

WHORES
AND
OTHER
FEMI-
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Edited by Jill Nagle

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Jill Nagle



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"Confessions of a Fat Sex Worker" by Drew Campbell originally appeared in *FaT GiRL* #4.

A previous version of Liz Highleyman's essay, "Professional Dominance: Power, Money, and Identity," entitled "My Life As A Dom," appears in the anthology *Second Coming* (Pat Califia and Robin Sweeney, eds., Alyson, in press 1996). That essay focuses on professional dominants within the SM community, whereas this piece focuses on pro doms within the sex work milieu.

Veronica Monét's essay "No Girls Allowed at the Mustang Ranch" is reprinted with permission of the Bay Area Bisexual Network, from *Anything That Moves*, issue #9.

Jessica Patton's "500 Words on Acculturation" was originally titled 'stripping and the second coming (out)' and was written and performed as a character monologue in *Death on Heels: Femme Dykes of the 90's*, first staged at 848 Divisadero Community Space in San Francisco in October, 1993.

Previous versions of Marcy Sheiner's "Odyssey of a Feminist Pornographer" appeared in *Spectator* magazine and *Forum*.

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The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent.

For Nancy

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Preface

AS INSTIGATOR AND EDITOR OF THIS VOLUME, I find myself compelled by many forces. Especially salient are anger, curiosity, and gratitude. It is surely not a new thing for an author-editor to be motivated by righteous rage at discourses, systems, or movements that inflict silence, pain, or injustice. Nor is it uncommon to create a work to quench one's own intellectual thirst—curiosity is a canny catalyst. However, I want to emphasize the personal gratitude I feel toward each of the contributors herein. In my ongoing quest (and it is not over) to illuminate (not resolve) the paradoxical nature of feminist whoring, it is these thinkers, writers, activists, and sex workers who have paved the way by modeling lives of integrity, consciousness, and passion: speaking out, organizing, performing, writing, fighting, and fucking their way to broader conceptual horizons.

Because of them, my world of possibilities is larger and richer. Without having witnessed their lives, I would not have had the tools to craft the person I am today. I undertook this project, then, not only to channel my rage and quell my curiosity, but also to demonstrate my gratitude. I am honored to collect and showcase the works of these very important thinkers, that their words and lives might further inspire and educate.

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Brad Bunnin imparted sound legal advice and warm, steady faith throughout. Jennifer Finlay provided impeccable research assistance, sound advice and lots of pep talks, all greatly appreciated. Veronica Monét, the first "out" feminist sex worker I ever met, lent support and editorial assistance—my very special thanks; Stacy Reed emerged early and often with editorial and all-around help. Patrick Graham and Tom Geller cheerfully and dependably conferred emergency computer expertise on short notice. My most religious thanks.

Rebecca Kaplan and Naomi Tucker appeared along the way with logistical and any other help I requested. Alison Luterman came through with last-minute editing assistance. Liz Highleyman's strong, skilled, firm, confident editing hand is most palpable in these pages. My deepest thanks, Liz, for your generosity, support, brilliance, and expertise. Not to mention your unfailing good nature. People too numerous to list helped proofread, offered ideas, gave feedback, procured potential contributors, ran errands, or just listened to me kvetch and kvell. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart!

To Zoë, who endured all manner of unconsciousness, especially around deadlines, and also managed to review whatever I put in front of her, I offer my most humble thanks. A bow (or curtsy) to Kate Bornstein, who set me on the right track to Routledge. I thank Eric Zinner for seeing the same light I did and following it to a contract. I also offer most sincere thanks to Jennifer Hammer for her early persistence—it gave me an unexpected confidence. Anders Corr offered unflagging enthusiasm and celebratory appreciation. Cleo Manago, teacher, brother, friend: your love, brilliance, support, and stellar politics buoy and inspire. Your intellectual influence is reflected here, as is that of Kerwin Brook, David Chapman, Liz Highleyman, Rebecca Kaplan, Richard Shapiro, Carol Stuart, and others.

I credit my myriad communities. The goddesses and warriors of San Francisco COYOTE stoked and tended my political fires. Queer Minyan saturated my often thirsty spirit. The Sacred Horses massage exchange rejuvenated my weary body and nurtured my faerie soul. The Radical Writers group gave feedback, confidence, and reduced my sense of isolation. My Internet queer and sex work communities kept my vision broad and my information base rich. San Francisco's Barefoot Boogie gave me a space to dance through my physical tensions, and plenty of playful partners. Spectator's monthly salon welcomed me among the "sexual intellectuals." And the gang: Alina, Alison, Ann, Aurora, Bayla, Beth, Eva, Holly, Judith, Neon, Rebecca, and Susie. You are the strong Jewish women who mirror, feed, and sustain me. The skin of my body contains parts of you, for we spring from common roots. You, too, are here.

Phyllis Nagle Washington, my aunt: your commitments to social justice, radical living pedagogy, and truth-telling continue to inspire me beyond your untimely passing. I dedicate this book to you. Rhoda Granat, my mother: your fascination with intellectual quagmires runs through my blood, and your warning—that only those who feel irresistibly compelled should write—keeps me vigilant. I also dedicate this book to you. And finally, my dear sister Nancy: your chutzpah, humor, perspective, and intelligence—and sisterhood—ground and color my world. I most especially dedicate this book to you.

Introduction

"FEMINISTS? IN THE SEX INDUSTRY? How can a sex worker be a feminist?" I fielded and engaged such queries numerous times during this book's development. The connections between feminism and commercial sex are deep, complex, and transformative. Defined broadly, sex worker feminists are nothing novel. What is new is the number and variety of openly identified sex workers speaking *as feminists about feminism*. The essays that follow elaborate perspectives on feminism from those within and in a few cases, closely alongside the sex industry. For this purpose, "sex industry" refers to a range of practices involving the exchange of sex and/or sexually related goods or services for money. Most of the contributors are current or former strippers, prostitutes, porn actors, writers, producers, professional dominatrixes, and phone sex workers in the United States. They reflect a particular historical moment in U.S. culture and particular conditions, largely white and/or middle-class, that afford the opportunity to forge feminisms directly from sex worker experience.

Questioning and expanding the meaning of feminism is by no means the exclusive domain of sex workers. In recent years, women from within many marginalized groups have begun to contribute their perspectives to the dynamic, contradictory body of thought, action, and narrative called feminism. In response, the face of public feminism has shifted to incorporate analyses of other forms of oppression such as race, class, and sexual orientation. However, mainstream feminism has yet to make major moves beyond analyzing how sex work oppresses women, to theorizing how feminism reproduces oppression of sex workers, and how incorporating sex worker feminisms results in richer analyses of gender oppression.

I made no special effort (though was not in principle opposed) to include perspectives of those who advocate abolition of all commercial sexual exchange, as I see such arguments well-represented elsewhere (Barry, 1979; Dworkin, 1981; Wynter, 1987; Russell, 1993). By contrast, the voices of feminist sex workers themselves have been glaringly absent in such discussions. For example, the January-February 1994 issue of *Ms.* magazine featured a cover story entitled "Roundtable on Pornography" that failed to include any women involved with

either producing pornography, or with any other aspect of commercial sex. One participant mentioned having had sex for money, an experience that left her feeling victimized and exploited. Though I feel deeply for any woman who is left feeling victimized and exploited, and though I advocate support, assistance, and the opportunity to voice that experience, a “roundtable” on as controversial a topic as pornography whose conclusions are practically foregone by the hegemonical views of the participants could not but fail to deliver the radical potential it promised.

When that article appeared, I had recently moved to the San Francisco Bay Area, and found pockets of sex-radical communities in which women, men, and transgendered people of all political stripes openly engaged in a range of commercial sex practices. I, too, began exploring various aspects of the sex industry, both as consumer and provider, and was surprised to find many of my own prejudices overturned.

Like many of the contributors to this volume, my racial and economic privilege afforded me the opportunity to choose participation in the sex industry from among many other options. This is not true for perhaps the vast majority of sex workers worldwide, especially those who exchange sex to survive on the streets, who support an addiction, or who are forced into it by others. Yet most public discussions about sex work fail to distinguish between voluntary and coerced sexual exchange, a distinction every bit as salient (and problematic)¹ as that between consensual sex and rape.

Sex worker activists around the globe have been laboring for more than two decades to improve conditions for those who choose the profession, and to oppose all forms of coercion, in the process calling attention to the larger economic context that severely circumscribes the range of options for all women (and most men). A small group of such activists recently helped ensure that the Platform for Action that emerged out of the United Nations’ Beijing Women’s Conference in October 1995 clearly differentiated between forced and voluntary prostitution, condemning only the forced variety.

Feminism too often has failed to incorporate and theorize this distinction. When it does, the theorizing is usually done by non-prostitutes (see, for example, Pateman, 1988). To momentarily don Marxist headgear, one could argue that the production of feminist discourse around prostitution by non-prostitutes alienates the laborer herself from the process of her own representation. While this is not to automatically discredit non-sex worker feminist arguments against sex work, it is to say it is high time to stop excluding the perspectives of sex worker feminists, time to stop assuming that traditional feminist analysis of sexual oppression alone exhausts all possible interpretations of commercial sex, and time to stop reproducing the whore stigma common to the larger culture. These practices dilute much of feminism’s radical potential. This needn’t happen. Mainstream feminism can and must take up the mantle to include sex worker feminisms—and feminists—in the larger picture.

Because of *Ms.*’s position as a primary, if not definitive, voice of mainstream

feminism, I objected loudly and vehemently to the political underpinnings of that roundtable discussion. In a letter to the magazine (which went unpublished), I raged, "Would Ms. sponsor a roundtable on lesbianism with a panel of famous heterosexual married ladies, one of whom had had a regretted past relationship with a woman?" Whores, I went on to argue, are the dykes of the nineties, the lavender menace whom it's still considered okay to ostracize.

This hasn't been uniformly true throughout feminism's history. As early as 1970 in the U.S., prostitute and non-prostitute feminists gathered in public, argued, formed friendships and alliances, and appeared in print side-by-side (Strong, 1970; Morgan, 1970; Fulbright, 1971; Reisig, 1971, 1972; Kearon, 1972). Though relations between openly identified sex worker feminists and non-sex-worker feminists were hardly seamless (nor was the line dividing these groups), sex workers (from closeted to openly identified, from part- or one-time to professional) figured prominently in many feminist discussions of that decade. After that time, public arguments among feminists became increasingly polarized over prostitution and pornography, culminating in the "sex wars" of the 80s.²

In 1985, at the height of the sex wars, sex worker and non-sex worker feminists collaborated to produce a Canadian conference entitled *Challenging Our Images: The Politics of Pornography and Prostitution*. Out of the proceedings came the book *Good Girls/Bad Girls: Feminists and Sex Trade Workers Face to Face* (Bell, 1987). The title notwithstanding, the book's contents problematize the very distinction between the two ostensibly separate groups. There are not just two party lines, two sets of experiences, two agendas. Yet the sex workers who speak in that volume express feeling pressure to conform to a "good girl" definition of feminism that unifies itself by excluding sex workers. However, as Laurie Bell states in the introduction, the sex workers

... maintain that it is the definition of feminism that must change in order to include both good girls and bad girls, not they who must conform to a good-girl image so as to be considered feminist. Sex trade workers claim, in effect, to be feminists in exile; excluded from a rightful place in the feminist movement, they demand to be recognized as members of the women's community. As one prostitute remarked, "Feminism is incomplete without us." (p. 17)

That volume furthered discussion between the two separated groups. *Sex Work* (1987), broke further ground with sex workers speaking for themselves, without traditional feminists mediating or legitimizing, and *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores* (1989) represented a more global and historical perspective on prostitute activism and demands for justice. This collection continues the spirit of those works by further cultivating explicitly feminist U.S. perspectives from within the sex industry. This time, in the pages that follow, sex worker feminists speak not as guests, nor as disgruntled exiles, but as *insiders to feminism*.

According to hegemonical feminist logic of the 1970s, excluding sex workers from feminist discussions seemed reasonable. After all, female sex workers who serve male clients offer a service arguably central to the very set of power relations traditional feminists seek to challenge and overturn. Sexual access fuels the rapist mentality (Brownmiller, 1975). Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice (Morgan, 1978). Prostitution requires self denigration (Millett, 1973). Pornography is inherently degrading to women (Dworkin, 1979). Thus, feminists and sex workers would appear to constitute two groups with mutually exclusive loyalties. Fortunately, the reality is more complex.

Many well-known feminists such as Andrea Dworkin³ and Susan Brownmiller⁴ have exchanged sex for money. Many others have participated in implicit sexual-monetary exchange, such as legal marriages or long-term cohabitation. When looking at actual *behavior*, sex-worker-identified and non-sex-worker-identified feminists form more of a range, or continuum than two discrete groups.⁵ As with sexual orientation, those who publicly wear the label become de facto spokespeople for the rest, who can remain comfortably invisible. This “closetedness” allows the general public to believe that there really are two kinds of women, and that those in the sex industry are only ever powerless victims.

In the Meanings section of this volume, Carol Queen asks, “What separates those sex workers who experience their lives negatively from those who do not?” The protocol of feminist discourse has so far overwhelmingly dictated that those with sex industry experience characterize it only as negative/in the past/coerced/victimizing. Feminist activism and discourse has done an excellent (though unfinished) job of clearing space, creating support for, and theorizing women’s stories of victimization around commercial sex. In the process, it has silenced feminist whores. Now it is time to clear space, create support for, and theorize other stories. As Adrienne Rich (1979) reminded us,

If we conceive of feminism as more than a frivolous label, if we conceive of it as an ethics, a methodology, a more complex way of thinking about, thus more responsibly acting upon, the conditions of human life, we need a self-knowledge which can only develop through a steady, passionate attention to *all* female experience. (*italics in original*).⁶

There is room in feminism for whores, virgins, and everything in between. The advent of postmodernism and queer theory presents both more possibilities and more challenges for feminism. In forging more whore feminisms, we might well begin by looking at what purposes are served by using *any* sexual categories to describe women.

Compulsory Virtue and Harlot Existence: Constructing Binaries of Female Identity

Female identity in this culture takes shape in relation to a variety of binaries. A constructing binary of identity (in this case, of female identity) is a set of two

categories, one marked by relative privilege, the other by relative stigma. The examples I discuss here, in relation to one another, are lesbian/heterosexual, and good girl/bad girl. Other examples include white/nonwhite, reproductive/nonreproductive, and all of these categories interrelate in myriad and complex ways.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the overdeterminacy of white supremacy. To the important sets of questions concerned white feminists ask of themselves, one another and their groups, like "how is this racist, and how can we stop," all feminists must add, "How does white supremacy inform the very terms of this debate?" In this case, though a full treatment of the topic would necessitate another book, one point must be made: *Most of the constructing binaries of female identity signify a particular female's relationship to reproducing offspring of European descent, also known as "white" people.*⁷

These binaries construct identity by forcing females to choose, or at least negotiate between them. Their strength and power is evidenced by the paucity of such "between" space, and what happens to those who dare to inhabit it, or otherwise challenge the binary. Much feminism has done a good job of challenging, or deconstructing some of these binaries. For example, Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1986), to whose arguments I draw thinly veiled analogies herein, points out how the lesbian/heterosexual binary informs and constructs all women's choices, not just the lesbian-identified, since it forces even heterosexual women to be forever vigilant lest their membership in the "good" category be challenged, as in, "I could never wear/say/do that; someone might think I'm a dyke!"

Similarly, since all our desires and actions still grow up under white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy, we need to problematize not only choices to participate in the sex industry, but also choices *not* to. Whores, too, are something that women are not only supposed to not *be*, but also, not be *mistaken* for. This division translates into a mandate to not only *be* virtuous, but also to *appear* virtuous, to again demonstrate our affiliation with the privileged half of the good girl/bad girl binary.

Compulsory virtue, then, is also something that informs and constricts women's every move, i.e., "I could never wear/say/do that, someone might think I'm a whore!" Beyond the internal constrictions women experience lie external risks, as well. As with other pariah categories, one does not have to actually *be* a whore to suffer a whore's punishment or stigma. Getting mistaken for a whore can land one in jail, as Priscilla Alexander and Norma Jean Almodovar point out. Recent laws, such as one passed in January, 1996 in San Francisco, give police officers the power to arrest someone for *appearing to intend* to exchange sex for money. As with most laws governing sex work, women are disproportionately targeted and arrested, although the total number of men who participate in prostitution is far larger than the number of women.⁸ Good girls, then, stay out of the fray by eschewing any display of sexual intent or autonomy, lest it be used to relabel them bad.

Heterosexual privilege generally functions as a subset of "good girl" privilege,

while lesbianism and prostitution are subsets of “bad girl” categories. One of the reasons female bisexuality has been stigmatized, ostracized, or reduced to mere titillation for straight men, is that it confounds the lesbian/heterosexual constructing binary of female identity.⁹ Feminist whores function in a similar way with respect to the good girl/bad girl trope.

To illustrate this, try juxtaposing the statement “No woman with other options could possibly choose sex work” with “No woman with other options could possibly choose lesbianism.” Elements of these arguments sound nearly identical: Why risk the stigma, give up privileges, take on pariah status, to do something many believe is aesthetically if not morally offensive? Liberal answers have framed lesbianism as genetic (or the result of bad rearing), and whoring as always and only forced (or fatalistically resulting from poor self-esteem), precluding a consideration of choice in either matter. Bisexual women confound both the conservative and liberal constructions of lesbianism, just as feminist, part-time and unashamed sex workers confound both conservative and liberal notions of whoring. As Rebecca Kaplan said about bisexual women, “Perhaps the ultimate threat to the heteropatriarchy is a woman who has had a ‘good fuck’ and still isn’t ‘cured’” (Kaplan, 1992).

The woman who claims to go back and forth—to inhabit heterosexual relationship with all its vicissitudes, to reserve the right to abandon heterosexual relationship and embrace lesbian relationship, and then reserve the right to change her mind once again—(or perhaps embrace both) inspires vitriol from all camps. How many rights, after all, are women allowed to reserve? Like the bisexual woman, the proud harlot, the lesbian feminist stripper, and the part-time whore working her way through grad school all suggest that women can *choose* the less socially sanctioned of the good girl/bad girl boxes, and can do so out of liberation rather than compulsion, or can refuse the dichotomy entirely. The contributors in the pages that follow renegotiate one set of rigid binaries upon which female identity is constructed.

Embodiment

A central problem for feminists of all stripes, including feminist whores, is opposing the nonconsensual treatment of women as *only* sexual bodies while simultaneously challenging the cultural hierarchies that devalue and stigmatize sexual bodies.¹⁰ To come at it from the other side, how do we value our sexuality when ‘to be valued for our sexuality’ is a primary instrument of our oppression? Karate and aikido are useful metaphors here. Karate is a what I call a “stop” martial art in which students are trained to defend not only themselves, but also every other potential victim of their assailant by disabling the attacker so that they will not be able to inflict harm on anyone else. Karate aims to meet, destroy, and overpower oncoming energy with greater, more effective energy, for the safety of all.

Based in an ostensibly opposite philosophy, aikido teaches escape from harm with as little damage as possible to the attacker. Students are trained to treat the attacker with great care, as though he or she were “the last eagle’s egg.” To

achieve this, aikido technique involves first going with, rather than against the energy of the attack, and then using the attack's own energy to deflect the attack and escape. For example, in response to a direct blow, the aikido defender would first move her own body in the direction of the blow and then out of the way so that the attacker's own momentum would continue to carry their body forward, leaving time for the unharmed attackee to escape. Conversely, the karate defender would instantly meet and disable that same blow with a comparable force.

Resistance takes many forms. To the untrained western eye, an aikido response to sexist oppression might appear complicit with the violence. But part of aikido's lesson is the paradox that sometimes, to get beyond something, one must first enter it with benign intention. In the successful aikido defense, the attacker, too, is transformed. Aikido's subtle magic also includes more direct defense techniques for last-resort situations.

While taking an aikido-based self-defense course for women, I grappled with these two philosophies as they applied to my own life. Karate appealed to my intense anger at the circumscription of my freedom and safety as a woman. Aikido appealed to my spirituality and utopian ideals.

Like many of the other young, white, middle-class women on my college campus, my feminist activism began karate style, with angry, reactive stances to men's sexual domination of women. I protested lenient date rape policies and sexist fraternity posters, though I stayed home when my comrades went to rally against porn flicks in the student union. "No means no," a catchphrase of the 80s, captured the essence of my peer group's "karate," or "stop" feminism.

Battered women's shelters, rape crisis centers, and increased consciousness around sexual violence sprang directly from this brand of feminism. Unless and until male violence against women ceases, "stop" feminism will be women's 911, a number I always want access to. But "stop" feminism has a limited domain. As a vehicle for sexual growth, awareness, and empowerment, "stop" feminism is to women's sexuality as an ambulance is to human health: a necessary measure, absolutely appropriate in many circumstances, but not suitable for daily care. Like the system of values it opposes, "stop" feminism fails to theorize a positive, autonomous view of female sexuality, instead reproducing much of society's deeply held ambivalence about female sexual agency. It also reflects an awareness of the minefield of sexual oppression within which the struggle to define our sexuality takes place. Without any clues, room to explore, or signs of imminent safety, a defensive posture is, indeed, a rational stance.

From an aikido perspective, the minefield of commercial sex looks different. The sex worker feminisms herein offer clues, create ideological space for divergent experiences, and call for greater safety measures for all women. Many of the sex workers in this volume use the opportunities for dialogue with clients in their work environments to educate men about women's bodies, women's desires, and issues of boundaries and consent. I know one feminist prostitute, Shaun, who regularly demonstrates proper condom usage,¹¹ relevant female anatomy and biology, and safer sex. She sees this component of her work as

inherently political, both because it challenges any stereotype of ignorance clients might have of her as a sex worker, and because it helps ensure that her many clients learn to treat women's bodies with the knowledge, respect and skill most women desire, and many still cannot articulate. In this way, feminist prostitutes can and do act uniquely as invisible allies of their non-sex worker sisters—a position made possible only by entering the domain of sex work itself.

In the San Francisco queer and sex-radical circles in which I and many of the other contributors have contextualized ourselves, I see a clear and present feminism organically woven into the culture. I watch sexual disrespect get nipped in the bud very quickly, with special attention paid to sexism and women's well being in mixed gender queer sex spaces.¹² I see room being created for men, too, to name, claim, get enraged about and grieve over sexual hurts. Getting my 'no' heard is no longer my primary concern. It isn't even getting my 'yes' heard; rather, I feel invited to articulate my own sexual desires in an increasingly diverse and welcoming context. I am not living in utopia by any stretch—just in a different culture from before, and one that embraces and rewrites, rather than circumvents and silences, myriad forms of female—and male—sexual agency.

I realize that my economic, educational, and racial privileges (to name a few) construct this stance. I also realize that occupying a small counterculture that supports safety and individual freedom for a few doesn't erase the material realities that keep in place systemic sexual and other violence against women, nor does it appear to dramatically touch the lives of masses of women across the globe, or even in this country, who are sexually coerced on a daily basis. However, it does reframe and expand the feminism I knew, which in turn informs how I and other feminists approach such global issues. For example, Priscilla Alexander's essay demonstrates how the same sex-positive grounding that supports small alternative communities of privilege also ideologically supports reconceptualizing human rights for sex workers internationally. Incorporating and expanding beyond the heuristic dualism of "karate" and "aikido" feminisms, Alexander's reframing of human rights issues for sex workers provides much sounder argumentative and political grounding for sex worker's human rights advocacy and activism than traditional feminist ideology. She also clearly identifies the stop elements and the sex-positive aspects as completely intertwined in her experience of being a woman in this society:

I believe that as long as women are arrested for the crime of being sexually assertive, for standing on the street without a socially acceptable purpose or a male chaperone, I am not free. As a woman and a feminist, I believe we will never have rights, opportunities, choices, work options, or an income equivalent to men's *unless we can stop being afraid of being either raped or called "whore."* As women, we must watch where and how we walk, talk, and dress, lest someone mistake (or claim to have mistaken) our intent. (Italics mine; p. 84, this volume)

Traditional feminism can no longer in good conscience advocate rape crisis centers while simultaneously refusing to talk to whores. Similarly, in its rebellious fervor, which I understand and share, sex-positive feminism mustn't make the mistake of disavowing stop feminism. Once a student becomes advanced in either karate or aikido, she begins to see their fundamental similarities. Each is premised on the belief that *the attacks ought not to occur in the first place*.¹³ Similarly, as responses to many forms of sexist oppression, karate and aikido approaches to feminism often work different ends of the same rope, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. When addressing the complexities of international sex worker issues, these categories may need to break down and give way to more dynamic, interparadigmatic¹⁴ approaches.

Polarization, whether in a relationship or in a political movement, often develops a life independent of the issues to which it attaches; the energy used to construct and maintain such polarities can exceed the argumentative content. This is not to trivialize real disagreements among feminists, but rather to raise questions about and differentiate between the dynamics and the actual substance of our debates. To put it another way, I am interested in engaging and deconstructing the dialectic, and uncovering hidden areas of agreement.

This has already begun to happen to the extreme polarization that characterized the sex wars of the 80s. Thankfully, chinks abound in the armor of the two most well-represented sides of the debate, revealing conduits for connection. Note, for example, the similarity of these two passages, both of which describe feminist reactions to mainstream heterosexual pornography:

Behind the static object which the obscene vision calls woman is a sacred image of the goddess, the sacred image of the cow, the emblematic touch of divinity in the ecstasy of the sexual act, and behind all these the knowledge that within matter and not outside the material is a knowledge of the meaning of the universe. (Griffin 1981, 71)

When I look at pornography, it reminds me of the hundreds of figurines of nude women that turn up in the prehistoric strata of some archeological digs... The woman in pornography is a triumphant goddess. She is the mysterious source of all pleasure... (Califa 1995, 4)

A feminist known for her oppositional critique of pornography wrote the first passage in 1981; another feminist known (and frequently targeted) for her sado-masochistic fiction, incisive critiques of sexual censure, and political defense of all forms of sexual expression, wrote the other in 1995. Their points of political departure bear no repetition here. I am interested in their areas of accord and in asking questions similar to Carol Queen's above, i.e., what separates those who wish to engage, or at least allow pornographic expressions from those who

would abolish all their incarnations? Many of the contributors herein, myself included, speak from personal experience of having traversed both territories and abandoned neither, but rather embraced the paradox and allowed new syntheses to emerge.

The results speak for themselves. I invite the skeptics to seek out those moments of ambiguity, the points just before an ally threatens to become an ideological enemy and ask, what, exactly, is happening here? Many of the essays that follow chart such pivotal moments within individual lives, shedding light on the complexities that give rise to sex worker feminisms.

On the Inside

We begin, as ever, where we find ourselves. In Section 1, six current or former sex workers grapple candidly with integrating their feminist views with their sex work practices. "Contradiction" says bell hooks, "is the stuff of revolutionary struggle. The point is not to deny the reality of contradiction, but to utilize the space of contradiction to come to a greater understanding." (hooks, 1996) It is from within these contradictory spaces, from the material realities of their lives, that these contributors write.

Vicky Funari explores what separates her, the paid peepshow performer, from the paying customers on the other side of the glass, and in turn, what separates her customers from the men she knows and loves. In the process, she unearths fictions that construct the peepshow experience, male and female roles, and ultimately her own body. Marcy Sheiner traces her development from a teenaged wife furtively perusing her husband's girly magazines to feminist activist to prolific author for some of those same magazines. Ultimately, neither her fertile pornographic imagination nor her feminist convictions suffers as a result of the other.

Using years of goddess mythology study as a springboard, Cosi Fabian embarks at age forty-two on a journey to embody the holy whore archetype. She at last brings her life into alignment with her beliefs, realizes spiritual fulfillment, and improves her physical health. Ann Renée emerges from years of a complex web of abuse, desire, teenage prostitution, ecstasy, and spiritual searching with a passionate call for justice, shift of authority, and an end to repression. Rather than being "cleaned up," she argues, the sex industry needs to be "made even more shamelessly dirty."

Nina Hartley is a registered nurse and porn star famous not only for her "wholesome" sexiness and upbeat attitude, but also for her politics, talent, activism, and mentoring of new actresses. She chronicles her emergence into the adult film world and the range of issues she confronted, both internally and externally. As her sexual experience and confidence shifted, so did her feminist analysis. Finally, Annie Sprinkle expands her usual role as sex-positive guru to address some of the more taxing aspects of erotic labor. She enjoins sex workers to care for themselves in specific, tangible ways to avoid Sex Worker Burnout Syndrome (SWBS). Through their sex industry experience, many of this section's

contributors expand their understanding of the machinations of sexist oppression, both strengthening and problematizing their feminist analyses.

In many ways the theoretical “meat” of the book, Section 2 takes up the project of such analysis in greater depth. Eva Pendleton situates sex worker feminism in the lens of queer theory, examining constructions of sex worker identity in the popular and lesbian/gay press. Both sex workers and lesbians, she argues, “destabilize heteronormativity,” thus placing sex worker feminists in some very queer positions, indeed. Priscilla Alexander uses the human rights rubric to analyze the politics on either of the two main sides of feminist controversy around prostitution. She takes a long view globally and historically, effecting a paradigm shift that calls for the prevention of systemic human rights violations of sex workers worldwide, rather than unilaterally framing sex work as always and inherently a human rights violation in the first place. Tawnya Dudash lifts the curtain on feminist speech in a peepshow environment. The peepshow affords unique opportunities to explore body image, sexuality, attitudes toward age and ethnicity, same-sex interaction and other elements, which Dudash chronicles in a series of interviews as a participant/observer.

Across the U.S., many stigmatized sexual practices are quietly winked at in exchange for silence and pretense of their nonexistence. Tracy Quan shines the light on Barbie as the trope for the lucrative hypocrisy that characterizes the “average American call girl,” exposing Barbie’s sordid past as Lilli, a German whore cartoon character-cum-doll. The rules governing sexual contracts, it turns out, are no further away than middle America’s toyboxes.

Delving directly into the post-sex-war wreckage, Carol Queen carefully unpacks the tenuous relationship between feminism and sex radicalism, deconstructing whore stigma, and offering reconstructive information, directions, and issues for traditional feminism to consider. Finally, Jessica Patton provides a graphic juxtaposition of lesbian sex in two women’s spaces: an upscale San Francisco strip joint and an East Coast Seven Sisters college, illustrating some surprising contrasts of sexual and feminist richness and poverty.

Since the commercial sex arrangement that serves as the model for most traditional feminist critique is women providing compliant sexual services to men, Section 3 contains a number of “reversed” perspectives on this common theme, each elucidating a different aspect of the constructedness of this original model. Julian Marlowe, a male prostitute, contrasts the meaning of prostitution in predominantly white gay male culture with that of female prostitution in mainstream North American heterosexual culture. The areas where the arguments against prostitution break down for males reveal how many arguments against female prostitution reify the very cultural notions of femaleness they often purport to challenge. Liz Highleyman analyzes many aspects of the professional dominant’s position, a sex industry job usually ignored by traditional feminism, since, in Highleyman’s words, “Abolitionists find it difficult to make the case that pro doms are exploited victims with no control over their situations.” Highleyman advocates solidarity among all sex workers, regardless

of the hierarchies of stigmatization that often privilege pro doms as somehow less objectionable or oppressed than other sex workers.

Most analyses of and arguments against porn are made against the majority of porn, which is by, for, and about male desire with women represented primarily as props in the service of that desire. The specific terms of sexual representation, then, become conflated with sexual representation itself, so that 'pornography' comes to mean 'that which uses women in the service of men's exploitive (or otherwise "bad") desire.' Leaving aside this time the issue of gay male pornography, what happens to this equation when women begin making sex videos for other women, with the intent to turn this dynamic around? Candida Royalle and Debi Sundahl, two longtime friends and peers recount the struggles and triumphs leading to their pioneering success, and discuss ways their work has helped transform the way women regard and express desire. Veronica Monét gains a special appreciation for professional sexual service (and a bad taste of heterosexism) when her husband treats her to a trip to the Mustang Ranch, a famous Nevada brothel. Finally, Les von Zoticus, in an effort to equalize the skewed arrangements placing femmes always at the service of butch desire, offers herself for hire by women as a "refined butch escort."

Section 4 illuminates areas clouded in silence, stigma, and/or myths. Stacy Reed's three years in Texas's renowned "gentlemen's clubs" divested her of more than just her street clothes. She debunks what she now considers mythical beliefs about stripping, which are based in both lack of information and an old-school feminist analysis. Working in the privacy of one's own home, with the anonymity of the telephone raises different issues. Drew Campbell's "Confessions of a Fat Sex Worker" recounts Drew's coming face-to-face with virulent fat prejudice from a phone sex client's wife.

If fatness puts one in an out group among out groups, so does being a raunchy feminist. Red Jordan Arobateau, whose work was rejected by feminist and lesbian presses for years because of its sexual content, now promulgates a steady stream of chewy filth with a specialty publisher. Because she makes money with her sexually explicit writing, she gets painted with the same derogatory brush as the whores she dated two decades ago. Her spelling of "dike" harks back to that time, and also reflects her working-class sensibility. Though Arobateau occupies a "gray area" vis-à-vis the sex industry per se, her piece illustrates how sex worker stigma leaks onto many forms of sexual representation, particularly when those representations are not white and middle class. As a case in point, Arobateau was recently accused in a lesbian publication of actually being an undercover man, as reviewer Jinx Beers had never heard of stone butches turning tricks with prostitutes, then getting it on with them "in a very masculine manner." Nor could she imagine any "real" lesbians engaging in Arobateau's preferred mode of tribadism (Beers, 1995).

In "Showing Up Fully," Blake Aarens, Hima B., Gina Gold, Jade Irie, Madeleine Lawson, and Gloria Lockett discuss their experiences as women of color in the sex industry, touching on feminism, racism, sexuality, stigma, and the

complexity of their lives. Norma Jean Almodovar reflects in "Working It" on her decision to become a prostitute in order to write *Cop to Call Girl*, an account of her experiences with sexism, violence, and abuse within the Los Angeles Police Department. She highlights the range of abuse and corruption in the LAPD, the ironies of the City's treatment of prostitutes, and the media's changing attitude towards her from the time of her book's publication to the present. Veronica Monét, happily and safely back from the Mustang Ranch, returns to trace her political transformation from traditional to sex worker feminist.

Section 5 is about the interventions and transformations that sex workers and their allies effect in the world. Carol Leigh, aka Scarlet Harlot, who coined the phrase "sex worker," reveals, "When I first looked into that mirror, and said, 'Now, there's a prostitute,' I knew that redefining prostitution from prostitutes' perspectives would be my life's work." Lyndall MacCowan interviews Denise Turner, members of whose lesbian feminist community took jobs at the local massage parlor, then protested and formed a prostitute's education project when working conditions declined. Turner's story, again from a working-class community, strikingly contradicts prevailing middle-class notions of feminists and sex workers as two disparate groups.

Larry Grant, a profeminist man, argues against the Men Against Pornography Statement of Accountability on several grounds, including that its selectivity about the particular kinds of feminists to whom they are accountable is actually anti-feminist. Teri Goodson joins NOW as an openly-identified prostitute, and fights an uphill battle to win allies and educate other members about the political necessity of such alliances. Siobhan Brooks bravely challenges the racism, both subtle and overt, implicitly condoned in the peepshow she performs in, and Joan Kennedy Taylor helps found Feminists for Free Expression in response to censorship efforts from other feminist factions.

Taken as a whole, the essays in all five sections work to close the feminist-sex worker gap. As I have suggested, the artificial separation of feminists from sex workers recapitulates feminist battles over lesbian inclusion, also eagerly exploited by the media to divide women. Then and now, feminism sorely needs exactly what is provided by the group it excludes. As lesbian feminism strengthened mainstream feminism, so will whore feminism. These essays contribute to that strength, not often by offering easy answers, but rather by introducing new questions and reframing old ones.

Postmodern critiques of sex and gender have shown the dangers of subscribing to a monolithic notion of 'woman.' Extending this critique to the notion of sex, the traditional meanings assigned to sexual exchange begin to loosen and admit of greater complexity. The voices in this book ground themselves in the gaps of this complexity, and create wider spaces for debate, for feminist sex work, and for sex worker feminism.

It becomes, then, neither interesting nor valuable to ask whether a sex worker (or any other sort of person) can "be a feminist" but rather, to ask questions like How does feminism inform the lives, choices, and practices of workers in

the sex industry? How does sex industry experience affect the feminism of individual sex workers? How do stigmas limit or define women not in the industry, or on its periphery? And perhaps most centrally, *how do sex worker feminisms change the face of feminism as a whole?*

Notes

1. The notion of consent is problematic in that it is based on abstract equality but is applied to situations of social inequality. For example, what does it mean for a woman who believes it is her duty to have sex with a particular man to give consent? Additionally, the gray areas between consensual sex and rape have often been strategically oversimplified in order to effectively combat date rape. I believe that as negotiation and consent become more standard parts of our sexual vocabulary, that more safety will be created to discuss these gray areas without automatically feeding backlash sentiment that would deny the reality and tragedy of rape.
2. Gayle Rubin has pointed out to me that the term "sex wars" and its attendant image of equally polarized sides reaching toward a conciliatory middle inaccurately frames the sexual outlaws as aggressively promoting particular sexual practices (such as sex work and sadomasochism) rather than defending themselves against attack. In fact, the "middle ground" conclusions represent standard sex radical views from up to two decades ago.
3. See "Roundtable on Pornography," *Ms.*, January/February 1994, p. 39.
4. See Reisig, Robin, *Village Voice*, 1971.
5. Nonetheless, while solidarity demands breaking down the good girl-bad girl binary division, openly-identified sex workers need to be the ones to speak for themselves, rather than obviating their unique perspectives by claiming that "we are all whores," and can therefore speak for one another.
6. "Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women (1976)" in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966–1978*, p. 213.
7. This means that the stigmas attached to both male and female nonreproductive and counterreproductive sexual behaviors, such as prostitution, homosexuality, bisexuality, abortion, public sex, and nonmonogamy, need to be examined through this lens in addition to any others. The potential results include better informed alliances among progressive antiracist, feminist, sexual liberation, reproductive freedom, and other groups working toward social justice.
8. I include in this number male prostitutes as well as male clients of prostitutes of all genders.
9. Elsewhere I argue that, in addition to sexism, monosexism constructs bisexual identity for both men and women (see Nagle, Jill, "Framing Radical Bisexuality: Toward a Gender Agenda" in *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions*, Harworth Press, 1995).
10. Carol Smart's discussion of the construction of women's bodies in legal dis-

course influenced my thinking here. See "Postscript for the 1990s, or 'Still Angry After All These Years'" in *Law, Crime and Sexuality: Essays in Feminism*.

11. According to Shaun, who has a degree in biology and years of experience as a sex educator, the two major causes of condom breakage are 1) air in the condom and 2) not enough lubricant on the outside.
12. 'Mixed gender queer sex spaces' refers to public or private parties created for the purpose of having, exploring, and watching explicit sexual activity among people of all genders and sexual orientations, making them different from, say, gay men's sex clubs or heterosexual swinger's parties. Safer sex, negotiation, and consensuality are highly stressed in the former.
13. Alex Lewin, personal communication.
14. Aside from conversations on the Internet, I first publicly coined this word in a paper entitled "Interparadigmatics: Toward a Dynamic, Polyvisional Epistemology/Praxis of Queer Liberation" presented at "Queer Frontiers: The Fifth Annual National Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Graduate Student Conference," Los Angeles, 1995. It refers to practices that consciously partake of and/or move among multiple frameworks and perspectives, as opposed to those that remain within one.

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