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## **Sex Work and Queer Politics in Three Acts**

Svati P. Shah

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## A NEW QUEER AGENDA

### Sex Work and Queer Politics in Three Acts

By Svati P. Shah

Sex work has always been relevant to queer and trans communities, both as a livelihood option and as an issue that critically informs the space between social and political margins, and the centralities of queer and trans communities. The vital set of issues raised by the intersections of sex worker and queer populations has not always been addressed by LGBT/Q organizations, however. This essay brings the complex history of those intersections into sharp relief, in order to make a case for the importance of thinking politically about sex work and queer life today.

This essay presents a synthesis of interviews with three New York City-based activists, Amber Hollibaugh, Ignacio Rivera, and Felix Gardon, conducted in March 2008 at New York University. In the course of each interview, Amber, Ignacio, and Felix discuss their own experiences of sex work, and how these experiences inform their work in LGBT movements. Their interviews describe the arc of contemporary LGBT history in the United States, from the late 1960s to the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion, through the formation of LGBT organizations and infrastructure to present-day struggles about the priorities and directions of our collective agenda.

The interviews address a range of issues that are central to understanding the relationship between sex work and LGBT communities—especially the history of the LGBT movement in the United States, and the value that sexual liberation had initially to the formation of “gay rights.” Amber describes the culture of gay bars during the 1960s and 1970s, and of queer and trans spaces that included a wide array of sexually marginalized communities, including sex workers. She goes on to describe the changes in the politics of queer sex cultures spurred on by the era of AIDS, emphasizing the stark class divisions there, as well as the emergence of politicized distinctions between sexually normative and non-normative queer and trans people. Ignacio takes up these themes in reflecting on the contemporary context, considering where and how concepts of polyamory, sexual liberation, and class intersect with sex work. Felix goes on to describe doing sex workers’ rights organizing in Philadelphia, focusing on the ways that gender inflects the politics of sex work and sexuality. All three argue that sex work and LGBT communities intersect, and that understanding this intersection is critical for re-evaluating the impact of contemporary homonormative politics.

#### Amber Hollibaugh

Amber Hollibaugh has been involved in LGBT organizing for decades, bearing witness to the movement since the 1960s. She has worked on numerous issues over the years with many diverse LGBT organizations including the Lesbian AIDS Project at GMHC (Gay Men’s Health Crisis), Services and Advocacy for GLBT Seniors (SAGE), and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. She is currently chief officer of elder and LGBT women’s services at Howard Brown Health Center in Chicago. Amber’s history within the movement is documented in her book, *My Dangerous Desires: A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home*, published in 2000 by Duke University Press. An excerpt from that book is reprinted in this issue.

**AH:** You know, it’s not an accident that the Stonewall Rebellion [New York City, 1969] was made up of bulldaggers, drag queens, trans people, sex workers [...]. Those were the people who were the outlaws of an already outlawed world, which was a queer world at that point. And they were the edges of that queer world. That’s who you could find who would be publicly out around being queer. The earlier women’s movement—the feminist movement—and the queer movement were originally, I think, much more radical movements politically and in their make-up—not just in what they thought, but who was in [them], too.

There were public cultures of LGBT people then, and those public cultures were very embedded in sex work. In the long history of the lesbian and gay world, gay bars were sexual outlaw sites that configured a lot of different communities: gay men, lesbians, sex workers, and the drag community, for example. I’m talking

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about pre-Stonewall and in that early Stonewall moment. And not just in the Northeast but actually across the United States. People act as though sex work and issues of sexual normalization are new issues, part of a new conversation, as though sex work wasn't really a part of how queer life was constructed before there was a movement. But the history that's important to remember here is that, relative to the way "normal" sexuality was constructed in the 1950s, you had a whole lot of people who didn't fit in, of which gay people were the most organized. I mean, I think gay bars had all of those different configurations of people, so we could have something like a bar that would become a place, not where people who were sexual minorities necessarily liked each other, but where people tolerated each other because they knew that on the outside they were despised.

As there began to be a bigger and bigger gay movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the politics of sex was much more radical. So you had promiscuity as a value, not as a deviation, but as a value. Certainly for gay men. For women it was very complicated, trying to figure out a radical practice, even if you had radical ideas. There were no real institutions that helped you play out that practice. For some, that "institution" was S/M [communities that experimented with sadomasochism and bondage and discipline]. For those of us that were not in the S/M community, that "institution" was being in butch-femme relationships or other kinds of sexual minority relationships. We all clustered around each other because we all accepted each other. Within that kind of world of the 70s just before AIDS, [...] the sexual values were more expansive and nonmonogamous and radical.

There were a lot of different configurations of that: many sex workers, many people who crossed over sometimes, working in the bars, and sometimes the bar would close and, you know, you'd hook for a few months and then you'd settle down with somebody for six months. I mean people configured their lives in a way that allowed them economic survival, and if you wanted a radical life, you had to configure a life that was unstructured, because you couldn't go to a nine-to-five job and go to a demonstration during the day. It just didn't configure. So, I mean, I didn't do sex work because I wanted to have nontraditional work hours. I did sex work because I had done it for years. And I didn't have other employment choices that were at all acceptable. I mean they were just miserable. I know the world of sex work can be really rough and not an easy thing to generalize about, but for many of us, sex work was so much more a privileged place of work in relation to the choices that we would have had to make otherwise. The choice between that and the other kinds of jobs I had in dry-cleaning plants, cleaning floors at night in big corporate buildings, picking fruit, or you know, cleaning fish for tuna-canning plants [...]. The job that worked the best for me, when I could make it work well, was sex work or something in the sex trade.

By the time it was the 1980s, I wasn't doing sex work anymore. I was in New York but I was trying to build a life off of having lived that way all through the 1970s. I had been a radical organizer, and that was part of why I continued also to do sex work, because it would allow me to go anywhere and do organizing anywhere. In the AIDS world [of the 1980s], you had to deal with sex work all the time. I mean it really was common, and if you were promiscuous, it was considered to be an informal kind of sex work. And if you were a sex worker you were a particular target of the state—of public health officials, who considered you one of the most dangerous forms of possible transmission for the illness. Completely ridiculous. But we had really serious, long, heated arguments with the Department of Health over whether or not there should be mandatory testing of sex workers. Any street walker for sure was supposed to be tested. So you were just having these kinds of fights.

When I started the Lesbian AIDS Project [at Gay Men's Health Crisis], it had twelve clients. When I left it had 4,000, 2,000 of whom were women in New York who partnered with women who had HIV. At least a third to a half of those women were sex workers, and at least three quarters of them were endlessly incarcerated. You could not divorce that lesbian identity—or trans identity—from sex work, HIV infection, poverty, and incarceration. But those 2,000 lesbians were never visible anywhere in the political markers for lesbian feminism. Never. Their stories were never at the center; they were never invited. It was as if those markers of queer identity and how it's completely intertwined with sex work and difficult choices never existed.

I think there's this whole strain of people who run organizations and formulate policy that's based on normalization. But there's a whole other piece now that, I think, is some of the most extraordinary and vibrant work that's going on, and it's big. It's usually driven not by identity but by issue. Like when QEJ [Queers for Economic Justice] does its class institute at Creating Change [the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's annual conference], it's packed. You have to close the door at 200 people. People are like, "please explain to me what the world is because this fucking movement isn't explaining it to me! Would somebody explain to me how this stuff comes together? Because I feel so weird when I'm sitting in my college campus, my equality organization, my dorm room, whatever, you know, because of my own background or because of what I care about that I can't find anywhere. But I know other queer people must be thinking about it." There's an enormous hunger to create, again, a movement that reflects a much different understanding of difference, and of queerness in that difference, that doesn't want to create a world that's "the same as," and doesn't want to fight for "the same as" as the end result. In that, sex work includes a completely necessary set of voices that cross over and link to other political voices from the left. Those look very different and very, very, extraordinarily, fabulously alive.

Ignacio is a queer trans-entity, black Boricua, lecturer, activist, and community organizer. Ignacio is also a poet and performance artist, mother, sex worker, and sex educator. In this interview, Ignacio reflects on their experience of queer and trans movements since the 1990s, taking up many of the themes that Amber raises, including that of sexual liberation.

**IR:** Okay, where do I start? Maybe I should start with my take on sexual liberation. I've been doing a lot of sexual liberation work around making a connection with how poor people, people of color, trans people, and women—around how our bodies have been regulated by the state, starting with slavery and forced sterilization, to the scare tactics around HIV and STDs and sex work. All of these things where there are policies, laws, regulations, and norms around how people should use their bodies. And when we don't use our bodies in that way, then we're marginalized, we're discriminated against, we're ostracized. I think about all of it in a multilayered kind of way: from trans people being able to alter or modify their bodies and use their bodies the way they want, to queer people having queer sex. When we talk about queer bodies, trans bodies, when we talk about sex work—I'm talking about [these issues in] a sexual liberation context.

Before talking about sex work as sexual liberation, I guess we have to determine the levels or layers of sex work that exist, and these are just a few. You can't talk about being in pornography, escorting, or phone sexing in the same way that you can talk about being on the street, or someone who does video-cam work, or someone who's dancing. I like talking about sex work in the context of sexual liberation because for me, it brings in this unifying way of looking at sexual liberation and the need to decriminalize this work that has existed for so long. I feel like sex work is legitimate work—it's been around forever. There's a need for it, and I think because it is not seen as legitimate work and we don't see the piece around sexual liberation, we create shame and disgust around it. We create very unhealthy, very violent situations for women and men who are in this field. If the shame and the disgust and the blame were eliminated, and if it were seen as legitimate work and as sexual liberation, then we would have more open discussions about having a harm-reduction approach for reducing the risk of HIV and STDs for people who are sex workers. We'd also have less violence against sex workers because right now they're seen as nothing, as dispensable. They get raped or murdered. If a sex worker goes to tell the police she was raped, that's a joke. Because you know, how do you get raped if you get paid for sex? That's how people see it. Like married women—"How are you married and get raped by your husband"?

**SS:** Could you talk a little bit about how your thinking developed around this, maybe a little about your journey that brought you to connecting all of these things?

**IR:** My initial thoughts around sexual liberation began with polyamory and it evolved from there. I started doing a lot of research on different types of relationships, like polyamory, asking people about it, outing myself as a polyamorous person to people so we could have conversations about it. I was doing my own little sociological study asking, for the most part, queer people of color. Through this, through the groups that I tried to access, I got really frustrated really quickly because it was all around white people. There were no, or very few, people of color [...]. The polyamory groups [in New York] would be predominantly white people, predominantly men. And I was like: "This can't be the case! I know there are folks of color out there that are polyamorous." So I started doing my own organizing, trying to find out why queer people of color weren't on this radar and coming to my own conclusions about it. I started a group called Shades of Poly a couple of years ago, which was basically a social group and an education group about polyamory. And even people who were not polyamorous could go there and learn about how to negotiate within your own monogamous relationship. And then I went on to doing more political work with it. An ex-lover of mine and I did a forum called Revolution, and we did this series called Polytics. It was a series of workshops and trainings about why unconventional or non-normal monogamous relationships are important. Why it is a political discussion? Why it is important even to someone who doesn't even identify as polyamorous? And I was doing play parties before this, but then started doing play parties with this ex, and then we did two sexual liberation retreats with queer women and trans people. It was wonderful. That's where it started, just trying to think outside the box. Through that, I started connecting it to a whole lot of other things, because I started to do sex work myself. I guess everybody comes to sex work in a different way; there's no one way to come to sex work. And I started thinking about sex work as well in this sexual liberation way.

I feel very privileged in the sex work that I do because I started off doing prostate massages, and then dancing, and then right now I do pro-dom [professional dominatrix] work as a female, and then I've done some porno as myself as a trans person—as a female-bodied trans person. I feel in that line of work—in terms of being a pro-dom, especially an independent pro-dom—I have choice. If customers ask me for something, I have the power to negotiate with them over the internet via e-mail or on the phone. I can tell them what I will and will not do before I meet them. I like that feeling. And I know a lot of sex workers don't have that option. So I feel privileged in the sense that I could do that.

You know, I feel like sex work's chosen me, in a sense, because I have come from poverty, I was on welfare, I lived in the shelter system, I was homeless for a while. I was a young teenage mom and sex work was always something that was in the back of my mind that I was willing to do, but because I was poor, because I was on welfare, because I was a young mother, I was terrified that my daughter would be taken away from me. So I did everything else but sex work to earn a living. Later on, I put myself through school and earned a degree. But then working within nonprofit organizations really left a nasty taste in my mouth in terms of how these

organizations said they were progressive and radical, but the work that was being done wasn't something that I felt was something that I wanted to put my blood, sweat, and tears into, you know?

**SS:** Because you felt like the priorities were not there? Because the class politics were not there?

**IR:** Yeah, the race politics, the class politics, just a whole bunch of stuff. I was really upset within organizations. It wasn't going anywhere. So I decided I wanted to do organizing on my own, support the few organizations that I considered progressive, and lecture, [...] so I became an independent worker doing consulting, but as any consultant knows, this work comes and goes. So there'd be a couple of months where I was getting consistent gigs, and I'm also a performance artist. But then there would be three or four months where I didn't know how the hell I was going to eat. At the same time I loved the flexibility that I had. I loved that I could stay with my daughter. I had time to be with her. There were a lot of things that it afforded me. But then I had to think about how I could supplement my income, and that's when sex work came into it. And at this point in my life I didn't think about sex work [negatively] the way I did before. My daughter knows I'm a sex worker now. I've talked to her very openly about sex work and letting her know that this is a reality for many people.

I remember one time I saw this program on HBO and I think they were doing a program on the red light district in Amsterdam. And I remember they were interviewing this black young lady who was a dancer there, and she said she had a master's degree, and I remember thinking to myself: "She is so stupid. How can she have a fucking master's degree and be doing this fucking work? Such an idiot!" I look at myself now and I have a master's degree and am a sex worker. Even though I have my master's, I'm able to do certain things with sex work. But it's funny, I also have to acknowledge my privilege in that. If tomorrow I decided I didn't want to do sex work anymore and I'm gonna start looking for a job, then I have that privilege. And I'm happy that I have that privilege; that I could do that.

**SS:** So, ultimately, do you think sex work is something that queer people should be thinking about?

**IR:** Most definitely.

**SS:** Could you say why?

**IR:** I think it's connected to many things. Sex work is a queer issue as much as any other issue is. There are a lot of people who are queer or trans who because of discrimination or because of homophobia or transphobia, do not have support from their families, economically or emotionally. Young people, too, for that matter, end up on the street and a lot of times, for either short periods of time or longer periods of time, have to engage in survival sex work. I think it's a really big issue in the queer community. Not to say that all queer people are sex workers.

**SS:** But a lot of people do sex work as they're coming up.

**IR:** Yeah. So that's one area of it. I think you asked specifically around queer, and then trans people as well. If you're a trans person who wants or needs to physically transition, or get hormones that are safe, sex work is an option; it's something that's a possibility for anyone. No one knows at one point in their life, if they come to a position where they say: "This is what I'm going to do, this is the route I have to take. This is the 'option' or the choice I have to make." Or, "I have no choice. This is what I have to do." No one is immune from that.

**SS:** That's really helpful. I know you've done a lot of community-based organizing as well, and I'm wondering about whether you see all these movements connecting with each other, or where you see them as connecting, or even if you see them as distinct.

**IR:** I think that there are definitely a lot of connections among movements, but I don't think that's something that people are really thinking about. Especially when we are talking about queer, I feel very strongly that the queer movement—whatever the hell that means—is really going on this normative tip. Especially with this fucking gay marriage, you know, it's really going into this area of: "We are just like you, thus we deserve rights." So anything that's outside of that: trans people, sex workers [...].

**SS:** People who don't want to live in couples.

**IR:** Right. It doesn't fit within that analysis so: "We're not gonna have a project to talk about those things because those things don't exist. That underbelly. Those are the other people, not us. We adopt children, we have children." I understand where that started coming from, but it's totally turned into something else. You know, we were trying to talk about it in terms of, "we are many things." But instead of many things it turned into, "we are just like you," very normal people. And I don't want to be seen like that, you know? Because I think it does a disservice to the movement.

### **Felix Gardon**

Felix has been an activist in Latino/a and LGBT communities since the early 1990s. He worked as an organizer with GAIAEI, a LGBT HIV/AIDS prevention organization in Philadelphia, where he developed and was the first coordinator of the Midnight Cowboy, a project that serves male sex workers in the Philadelphia

area. In New York, Felix worked as the outreach coordinator for the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) for a number of years. He now consults with LGBT organizations, the New York City Department of Education (DOE), the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and various organizations throughout the city. He was a founder of Queers for Economic Justice (QEJ).

**FG:** My interest in working with QEJ was to try to address all of those intersections and places where our community usually gets disenfranchised, or actually loses power. Sex work, to me, was one of those places. We needed to create awareness about the many ways that the LGBT community is forced to survive in many different atmospheres without a safety net. Because many times we're put in [bad] positions because we're ostracized from our families, or our communities don't want us. We end up doing any kind of survival work because we might not be ready to use any of the other skills that we have, or we don't know that we have any other skills. There's a lot of shame, too, about this. People have a lot of shame. Many of us come from such sex-negative communities, where sexuality isn't something that you speak about, it's something that you do. I mean I struggle, I think: "Oh my god, I'm going to go talk about my sex work days and, you know, in a book! I'm gonna put it out." It's not something that I think people are always ready to speak about.

When I was in college and my parents decided not to fund my school because I came out, my only resource was to become an escort. So I was a sex worker. I was also working as a maid in a hotel and I was stripping, which is another form of sex work. We usually equate sex work with an act, but there are other kinds of sex work that are not specifically about engaging in a sexual act. So there were many ways that I got involved in this life. I was also one of the creators of the Midnight Cowboy project in Philadelphia [in the early 1990s], which was one of the first projects to work with male sex workers in the streets. There might have been programs doing outreach in the areas where sex workers were, providing condoms to them, but there was not a thrust to help people understand how to work the system, how to organize themselves. Part of what I wanted to do was to figure out how to create some kind of network for protection, because there were a lot of young people who were being beaten up. There are issues of youth and sex work and exploitation. When I came into it, I was in my twenties, still trying to finish college, trying to understand how to survive the United States. I was from Puerto Rico; this is my second country, so I didn't have tons of family here. I had to try to survive in this country, and I think I'm one of the lucky ones. A lot of my friends died from AIDS, or were people who were in the streets who I just don't see anymore when I go to Philadelphia or to some of the places I used to hang.

**SS:** They just didn't survive.

**FG:** They didn't survive [...]. There are other issues, too, because of the way the law system addresses those kinds of crimes, you know, "moral turpitude"—there's a morality attached to the fact that we are sexual beings and there are people who might be willing to pay for sex. And in the United States that's the most horrible thing you can do: to actually think that you're going to pay for sex. But if you do it with an individual, or you do it for a film or something, it's like, a little less. You can buy your books, you can buy all this other stuff—that is still sex work—but in the moment in which you engage another person in sex work, people freak out.

**SS:** Why do you think people freak out?

**FG:** Because I think people are very phobic about sex. People buy into what many religions have put forth about what sexuality is. Like the way that the Bible and many of the systemized religions have put sexuality in the space of reproduction only, as opposed to a place of pleasure. Sexuality is about pleasure, but people don't talk about pleasure. We just have such fear about saying: "Oh my god I had an orgasm," or, "I felt so good after I had sex!" Because people think they are immediately debasing your humanness, that's something you don't talk about. But it's a basic need of humans to be able to have sex, to feel good about your body, and actually feel completed in that way.

**SS:** Can we talk a little bit about the need for a space to talk about sexuality and class together? Because I really see QEJ as a unique space where you talk about economic survival among LGBT people. I think there are a lot of assumptions about people's class in the LGBT movement that feed into the ways we end up talking about sexuality.

**FG:** Well, for example, we never talk in depth about what it is to be somebody who's straddling class, somebody who comes from [the] working class or middle class and starts studying or starts changing, and what does that mean to move to another class? You might have parents in a different background, or have siblings in a different background, and you're growing into a different class status. What does that mean to you when you come back to your family and you're LGBT and they still see you as a second-class citizen because you're LGBT? But in your [socioeconomic] class status you're higher than them. For me, I come from the lower-middle class in Puerto Rico, [a] working class family, and I went to college and did all this stuff. I think there was a bigger issue for my parents that I was gay than that I ever did any sex work. Granted I'm a man—I think it would have been different if it had been one of my sisters, because there are all these gender biases coming from the Latino community around the permissiveness of engaging in sex as a man versus women, where you are seen differently when you are seen to be engaging in sex.

**SS:** Are you out to your parents about having done sex work?

**FG:** They knew that I actually had guys that moved me out and helped me with stuff, but they never would call it sex work. They would call it survival; they would call it, “it’s okay, it’s what a man does.” It’s a double standard, because for a woman it would have been, “well, that’s prostitution.” But for men it’s: “You did what you had to do as a male. So what if you sold your butt to get money for your apartment? That was not sex work.” That was a very big double standard in terms of the male and the female, and how we engage in sexuality, again, because we’re so sex phobic.

With all the fear that people have around this issue, it becomes a big question: How can I come out and say that I’m a sex worker, because I’m going to be even more ostracized within my community? Or again, you might not be believed because you’re a man and it’ll be, “oh, that’s just what boys do,” you know? If you’re a girl you’re a whore. But if you’re a man: “That’s what boys do; boys have sex. The penis is just taught for it.” I heard it from my mother! “That’s what boys do.”

**SS:** Can you talk a little bit about why you decided to talk about this for this book?

**FG:** Well, I think it’s important for us to create a space to start addressing the fact that many people in our community use sex as a survival tool in many ways. There’s nothing wrong with that. We need to find spaces in which we start advocating for less criminalization of sexuality in our community. Because there is no need for people to be criminalized for this. I find it very offensive that many of our trans sisters are actually arrested on a daily basis just for walking the streets, and there is a presumption of [their doing] prostitution. I find that horribly offensive. Certain people can get away with it but other people, because they’re from low-income communities or have different color skin, get immediately put into a system that then debases them and actually destroys their lives. Meanwhile other people can do this who are white, who have money, who can keep it in the up and up, who can have a network and have pimps, and can survive in this and actually make tons of money, and nobody makes a peep about it. You know, there’s a really big hypocrisy happening in this country. It’s okay for the rich to have their prostitutes, or their sex workers, or whoever comes to do their massages, but if you’re somebody from a low-income community, you’re gone.

**SS:** I think male and trans sex workers are visible in a way that other sex workers are not. And yet there’s this irony that we don’t usually talk about sex work in the context of queer and trans communities.

**FG:** Well, I think we have a lot of fear around our community of being penalized because of something that is viewed by mass society as a criminal act. And because there has been so much guilt put on us around AIDS and pandemics, because we’re promiscuous and this and that; it’s hard to bring in that other association around sex work when mainstream society doesn’t understand it. I think the queer community doesn’t want to own that. It’s that fear of saying, “OK, you know, they’ve brought all of this weight onto the community.” We’ve brought AIDS into the community, now we say we’re advocating for sex workers, or we’re going to speak about sex work, they’re again going to ostracize us. You know, the idea of being sex-positive is still seen as what got us into this mess and [the AIDS] pandemic. It’s a shame that AIDS happened, but it’s not because of us trying to be sex-positive that AIDS happened. It’s [one reason] why sex work becomes pathologized, because all of a sudden there’s HIV and all this stuff attached to it. [This perspective] loses the intrinsic reality of survival sex and what it means. It is part of our lives and it is there, but it’s not that we’re trying to get sick—as if we’re going out there like, “oh let’s go out there and get us some syphilis!” [laughs]

**SS:** What would you like to have happen with this issue—in your ideal world?

**FG:** I would like to stop talking about marriage as the most important thing in our community and to talk about sex in our community. [We should] talk about what is sexual health in our community, regardless of whether an individual has sold sex or not, [is in] a monogamous or polyamorous relationship, likes orgies, or is bisexual. Regardless of your identity, how do we create a sexually healthy community? Because it’s important. We need to be speaking about that. If you start having those conversations even with your partners or the people you love, about what it means to be sexually healthy, we can actually create better communities.

## Conclusion

The historical and political issues that these three activists describe, including the need to see race, class, gender, and sexuality as intersecting and constituted by power, are being extended in the bloom of sexuality-based movements for progressive social change. Key spaces for this work are being defined in LGBTQ organizations that are using an intersectional approach in their work and in sex workers’ rights movements. The sex workers rights movement in the United States, which began in the 1970s through organizations like COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), is vibrant and growing. It includes organizations in almost every major city, annual conferences, Listservs, legal interventions, direct action and protests, and a web of activist networks made up of sex workers and their allies. The legacy of queer rights and sexual liberation is evident in the ways in which these organizations define their own priorities and interests. SWANK (Sex Workers Action New York) and SWOP-NYC (Sex Workers Outreach Project – NYC), for example, describe themselves on their Myspace page as, “a group of radical, current and former sex workers who are committed to building community and providing support to sex workers and our allies. We identify as sex-positive, gender-inclusive, radical, queer-positive, kink and BDSM-friendly, critical of capitalism (though not necessarily anti-capitalist). We are opposed to and don’t tolerate any form of oppression, including but not limited to: stigmatization,

stereotyping, homophobia, racism, ageism, sizeism, transphobia, sexism, and patriarchy.” As the broader discourse on sexuality and power continues to engage with questions of state power, marginality, and normativity; the work of these movements will remain critical for pushing the edges of what we conceive, imagine, and practice.

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