Ruby, Red Umbrella Sweden**

Research on platform economies and the gig economy have gained increased scholarly attention in the last decade. Critical platform studies (Alfonsson, 2019; Aloisi, 2015; Fagioli, 2021) argues that the economy of work on-demand via apps restructure labor and creates new forms of precarity, mostly focusing on the situation for migrants. However, research fails to recognize sex work as part of this economy, and how such work has existed long before the gig economy (and on-demand apps) became popularized.



In the mainstream Nordic context, sex work is considered as violence against women, as exploitative and therefore as non-work. However, considering the vast Marxist literature on labor, work is per definition exploitation of the bodies of workers. The Nordic law, policy, and discourse on sex work as violence and non-work, makes it almost impossible for sex workers to gain recognition, to unionize, claim labor rights and basic protection. While it is not illegal to sell sex, everyday acts are criminalized through means of surveillance, policing, evictions, and deportations. The Swedish state positions sex workers as unworthy of the state, yet not their taxes.

Anti-trafficking organizations campaign to shut down sex work internet platforms, without recognizing that it pushes sex workers 'back to the street corners'. Benefits of online platform work are more agency, safety, and financial stability for sex workers. However, sex workers are also negatively affected by the platforms' design and policies, which are developed without consideration of sex workers' health, safety, and wellbeing (ESWA, 2023).

We argue that research on the precarisation and platformisation of work has much to learn from sex work. Drawing on insights from sex workers, we suggest other ways of understanding work by centering experiences of workers in the intersections of criminalization, informalization, and the gig economy. In doing so, we make visible the tensions, contradictions, and continuations of exploitative labor.

***Dismantling Whorephobia through Community-Driven Research: the case of Sexifier***  
**Carmela Morgillo, University College London**

How can sex workers be actively included in the research produced around their experiences? Drawing from my experience as the organiser of Sexifier, a UCL multidisciplinary project aimed at amplifying sex workers' lived experience and challenging their invisibility in academic spaces, in this paper I discuss the idea of community-driven research, a methodology that I am currently developing and applying to my work. While still in its early implementation stage, this methodology is inspired by my own experience as a sex work researcher with lived experience of the industry, my frustration with peer review practices that invalidate my community's experiential knowledge, and my desire to produce research that centres the populations it studies rather than just academics' career ambitions and institutions' interests.

While acknowledging that over the last decade sex work scholarship has made important steps towards the destigmatisation of the industry and the inclusion of sex workers in academic projects, the knowledge produced as a result is still subjected to the rules of the academy, including bending it to the requirements of peer reviewed publishing. Starting from the background for this project, the sex-worker-centered activities and workshops it proposes, together with its current and future impact on the community of sex workers, activists, academics, and allies that it brings together, in this paper I aim to explore the possibility for a radical paradigm shift in sex work research. As well as highlighting the benefits of such an approach to sex work research and its potential to be applied beyond this area and to other research projects that focus on marginalised and stigmatised groups, my paper also offers an overview of its challenges and a reflects on potential setbacks, such as institutional redtape and community risks, and mitigation strategies.

The paper proposes a transformative and liberating approach to knowledge production, one where sex workers do not simply support academics with ensuring ethical processes or accessing hard-to-reach communities but are involved in the creation of multidisciplinary research that is both beneficial for them and carried out on their own terms. In doing this, it challenges the dominant discourses around knowledge production and the hierarchies that relegate focus communities to the status of research subjects, informants, or collaborators. Ultimately, it shows how sex workers can be given



opportunities to integrate into the academic community that researches them and actively participate as peers and co-authors of the knowledge produced around their experiences, needs, and activism - knowledge which would never exist without them.

***Exclusion and ambivalence: Understanding the legal status of sex workers in Sweden***

**Petra Östergren, The division of Social Anthropology, at the department of Sociology, Lund University**

While political discourse cast sex workers in Sweden as victims of male violence, according to established law they are consenting individuals. For instance, the ban on sex-purchase is predicated on mutual consent and designed to protect public order. Moreover, as in other repressive policy regimes, Sweden's various anti-prostitution laws and regulations position sex workers in a tenuous legal and civic position. This gives rise to the question: If a person selling sex in Sweden is not a victim of crime, then what are they as a legal subject?

Since the sex-purchase offense hinges on consent, the legal system has needed to clarify how the ban relates to the general legal principles that apply to the penal code and defines the legal statuses of individuals selling sex. This paper scrutinizes three norms: the rules concerning exemption from liability; the rule on complicity in crime; and the role of the sex worker in trial. Also, it briefly considers how sex workers are cast in tax and contract regulations and discourse, in health and social service measures, and in the reasoning of Swedish authorities when sex workers challenge their legal status.

By subjecting established law and official statements to closer examination, we find that sex workers are cast in multiple roles, oscillating between victim, consenting individual, witness, criminal and self-employed entrepreneur – and sometimes as nothing at all. While this ambivalence expresses social ambiguity and an exclusionary logic intrinsic to all anti-prostitution policies, I suggest the malleable legal status of sex workers also helps to perpetuate these stigma-based discriminatory practices, providing authorities with what Gabrielle Koch (2020) terms a “strategy of ambivalence”. I also argue that discussions on the governance of prostitution and sex-workers’ rights benefit from focusing on legal principles.

***Challenging patriarchy on stage: the feminist dimensions of neo-burlesque as sex work in Poland,***  
**Paulina Prisacariu, independent researcher**

This presentation explores the feminist dimensions of neo-burlesque as a form of sex work, with a focus on its potential to disrupt patriarchal systems and advocate for justice for sex workers. Drawing on a narrative interview with Harpy Queen, a prominent Polish neo-burlesque performer, the study examines her perspective on burlesque as both a performative art form and a privileged form of sex work. This research employs qualitative narrative inquiry combined with a critical feminist analysis of the socio-political context of sex work in Poland.

Harpy Queen's acts are deeply tied to the socio-political climate in Poland, reflecting her commitment to feminist activism. Her performances addressing abortion rights, for example, incorporate powerful symbols like the lightning bolt of Poland's Women's Strike, confronting societal norms and advocating for reproductive justice in a country with restrictive abortion laws. By blending eroticism with sharp



socio-political critique, her work highlights the potential of neo-burlesque to amplify feminist values and challenge oppressive power structures.

This perspective challenges Siebler's (2014) argument that neo-burlesque often replicates patriarchal narratives and caters to the male gaze. Harpy Queen actively subverts these dynamics, emphasizing the role of burlesque as a space for queer and feminist empowerment. Her performances resist heteronormative expectations, engaging diverse audiences and broadening the possibilities of feminist performance art.

Rooted in Poland's unique socio-political environment, where issues like reproductive rights remain highly contentious, Harpy Queen's work highlights the broader challenges faced by Polish performers and sex workers. While this study focuses on Harpy Queen's experiences, it raises the question of whether socio-political themes in neo-burlesque acts vary across different national and cultural contexts. It suggests a need for future comparative research to explore how neo-burlesque communities engage with local political climates, using performance as a platform for resistance and commentary.

The presentation situates neo-burlesque within larger debates about justice for sex workers, emphasizing the urgent need for legal protections, access to social security, and destigmatization of sex work. Harpy Queen's reflections on navigating a system that undervalues performers' contributions while benefiting from their labor underscore the systemic barriers faced by sex workers in Poland and beyond.

By analyzing Harpy Queen's narrative, this study contributes to a localized understanding of sexual labor and feminist activism in Central and Eastern Europe. It advocates for an intersectional approach that prioritizes the voices of sex workers and performers in both academic and policy discussions, ensuring their lived experiences shape the frameworks of justice.

***Occupational health risks in criminal courts' case files concerning abuse of prostitution in Slovenia, Neza Kogovsek Salamon and Tjaša Učakar, , Peace Institute Ljubljana & Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia***

The paper explores how occupational and health rights of sex workers are dealt with by courts in criminal proceedings related to the crime of abuse of prostitution under Article 175 of the Slovenian Criminal Code. The socio-legal analysis conducted based on court case files showed that judicial decisions on the crime of abuse of prostitution invariably include considerations regarding occupational health risks, access to health care, and the health rights of sex workers. Courts scrutinize the availability of healthcare for women, their vulnerability to or protection from violence, and their access to health-protective measures, including contraception, medical check-ups, tests, and treatments for health issues. The courts took note of the long working hours and the difficult working conditions of the women, utilizing this information to substantiate their findings that the acts of the defendants (pimps, organizers, intermediaries) constitute "abuse of prostitution". Under the Slovenian legislation, the key element of the crime of abuse of prostitution is the fact that a sex worker was expected to or forced to share part of her income with a third person. However, in court proceedings, this key finding is always accompanied by other conclusions of the courts which are not only related to sex workers' freedom (to move, choose clients, or refuse them) but also to their health, social security, and work conditions. The analysis of case files revealed that, in the absence of specific administrative and employment regulations for sex work in Slovenia, courts do not hesitate to affirm that sex workers should have rights recognized in the same way as any other worker in the field of health care, social security, and employment. Health risks and lack of access to health care were mentioned as relevant circumstances in ten out of the twenty cases analyzed, underscoring the



importance of these factors in the adjudication of cases related to the abuse of prostitution. It can be inferred that the lack of health and other social and economic protections for sex workers exacerbates the exploitation they endure, compounded by the obligation to relinquish a portion of their earnings.

***Harm, Justice and the Law – Critical Criminological Approach to the Regulation of Sex Work***

**Ira Salo, The University of Turku**

One definition of justice is, that “laws are in order to ensure no harm befalls another” (Cornell Law School, 2023). In my PhD dissertation, I study the effects of sex work regulation on sex workers working in Finland. The purpose is to examine and highlight the concrete effects of the laws that govern sex workers in Finland. In my presentation, I will theoretically discuss the intersections of justice, harm and law through the lens of critical criminology and zemiology. The presentation will be based on my forthcoming PhD dissertation.

Zemiology and critical criminology have studied the concept of harm and crime since at least the 1990s. Critical criminology is interested in, for example, the processes of criminalisation and control. Unlike mainstream criminology, the focus has been shifted from explaining crime and criminality as individual antisocial behaviour to examining social constructionism and the process of criminalisation and control. Hence, critical criminology is interested in how something is seen as a crime and how ‘crime’ and ‘criminality’ are socially constructed.

Research has long presented evidence of the negative effects of different regulations on sex workers. Laura Graham discussed the governing of sex work through Jonathan Simons’ “Governing Through Crime” -framework. In her research based in the UK, Graham concluded, that the state has framed sex work as a crime-related issue and has then, hence, legitimised the actions of power and control towards sex workers in the framework of “saving” and “protecting” sex workers. Critical criminology and zemiology give a great starting point and framework to examine the relationship between law and harm. It further provides an opportunity to ask what role the law plays in the creation of harm and places of violence, and for whom the law is just.

***When agreeing becomes impossible: Sex work/prostitution as a case of 'abnormal justice'***

**May-Len Sklibrei, Univeristy of Oslo**

In many policy fields, politicians seek out available knowledge to inform them on what policy will produce the best possible outcome before making changes. In the case of sex work/prostitution, conflicts over how to at all understand sex work/prostitution have impacted also how policy makers relate to knowledge and knowledge claims-makers. Nancy Fraser's concept of 'abnormal justice' is descriptive of such a situation, where policy debates are made difficult or even impossible because debaters cannot agree on the premises of the debate. In this keynote I use examples from a Nordic context to explore the 'abnormal' character of sex work/prostitution policy debate.

***Queering Justice: Lesbian and FLINT Sex Workers in the Politics of Erotic Power***

**Laira Rocha Tenca; Paulina Prisacariu, University Of Brasília; Royal Holloway University Of London**

Lesbian feminism has historically critiqued both heterosexuality and sex work as mechanisms of patriarchal control over women’s bodies. This paper interrogates these critiques by examining how sex work, when practiced within queer-centric spaces and catering to lesbian and FLINT (feminine, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, and transgender) clients, may disrupt conventional feminist narratives that frame sex work as inherently oppressive. Specifically, this study explores erotic labor in queer-friendly



environments, analyzing how lesbian and FLINT sex workers cultivate agency, challenge stigma, and reconfigure the relationship between sexuality, labor, and justice.

Grounded in the theoretical insights of Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Gayle Rubin, this research revisits the feminist discourse on sex work by centering erotic power as a transformative force that resists both patriarchal structures and heteronormative feminist frameworks. Lorde's "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" (1984) frames the erotic as a site of autonomy and creative force, while Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) highlights how systemic heterosexuality shapes feminist understandings of power and oppression. Additionally, Rubin's "Thinking Sex" (1984) offers a crucial perspective on the moral hierarchies imposed on non-normative sexualities, positioning queer sex work as a form of political subversion.

Methodologically, this study employs ethnographic research through participant observation at kink wrestling events in London, an emerging site of queer erotic labor where FLINT sex workers engage in performances that blend physicality, erotic power, and subcultural community-building. These spaces, often organized within lesbian and queer networks, provide a unique vantage point for examining how bodies in performance negotiate power, consent, and erotic labor beyond heteronormative frameworks. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with both sex workers and clients will investigate how participants understand their roles in these interactions—whether as labor, play, or resistance—and how they perceive the political and emotional dimensions of their engagement.

By situating these findings within broader European debates on sex workers' rights and legal justice, this paper explores how queer sex work operates in the margins of legal recognition, offering alternative frameworks of safety, solidarity, and economic independence in response to state neglect and legal precarity. It interrogates how such practices both challenge and extend feminist debates, particularly in relation to agency, consent, and the commodification of intimacy. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that reexamines sex work through an intersectional queer feminist lens, advocating for a more inclusive framework that acknowledges lesbian and FLINT sex workers as active agents in shaping erotic economies and justice claims.

***The Master and the Hysteric: A Lacanian and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Estonian, Lithuanian, and Latvian Justice Rhetoric towards Sex Work***  
**Maxime Thébaud, ESWORN European Sex Workers Research Network**

The situation of sex workers in the Baltic region – Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia – is complex and influenced by the varying legal frameworks. These justice variations have significant implications for sex workers. Critically understanding these dynamics is crucial for examining how justice frameworks affect sex workers in the Baltic countries and broader European context. On the other hand, language, discourse, and rhetoric are powerful tools that shape societal norms and power structures. Jacques Lacan argued that the unconscious and politics are structured like a language, highlighting how language influences our perceptions and social relations. Similarly, Michel Foucault criticized power structures, emphasizing how regimes of truth and biopolitical rhetoric control behaviors. This underscores the normative power of language and the control exerted by judicial systems, making it essential to analyze how these discourses impact the lives of sex workers. Therefore, given the lack of recent studies critically analyzing these discourses in the Baltic countries, this research aims to fill this gap by examining the legal discourses and justice rhetoric in Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia to understand the power dynamics between justice and sex work and their impact on sex workers.

Considering justice as an institution norming sex workers' lives through laws as well as through language, discourse and rhetoric, the central research question is: How do the legal frameworks and discourses of justice in Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, shape the lived experiences and rights of sex



workers, and what are the concrete impacts of the discursive normative judicial control on sex workers?

This work aims to address the discursive normative and performative power of Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian justice's language over sex workers' lived experiences. The objectives specifically include to fill gaps in academic literature while providing a new theoretical and methodological approach enriching law studies, gender studies, political science and sociology; to provide valuable input for sex workers' rights advocacy and policymakers helping to develop more effective strategies and policies; and to bring broader discussions and justice and power dynamics potentially influencing legal and social reforms in the Baltic states and the broader European context.

Qualitative methods and critical discourse analysis tools will be employed to analyze a corpus of legal discourses and written documents from the justice systems of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, from 2000 to 2024. The qualitative analysis will be anchored in a combined Lacanian (LDA) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), as developed by Maxime Thébaud in 2024. LDA goes beyond simple discourse analysis by offering a methodology based on the mathematical sciences. FDA unifies social practices with discursive practices and enables to grasp the power dynamics inherent in national and international institutional discourse.

The expected outcomes include a comprehensive understanding of Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian justice system understanding of sex work and consequences on sex workers. By revealing the intricate ways in which these legal frameworks and discourses influence the daily lives and rights of sex workers, the outcomes will provide a nuanced understanding of the power dynamics at play.

***Preventing Violence Against Women or Violence Work? - The Swedish Model of Prostitution***  
**Niina Vuolajärvi, London School of Economics**

In 1999, Sweden was the first country to aim at abolishing the sex trade through criminalizing buying (rather than selling) of sex. Criminalizing the buying of sex has its roots in the Nordic feminist movement on violence against women and its understanding of prostitution as part of this violence. Versions of Swedish style sex trade legislation were passed soon after in Norway and Finland, and policies centred on criminalisation of sex buying have been adopted throughout Europe and North America. Through multi-sited fieldwork among sex workers in the Nordic region, including 210 interviews, this paper complicates the simplified image of this policy model. It examines how the Swedish model and the popularization of the understanding of commercial sex as a form of violence against women affects people who sell sex and asks, what kind of conceptions of justice does its feminist arguments of protection and care promote.

The study's findings demonstrate that understanding of prostitution as violence that needs to be abolished has led to repressive and racialized practices that perpetuate violence and stigma towards people who sell sex. Relying on Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2002) understanding of violence as production of vulnerability to "premature death," the paper argues that, despite its benevolent image, the Swedish approach by exacerbating the already precarious lives of sex workers serves in itself as a form of 'violence against women.' Following Gilmore's definition, the paper demonstrates how a wide range of people from the police to hotel receptionists and NGOs advancing increased policing of marginalized communities engage in what Micol Seigel (2018) calls "violence work," production of vulnerabilities. The paper concludes with a demand for a different kind of feminism and justice that embraces the idea of the "intersectionality of struggles" (Davis 2016).



***Human rights as a double-edged sword. Dignity and self-determination The contested relationship between sex worker rights and human rights***

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Since the 1970s sex workers across Europe have begun to organise and demand human rights and labour rights with the slogan 'sex workers rights are human rights'. In my presentation I discuss the different layers of meaning that sex workers attach to the slogan 'sex workers' rights are human rights'. Secondly, how the use of human rights by the sex worker movement relates to theories of the mobilisation of human rights by social movements as a kind of global law 'from below' (Merry et al., 2010). And thirdly, how sex workers' struggles to prove to the outside world that they are human and have the right to live and work are linked to the anti-rights movement's dehumanising strategies to exclude sex workers from human rights. My presentation is based on the interviews with sex worker activists I held in the framework of my study on the use of human rights by the sex workers movement and other actors, including civil actors, law makers and the courts.

The first level of meaning of 'sex workers' rights are human rights' is the recognition of sex workers as human beings as a fundamental condition for the right to (protection of) human rights and to be treated "as full and equal members of society" (Dworkin, 1977). Sex workers recount how their very humanity is challenged, and how their advocacy must therefore start from this fundamental point. Secondly, they make a direct link between human rights and labour rights: 'sex workers' rights are human rights' implies the recognition of sex workers as workers and their contribution to the economy and society. They also see the recognition of sex work as work as a gateway to human rights. Thirdly, 'sex workers' rights are human rights' is tied to the universality of human rights: the message that, as human beings, sex workers are entitled to the same rights as other human beings. This, in turn, is the basis for the growing rights consciousness among sex workers.

However, the human rights framework is being mobilised not only by the sex worker rights movement, but also by the abolitionist movement. Fed by the dominant anti-trafficking discourse sex workers' human rights are under attack by an increasingly influential abolitionist alliance of traditional abolitionists, so-called radical feminists, conservative and fundamentalist Christians, and 'left wing' liberals who advance the view that sex work is violence against women and a violation of human dignity and who call for its further criminalisation. What they have in common is their dedication to restore 'family values', and to re-establish the white middle-class monogamous model of 'good' sexuality, based on the conviction that sexuality should be kept within the confines of the romantic couple and embedded in (essentialist) ideologies on gender roles, femininity, masculinity and sexuality, including concepts of 'true' or 'natural' women versus 'tainted' or 'unnatural' women.

Consequently, human rights violations of sex workers are ignored, not deemed relevant or considered acceptable as collateral damage 'for the greater good', be it the rescue of innocent maidens or a world without prostitution, that is, without prostitutes. This places sex workers in a position where they first and foremost have to 'prove' that they are human. And that is exactly what happens.