

Closing Panel: Imagining Feminist Futures

Speakers: Lola Olufemi (LO); Juno Mac (JM); Hello Rooster (HR); Lydia Caradonna (LC) - Decrim Now; Jade (J); Mimi (M) - STRASS; Chryssy Hunter (CH) - Bent Bars Collective; Chamindra Weerawardhana (CW); Aviah Sarah Day (ASD) - Sister Uncut.

In May 2019 SWARM hosted a three day festival involving panel discussions across a wide range of topics that impact on sex workers, and that connect and intersect with sex worker rights organising and broader struggles for justice.

This recording is from that festival.

00:00:00 JM So hi everybody, welcome to the closing panel, Feminist Futures. Thank you for being here with us all weekend and for nearly filling up the house in the final session, it's really great on a Sunday as well. Before we get going I just wanted to just reiterate again the Safer Spaces Policy which by now I'm sure you've all read a few times, but as we close the whole conference, just to... we want to finish off with a good panel and a good Q and A and to be mindful of the language that we use and the perspectives that we bring to the discussion, and to remember that other people's experiences and various expertise's in talking about their experiences. And also, to remember that we're all capable of receiving criticism without fear of reprisal, but also to not... it's important for us not to feel afraid to share our ideas or ask questions whilst at the same time keeping reflective. That was fairly garbled, but you get me, just like, just don't be dicks. This panel started off a little bit smaller than it currently is and we decided to add a few more people to the mix last minute, to add a few more sex worker voices to the discussion of a feminist future, and we also wanted to maybe broaden out the discussion to reflect on how the weekend's gone. Reflect on some of the ideas that have come up for us all during the conference and yeah, just to together discuss the kind of feminist future that we all are working towards. So I'm going to ask everyone on the panel to introduce themselves and explain or just clarify the kind of organising that they do and where

they're approaching this topic from, and then we'll get to it and at the end we'll do some questions, so you've got between now and then to just double check that those are questions and not statements. [chuckles] Alright, Roo, do you want to kick us off?

00:02:14 HR Hi, I'm Roo or Rooster, I go by they/them pronouns. I'm a performer in porn and also an escort and yeah, I advocate for better working practices for performers in porn.

00:02:35 CH Hi, I'm Chryssy. My research is in, in the law and the interplay between law and culture, and how... how the law protects or fails to protect them as vulnerable people. Especially equality and diversity law. And I'm also involved in the Bent Bars Project, which is a letter-writing project for LGBTQI prisoners, and the Bent Bars Collective which works around prison abolition issues.

00:03:06 LO Hi I'm Lola, I'm a Gender Studies Masters student and I'm doing my research on the role of the feminist imagination and I've done organising inside and outside of universities around protecting survivors. Yeah!

00:03:21 JM I'm Juno, she/her; I'm chairing the panel, but it might be useful to know that I'm a sex worker and activist and I recently wrote a book with Molly called *Revolting Prostitutes*. Please buy it on the way out, because it's being taken out of my royalties cheque, so... [laughs]

00:03:48 LC Hi I'm Lydia, I use she/her. I'm one of the organisers of Decrim Now which is the UK campaign to decriminalise the sex industry, and a SWARM member, and a prostitute if you hadn't guessed—I currently work in a brothel.

00:04:06 J Hi everyone, so my name is Jade and my pronouns are she/her, I am a Black Feminist historian, so I look at the Black women's movement in Britain during the 1960s to 1980s and my work is very much about kind of disrupting dominant narratives of you know, feminist history and centring the experiences and voices of marginalised peoples.

00:04:32 ASD Hi, I'm Aviah, she/her pronouns. I'm from an organisation called Sisters Uncut; we formed to fight cuts to domestic violence services, to try and keep refuges open, things like that. More recently we're focusing much more on the

criminal justice system and taking a prison abolitionist kind of approach to fighting gendered violence and yeah, I'll go into a bit more about this perspective I'm speaking to, from during the questions.

00:05:06 M Hi, I'm Mimi, so I'm a sex worker and trans activist living in France, so I work with a French sex worker trade union, STRASS, and also, I'm working with trans activism at Transgender Europe as a board member. Yeah.

00:05:24 JM Thanks everyone, so I thought I'd just kick it off in a fairly open-ended fashion, and anybody on the panel can feel free to jump in here first, but I'd love to hear about your version of a feminist future, like the values that you hold particularly close, and maybe that will be in light of some of the ideas you've been hearing over the course of the weekend. But yeah, like, just really the feminist future that you're heading towards and maybe you can talk a bit about the feminist history that you're coming from and the journey you've been making in your activism. And if you want you can talk about the feminist future you hope we're not heading towards; whichever one feels like it's floating to the top of your mind most at the moment.

00:06:12 LO I'll go, I think for me thinking about a feminist future, thinking about a liberated future, one of the most important things is that it's not prescriptive, in my imagination it's chaotic and it's a world without violence. And I think for me, like, my feminism really is rooted in the urgency of responding to violence. So thinking about you know, different groups, who wants us dead? That really is a really central question to my understanding of what feminism is, and I also think a, in a feminist future, our relations to each other are completely transformed in ways that we haven't yet begun to imagine. And I think that that's why for me, the imagination is so important and so crucial is that it gives us a political framework, it gives us a way of thinking through the work that we do, and it gives us a way of holding onto the possibility that the work that we do matters. And the possibility that yeah, the world could be transformed in a world where ideas of like capital, racism, all of these things, make it impossible for us to think beyond the structures that oppress us at any given time. So yeah, that's my idea of a feminist future: chaos.

00:07:31 CH Yeah you mention in the introduction talking about where we'd come from, the feminist past, but if I talk about the feminist present just for a minute, and the trouble in the UK—this is very UK-centric—that we're having with trans people

being... being very organised against in the mainstream media, online. And being forced, I think, into positions where we're having to do activism that's not very helpful or comfortable with more radical ideas that we might have about what we would like to do. So, there are kind of competing needs to address the immediacy of what's happening to us here and still holding on to, if it's chaotic, but the future is inclusive or however we frame it. And also not—I think it's absolutely critical that we don't think about this in narrow terms but we think about it in the broadest terms possible, so this is a very narrow attack that's happening but it doesn't mean that we can't see that similar attacks are happening to other groups of people. And we need to absolutely maintain the need to work with other groups of people, to have a broad front of feminists, radical feminist activity, and to work with communities that can begin to cohere around this level of resistance, because we need all the allies we can get right now, I think.

00:09:13 LC Okay, I do not think it's possible to have a feminist future if we are going to still have a capitalist future; I think it's absolutely impossible to have a feminist future that doesn't involve us eating the rich and taking all their money and redistributing it. And I think I fell into the trap, as many of us do when we're like fourteen, fifteen or so, of following a really kind of liberal feminism, where we'd just see, "Oh yeah I shouldn't be oppressed for being a woman! My body my choice!" And all of this narrative that's like not at all nuanced, and I think it was being disadvantaged in life, it was being disabled and not being able to support myself, it was being in the sex industry underage and all of this stuff that like, pushed me towards actually re-examining the privilege that lots of feminism has within it. And realising that it's capitalism that is kind of like pushing all of this dangerous stuff and all of this oppression is like, at the moment, inextricable from capitalism. There's no like, real way around it and I think the big idea that I've enjoyed discussing this weekend is about work and the value of work, and I know we say sex workers work a lot, but I don't think we really think about what it means. I think we're saying, usually, sex work is a job which it is, but I think we need to have a real discussion around the future—I know this was a panel too, *The Future of Work*. And move more towards a world where when we do work, we're doing things that benefit other people and the greater good rather than doing things that make some old white dude richer and calling that work. And I think if we start looking at work as doing what we can for the greater good and not having it pinned to our quality of life, not having to have a certain job in order to have an okay quality of life and not literally starve to death.

Like, the reason I'm in the sex industry: trying not to starve to death. Then, once we separate work from jobs, we can really work on like, making things better in our own communities.

00:11:39 J Speaking specifically to Black feminist approaches to the future, you know, something that Black feminists, activists, scholars and organisers regularly speak about is you know, this big question, what does it mean as a Black feminist to think in the grammar of futurity, you know? So, we're often theorising, thinking through things that don't already exist, just by the nature of our subject position in society. So, you know, it's this politics, forming this politics for this world that you know, it is difficult to imagine because we have never seen it, but we still do that work. So for me that very much is centred within the politics and praxis of abolitionist feminism; so that is you know, the end to imperialist white supremacist, capitalist cis-hetero patriarchy—it's a massive mouthful and I always say that's because you know, what we're contending with and what we're grappling with is so complex, it is so huge. But kind of trying to dismantle those webs in so many different ways is really the work that we're doing. So yeah, for me it is just trying to find ways of constructing transformative justice in the present you know, and doing with that work and contending with the tensions with abolition, you know? Especially with what we've been socialised to believe is justice. So I, I don't think it's easy, I think like Lola said, it is chaotic, but that's what you do to you know, try and live the future in the present.

00:13:24 ASD Yep, so I came to feminism relatively late compared to like, my wider politics. I was reading Marxism when I was a teenager, I was involved in anti-racist struggles, but I didn't see feminism as something that I could be a part of for quite a long time because mainstream feminism tended to exclude quite a lot about me. I, you know, was in foster care as a kid and so the nuclear family and middle-class wives' concerns were not something that was relevant to my life or my family's life. As well as that, the people that for the most part raised me were sex workers and that definitely didn't seem to be something that fit into mainstream feminism and it was quite a long time before I came to understand what intersectional feminism was, and sex worker inclusive feminism, and that there was a whole, you know, side to feminism that could include those sides of me that were important to me. And I guess one of the things that's been really important to me in terms of this conference... I think my phone is ringing, sorry. [chuckles] I'm just going to talk over it and ignore it.

So, yeah, one of the things that's been really important to me in this space is, is the level of pride that people have taken over their work and over their survival and the fact that they've been able to thrive through sex work or other forms of work has been really, really important to me. And it was other kinds of work that I read and engaged with that really helped me to broaden my understanding of politics. You know, when I was fifteen, sixteen, reading Marx helped me to feel really proud and strong in my working class identity. And people like Angela Davis and Assata Shakur helped me to feel really proud and powerful as a black woman, and I really have to say that like, reading the book *Revolting Prostitutes* was the first time that I felt really, really empowered and strong and proud to come from a family of sex workers. I feel like I really have to give that to you because working in the domestic and sexual violence sector and the mainstream feminist sector there's a lot that tells you that that's not okay. Like, I... I literally, sex work has paid for my, you know, me getting to school, my school uniform, my books. Like I have a PhD now. Kids who went to foster care aren't supposed to get PhDs, that's the reason why I have that and the fact that sex worker exclusionary feminism would rather see me the way other kids that went, were in foster care, rather than surviving and thriving. When I look at the future of feminism, like that cannot be part of it. That cannot be part of it at all. So the feminism that I'm really interested in and that is really powerful to me is the kind of feminism that makes me feel like, a, I have a place in it and, b, that I can be powerful and strong. And like, you've done that, amongst so many other people and powerful, strong histories. [Audience applauds]

00:16:39 M Yeah, it's so impressive actually. As a, as a trans sex worker of colour, I understand like, to be accepted by the mainstream, institutional feminism, it's not that easy. You are put apart, you are labelled as, "Oh, you're trans, you're not a real woman, you're a sex worker. You are just trying to fight the historical fight of feminism." You are always stigmatised as if you were nothing in this community, but here for me, I think, feminism for us as a trans sex worker of colour is a way to reclaim our rights, our rights and our experience as a woman, as a sex worker, as a trans people, non-binary, queer or anything that are excluded from this kind of institutional feminism. It's a kind of violence that we are facing every day, and now we reclaim our voice, reclaim our fight. And my feminism, it must be the fight of everyone who is excluded from this kyriarchal 00:17:45 violent, capitalist and racialised society. So our feminism will not mean anything if it's not anti-capitalist, a decolonised world that everyone who [it] operates [on] can be there. So for me it's

like, we need the liberation, but the liberation from our version is not the same one that we heard or read from the white historical feminism of our age. So we need to learn that liberation for us is the kind of thing that came from the power of the people. There would not be a feminist that is better than us, superior than us, that will come and liberate us. It's us, the working class people, sex workers, people of colour, BPOC, and all the people who are excluded who will come there and tell that what we need is that, and all liberation is the fight for equality. And not an inclusion for just a certain population of our society. And today what I have seen is that I'm so happy that many people are trying to support it, and this kind of way we construct the feminism, the real feminism that makes the people involved, the oppressed people involved, and let their voice, their presence to be seen, to be visible in the public. We need always to be powerful. And for me, the feminism that I am constructing with you right now today is a kind of way that try to practice [for] me. It's like a lesson of practice. You are practicing to know how to do your self-defence, how to fight back against this oppression. We are not victims. Although we know that we suffer from a lot of this kind of violence, verbal, non-verbal, ideological violence from the feminism of the mainstream that sort of works with the racism, and also classism and also capitalism, but we are not to fight back. There is a way and a time to say that, you know, we will not lose this battle; this battle is still a long way to go, and if someone who is here feels like oppressed, some kind of inner suffering situation, I just want to tell them that this, now, the relation 00:20:12 to empower ourselves, to unite together, to fight for a real equality, for a better world that all the oppressed people can live together without fear of being ourselves. [Audience applauds]

00:20:38 JM Within the various organising spaces that you on the panel are coming from, I was thinking earlier on the during the porn panel that within so many forms of activism there's the struggles that we're coming up against every day and then there are like the tomorrow conversations that we never quite manage to get to because we're always struggling so hard putting out fires in the here and now. One of those with sex worker activism is for me, thinking about what we might do after decriminalisation. If we could only just get that fundamental expectation of equal rights, then maybe we can start thinking about ways in which sex workers can participate within society in other ways. Inform health care, really fine-tune the way that we want to be in the world, but we just can't get there because people can't even legally put their heads up above the parapet. And before we even get there we have to keep continually explaining what legalisation and decrim even mean, so it's like

sometimes I feel like there's just like, series of obstacles that stop us from really getting to the conversations we'd love to be having. What are some of the like, tomorrow conversations that you are excited to get to that you wish that you could get to a bit quicker? Yep.

00:21:59 LC This mic's going to kill me, oh my God. So at Decrim Now we really have like a two-step goal, so the first step is decrim but once we get past that and before we overthrow capitalism, we are looking at unionising the sex industry. And we've already had some really, really amazing successes. We've been working with United Voices of the World to unionise strip clubs in particular at the moment. But we're trying to figure out a way that we can unionise all forms of sex work, including independent sex workers with websites like Adult Work that have so much control over our jobs and what we do but have like no formal accountability. So yeah, after decrim we're going to unionise and take the power back into the hands of the workers, make it so we are able to assert our boundaries because we don't have like the threats of losing our jobs hanging over us when we speak up about things. We really are looking for sex worker led infrastructure. I don't think after decrim, as a brothel worker I'm not advocating for more brothels that are run by third parties who are like coming in, taking fifty percent of my money and I'm not here for that, I'm here for workers collectives. I'm here for workers providing services by and for the community, I'm here for us being able to make art and talk about our jobs and have our own narratives because it will be safe for us to actually talk.

00:23:42 LO Yeah, just maybe to bounce off of that, I always think in terms of tomorrow conversations what the world would be like if we didn't have to work and how many of us would you know, be artists or have other creative endeavours? Because I think when we think about politics we don't necessarily think about you know responding to the urgency of violence as a creative pursuit? But I think it is and I think like in that new world that we're attempting to build, not only will the way that we you know, interact with each other be transformed but we'll have more space and more time. So like, I think once we get rid of capitalism the way that we think about time, like it'll cease to be linear; we'll start thinking in ways you know that are chaotic, we'll start thinking in circles and in squares and in all of these really you know, exciting ways. So yeah, for me in terms of tomorrow conversations, I'm thinking about like, what does healing look like? What does art look like, what does... you know, what could we do that we can't do now, essentially. And I think sometimes like

everyone has said it's really hard to imagine what those things are, but I think it's an important thing. And I think—we were kind of talking outside about how often you know in activist spaces everybody understands how dire the situation is and how terrible the world is in so many different ways. And there's a way that you kind of just depress yourself with that fact, which is why I think feminism has to be a project of optimism, even if we are cynical in our politics; we have to have, you know, a vision, a horizon to look towards. Yeah, because it keeps us alive. Well, it keeps me alive, definitely.

00:25:29 ASD So yeah, Sisters Uncut has been doing a lot more visioning for the future around the ideas of prison abolition and some of these ideas came out of the panel that I chaired yesterday, and it was really good to hear like, people's ideas about the future and where we're going and yeah. I think one of the questions that came out of the panel yesterday was around people—like, some of the difficulties around whether or not if you get rid of the police are you going to end up with vigilante violence and things like that. And through the conversation like, obviously there are concerns around that kind of thing and whether or not there's... I guess what I took from it was like, there can be good vigilantism and bad vigilantism [chuckles]. And like, you know, invoking things like the Black Panther party, for instance, were a collective of people who came together to defend their community; not just against police violence but also against white supremacist violence from people like the KKK, right? And effectively did that and really built their community. And it wasn't just about, like... the image of it is now like macho guys with big guns, but I think like sixty or seventy percent of the Black Panther party was occupied by women who did all the day to day stuff of feeding the kids, educating the kids, educating the community, doing the self-defence classes, all of that kind of thing. So when I'm thinking about visioning a future and envisaging an abolitionist future without prisons and without police I feel like we do have these examples of where you know, powerfully we have been able to do that with our communities and powerfully we have been able to raise, raise up communities from something that you know, from violence and from trauma into something much stronger. There are examples that have already happened, yes, they have been undermined but they're still a model for us. Yes, they had problems and they had lots of difficult things that hopefully we'll not have as we move into tomorrow, but I still feel like these blueprints are really, really good for us.

00:27:38 CH To talk perhaps a bit more prosaically about abolition, abolitionism, and if we think about the causes of why many, many people end up in prison in the first place, just in terms of social structures, in terms of good education, good healthcare, poverty. And so, there are some very core things we can aim at either improving or abolishing. Let's abolish poverty and improve healthcare, not the other way around, and let's improve education and make it accessible to everyone. These are tangible aims, aims that people can understand and, yeah, I think they should be part of our politics, to aim at that at the same time as talking about a different kind of justice as well. What do we think about justice? How can we...? if we talk about not having police then what do we have in its place? Vigilantes, but what do they...? Even if we have vigilantes, what is their role in terms of community justice? I think we don't have a very clear idea of necessarily how that could be brokered, but we need to definitely be having that conversation and thinking about how we would, as individuals and as groups, could build a movement that supports that.

00:29:02 HR Like on, yeah, the topic of justice and especially when I think about it, yeah, like transformative justice and like, restorative justice and you know, processes of accountability, we have examples of that but it's still something that we're still kind of developing and still learning from. I think in terms of, you know, even when there's stuff like problematic within, you know, some feminist movement, how do we kind of call in each other and try to kind of address those issues? And it's a very hard thing. If we all kind of like take on that labour hopefully it will be something that you know would, yeah would... we'll be working through something really difficult, but it will be something like—the outcome of it would be really good. And yeah, I think, so like a future that kind of acknowledges that and we kind of work towards some sort of like restorative justice and accountability because that is very central to it, I think, is very important. But also, like not stepping over people's maybe ideas, or recognising especially like working-class and like BPOC folk and queer folk and not always just taking on their ideas and being like, "Hey, you know, I'm the person," you know? Just kind of like, leaving them behind? So I think raising their voices and helping them like, taking them onto the podium or the platform as well, and yeah, signal boosting their voices. So that's what I hope, like, imagining a future.

00:31:06 M Yeah, I agree, that's, yeah... to reclaim the spaces we need to talk more about the subject of justice in a material condition or in a material way. I mean, that's... we need to talk more about poverty and also the access to the resources

that is not equal today. And if we do not attack the real problem, the real cause of this kind of problem, especially capitalism, nationalism, that come together to deprive us from the rights and the resources that all of us deserve to have equally. So if we do not attack this kind of issue, the heart of the problem, so we will suffer more and more with the same problem, it will be reproduced; how people, trans people or sex workers are excluded from the working market. Or we are always discriminated [against] for being who we are. And this kind of thing is that, for being in the really just society, we need, yeah, to reclaim this kind of issue to the public and try to make all of us aware about, that the condition that we are in right now, it's not something so great, especially when we are in a nation-state where many people die because of the border. They cross the border, they die, they sacrifice their lives, they sacrifice everything just to have a better life, just to have a better quality of life, and this is a real fight that we need to carry on. We should not abandon it and make our community—LGBT, sex workers, queer people—to acknowledge this problem that we should not abandon some of our friends, sisters, brothers or any kind of people who are left behind right now because of this ideology. And the ideology that we see today, it's not just only something abstract, it's something that affects our lives, it's something that makes us have nothing to eat. It affects us from having a place to sleep, from having someone to sleep with, because we do not share the common institutional and normative ways of life as those people that try to define all the things for us. And it's a way to fight back. It's—right now, us to say to them that you who are the pro-nation states, you who are pro-border, you who are pro-police prison, punitive ideas, you are wrong and it's us right now to say that, yeah, you need to abandon your thinking and reclaim all the things together as a people of the real liberation. [Audience applauds]

00:34:03 J Yeah I'm so glad Aviah mentioned the Black Panthers because as a historian I'm always kind of trying to look back at ways that you know, different kind of marginalised communities, particularly Black feminists, were trying to kind of find ways to ask those tomorrow questions, but as I said, in the present. You know, speaking to the Black British example, you had women forming, you know, community centres for marginalised people throughout London, throughout the kind of UK in general, providing service provision to communities who were very much left or positioned outside the boundaries of the nation, you know? So for me, I'm always looking to see you know, what happens when we centre the conversations within those sorts of... sorry I'm just trying to think through this. What happens when we

take or evince an intersectional approach to all of these big questions? So you know, at the moment we are talking about abortion rights, you know, both in the US and then in Northern Ireland as well and I always think, okay, but who is then, if we only centre abortion rights who is left out of that conversation or who is centred in that conversation? So what happens when we do really you know take the approach of full reproductive justice, who does that include? What happens when we centre women, non-binary people and people generally positioned as non-men, what happens when we kind of centre the everyday experiences of people who are not seen as exceptional within the white gaze? So, these are all of the questions that I'm always kind of trying to ask in the present and seeing you know, what methodologies, what forms of organising, what ideas of abolition come to the fore from that. And I think also within that, you know, what does community accountability look like? What happens when the state isn't a mediator within all of our kind of relationships or when you know, harm happens. So these are the difficult conversations, they're not easy but I think those are the tomorrow questions that we do need to be thinking about because those shape the activism and the work that we're doing in the now.

[Audience applauds]

00:36:21 JM Thank you. When you think about the biggest threats and obstacles that are in your futures as organisers, do you feel like in the next five to ten years those are going to be evolving and changing or do you have a more optimistic view that you'll be able to overcome one or more of those obstacles? Because for me, someone the other day described abolitionist feminism as the hurdle, like they described it as like, the single hurdle to overcome and I had to kind of be like, that is just like a tiny piece of the puzzle. Like for me, if I lie awake in bed at night and think of the hurdle, I'm thinking of climate chaos, I'm thinking of fascist apocalypse, I'm thinking of the way that feminism is increasingly becoming defanged and like a product, like corporate feminist co-optation of our terms. I'm think of the way that carceral feminism is stealing bits of our language and our terminology to be more palatable. I'm not just thinking about Julie Bindel and people picketing outside the conference. So, what are some of... I'm guessing that we share some of those big fears but are there other threats that you think are evolving and that our movements are going to have to adapt to fight in the near future?

00:37:44 LO No, no worries, no worries. I think alongside all of the things that you mentioned, the role of technology for me is something that I think about a lot, and I

think about the need to create kind of digital feminisms or digitally literate feminisms that enable us to kind of pervert and subvert surveillance, and enable us to think, to find methods and ways of organising transnationally. Because I also think that that's something that's really important; like linking up our movements. And I think that we see the failure, we see what happens when we don't link up our movements or we don't think globally: we get you know, Extinction Rebellion. [Audience laughs] We get like... we get you know, movements that are well-intentioned but not very well thought out, or movements that haven't made, that aren't attentive to histories of colonialism and how that's shaped the role of climate disaster and climate chaos. But I also think in trying to avoid it in thinking in the future, disaster thinking, I think it's really important for lots of people to understand in regards to like climate chaos, the idea that the world you know, could end in apocalypse. The world is apocalyptic for people right now, the world... presently, like... I don't know, I find it really interesting how the climate movement or the mainstream climate movement has been able to you know attract a large white middle-class audience, right? Because these people have never been attentive to violence before or they've never really experienced it, or they've never lived through it. And so, I think that realising that we're living through apocalypse always, in some way enables us to not catastrophise about the future. Yeah, we'll be okay, I think. [Audience applauds]

00:39:45 LC The thing that really worries me at the moment I think is like the mental health crisis and like the fact that the NHS is being completely chipped away at and people aren't getting the healthcare that we need. And the reason that I bring it up is because, I don't know if you can tell, I'm fucking exhausted? And I know so many of us are so burnt out, and it's so difficult and upsetting seeing these like really, really bright amazing activists slowly just lose energy and just not be able to continue these fights. And I think the thing that really worries me is that like, fascist movements don't have this kind of issue in the same way, because for them it's like a fun hobby being a Tory? Like, they're like making fun of snowflakes and stuff online and it's a fun hobby and it's a way for them to be edgy and stuff without risking their livelihoods, without risking like, discrimination and all of this stuff. But like, all of the sex worker activists, we're fighting for our lives and it's really exhausting having to constantly justify ourselves and our jobs and like, beg people for a scrap of respect or like, God forbid, like, safe conditions? Stuff like that. And I'm really, really worried about like our energy as a movement when we're all working so hard up against these like fascists who seem to have infinite energy. There doesn't seem to be like a

huge culture of care—and this is not just in sex work activism, this is in most like left activism—there's this culture of working so hard and always working for the cause and just getting burnt out. Like the fact that self-care has now been co-opted by capitalism to sell more things, like fancy bubble bath. I think we all need to like, take care of the people around us and take care of each other as a movement and really like, recognise lots of the labour that goes on behind the scenes. Like, I don't know if you've noticed, this conference is a fuckin' triumph! [Audience applauds] And I've only seen a little bit of the organising of it, I've been like just seeing a few invoices coming in and stuff, I've been off doing other things, but like the tiny bit I've seen, I'm like, wow. I'm bowled over by how much work people, especially Valerie, where's Valerie? [more applause] Especially Valerie is putting in! Stuff like this, it takes so much energy and so much fight and we really need to like take care of each other and make sure that we have the energy to keep fighting this because like, the fascists aren't going to stop.

00:42:50 J Yeah, I think for me, in amongst all of the you know, really big kind of catastrophes so to speak facing us at the moment, I think it's one of the things that Juno mentioned. Corporate feminism, or feminism lite, is probably one of the things that I worry about because you know, co-option is real obviously. It will always happen, we do need to kind of always be renewing the way we think, always be challenging ourselves and obviously having a self-evaluative process at all times. But at the same time you know, speaking to women that were organising in like the seventies and eighties, they're very much of the opinion and I do agree that like in so many more dominant feminist conversations, there's... the structural critique is missing in a lot of ways. And that's not to say obviously—there are so many of us who are then working to kind of have these critical views and always trying to you know, challenge ourselves. But I do think with the rise of this Internet social media feminism, whilst it has been so great in kind of democratising knowledge and you know making these kind of exclusive pots of knowledge, or formally exclusive pots of knowledge, more accessible to so many different people I do think the more kind of radical, more material structural critique is very much flattened out so much within these conversations. I know for me personally—and you know, we all have to start somewhere—but I know for me personally when I first started being interested in feminism, Black feminism, I was very much part of that kind of Tumblr generation, very much invested in like pop feminism and I do think, you know, those are the kinds of symbols that we see now rising to the fore with dominant feminist

conversations. So people that are taking up quite a lot of space you know in different ways and kind of monopolising the conversations, so... and then I do think that allows a kind of complacency sometimes about what is confronting a lot of people. I mean obviously this is along the axes of privilege as well. You know, as Lola said, there are people facing, in the midst of the apocalypse right now who don't have that ability or that access to be complacent. But what I do want to see is us having more kind of difficult conversations that are not all kind of like fairy tales and like you know, choice feminism, and like, every choice you make as a woman is like, radical, because it's not, you know? [chuckles] So I think for me, you know, corporate feminism, feminism lite are things that we really do need to start taking to task a bit more, and yeah, just really start to complicate our understandings of the things that we hold you know, axiomatic, basically, so yeah.

00:45:49 ASD Yeah, following on from that actually, I think for me one of the biggest issues... I definitely call myself an intersectional feminist and I am an intersectional feminist but if there was one problem I often have with our way of interpreting our intersectional movements is the lack of class? And the lack of class analysis and the lack of working-class people we have in our movements and how alone I often feel when I feel like, am I the only one around here man? Like, what's going on? But one of the things that like—I'm going to just keep gassing this conference because it's so sick—but one of the really interesting things I think about sex work organising and sex work unions is that it seems to occupy a very, very unique place in the left? Selma James said earlier that sex workers or sex worker union people or whatever are in this kind of strange situation around trying to demand to be exploited legitimately, which [laughs] which brings like the focus around work and exploitation very sharply to that, rather than other kinds of things where working-class priorities have very much been marginalised. And since the unions have like been completely smashed in this country, since working-class communities have been completely desecrated. And we're at a point now in terms of you know the level of exploitation of working-class people is absolutely phenomenal, we're going back in time to before the labour movements were even started. That's kind of where we're at now, where people on zero-hour contracts is directly linked to the way in which people when they worked on the docks and would turn up and put their hands up for a day's work and get told, "No, no work for you today." That's what zero-hour contracts are! And I guess what I worry about in terms of the threat is like the lack of working-class organising that we are doing as the left. But I do think like, from this conference in

particular, I really do feel like sex worker advocacy groups and sex worker unions do occupy a space on the left at the moment that I feel like is really, really important and could help to bring that work and exploitation focus back, back into the left.

00:48:15 M Yeah, so I'd like to present you some kinds of ways I fight back with, how to invent the technology or some kind of method to fight, again, this kind of violence that we feel right now, or we are living in. So for myself, I did not grow up by learning this kind of consciousness by reading a book, Karl Marx or any kind of the thing that—maybe like inspirational things like Lenin books or kind of intellectual things? I grew up as a real working-class transgender woman, Kit, who was punished, who has been punished all the time by the society, by my parents, by the family and especially the norms of the society. And this inspiration that pushed me out to fight with you today has come from my really personal experience; so I learned that I don't have something to eat because of what I know, that I need to be with the working-class people because I see that I have nothing. My family has nothing, and we need to be together in solidarity, otherwise, we will have nothing, and we will die. So this kind of thing, it should be a kind of like personal inspiration that can push you out, learn from yourself, learn from the past, learn from your own personal... how you say, sometimes people can say—it's like *la blessure* in French. It's like, how do you say... *la blessure*. It's like when you get hurt? It's the wound, it's like the wound history. But yeah, before learning the collective wound history, or the hurt history, maybe you can begin to ask yourself about how you are here. How you are here is because of what? And for me it's something very concrete that pushed me to read Karl Marx after and then become a revolutionary trans crazy person. [Audience laughs and applauds] So before ending this, I have two kits, one kit for you that has two toes. So the first one: be crazy. And the second one: be angry. [laughs] And I hope that this kind of sentiment you have, angeriness and craziness, it will transform our—we can transform it into some kind of action. We can transform it into kind of the panel 00:50:53 today, because we are angry, and we cannot stand anymore. Because of all the injustice we have in our lives, we need to go out, push out our angry, and the more you can make the people angry because of who you are, because of you are fighting for your rights, you are doing the right thing. And don't stop, and continue to make people angry, although they will tell you that you are terrorists, you are liar, rebellion, and tell them, "So what, I'm a proud transgender terrorist and I will fuck your world! Capitalist world." [Audience cheers and applauds]

00:51:44 JM I think that's a great note on which to enter into the question section. [Audience chuckles] And if your questions are a let-down after that then that's on you, step up your question game. [Audience laughs] We're going to take three questions at a time, that allows us to skip over you if you've said something annoying. [Audience laughs] Hands up? Don't let that put you off now, come on! This conference has given you loads to think about, and we want to know which of the stuff has left an impression on your mind, so please put your hands up. Don't be scared. Anyone? Yes, okay, just there, and then there's somebody at the back?

00:52:17 Q1 Hello, first off thank you so much for an amazing panel. So I know that as sex workers we need good allies, we need to make connections, we need to do this both locally and internationally. My question is, how do you deal with allies when they're really bad allies?

00:52:42 JM Yeah, just at the back there.

00:52:45 Q2 Hi, my question is kind of in response to what was said earlier at the beginning of the panel and also in response with the panel before this about surveillance and how as a sex worker, how can you kind of fight for this like feminist future when you're worried about your privacy and surveillance on the internet and stuff? So I guess, yeah... does that make sense?

00:53:20 JM Yeah it does. Also, kudos to put hands up and ask questions after I was just as rude as I was! So, thank you and they're good questions. Is there a third one for now? Yep, just down there in the middle?

00:53:34 Q3 I think it's the same as the first question. Thank you so much to everyone on the panel because you're all amazing. But I think it's the same as the first question, it's: how to be an effective ally? And so, after this conference, it's been an amazing two days, what should I go on and do to support sex workers without speaking over them? Because I feel like I... I work with quite a few and I don't want to ever speak over them but a lot of them can't articulate a lot of things properly, so what can we do moving forward? So same as the first.

00:54:10 JM I knew that you'd have something to say.

00:54:13 LC I have something to say on the first question about bad allies, and it is that clients are not and never will be our allies. [Audience applauds] And full offense if you are here as a client, fuck off. [Audience applauds] I, I have a real, real problem with how much airtime... not airtime, oxygen I guess, gets given to discussing how clients can assuage their guilt by being an ally to us. Like... at the end of the day like, we're here because the capitalist bullshit we live with has meant that we are in the sex industry and clients are not oppressed by paying us for sex. Like, it's just, ugh. And I really, really hate how the conversation is always brought back to clients at any kind of discussion about sex work; really, clients are such a small part of what we do a, a lot of our lives is about hiding from other forms of oppression. Hiding from the police, trying to get actual access to like housing and healthcare. And yeah, so with bad allies, with clients, I think we just need to get better at telling them to piss off.

00:55:39 JM Also on that, it kind of makes me think about the class consciousness that I feel can sometimes still be sorely lacking within sex worker spaces, because whenever I see clients allowed to get anywhere with their attempts at joining in with activism what I see there is... I feel like that's a symptom of there being... it's a misunderstanding of the sex worker struggle as being one of identity and one of a sort of stigma in a traditional—as in like a stigmata that you carry because you've had transgressive sex. When something that me and Molly have tried very hard to make clear in the book is that sex work is primarily something you do for very good and political reasons that need to not be buried underneath a false sense that you just woke up one day and you were a whore. And that's not to say that whoreishness and the label of being a slut or a bad woman isn't deeply an identity struggle that a lot of people read as women will face, and that's important. But that is... that doesn't carry over to clients because they've rolled around with us and only a movement that isn't foregrounded in the conditions of the worker could possibly get confused enough to include clients in our organising. Like, for all intents and purposes, clients are bosses; they are our bosses, we work for them, our interests cannot align because they want our labour, as much of our labour for their money as possible, and we want as much of their money as possible for our labour! There's no way our interests can coalesce, and clients obviously don't have any class consciousness at all because frankly they've got the money to spend on, on sex. And I just feel like I know I've made that point; this isn't the only panel I've made that point on, but it bears repeating so thank you for listening to me say it again! Does anyone have anything else on some of those questions?

00:57:42 LO I was just going to say, I think that in terms of allyship, or—I don't really like the term. Just like, standing in solidarity with people especially if you're not from that group. I've found that something that's really important is political education. So like doing the work of—especially now because... and obviously this is connected to sex worker activism and advocacy—we're having this culture war around like, transmisogyny, transphobia. We're having... we're basically in the middle of a turf war essentially. Where you know, fascists are organising, but white women are trying to draw a circle around womanhood and say that some people can't come in, which to me is so stressful. And I think in standing in solidarity with people, what I've found helpful is taking on those people and trying where I can to make critical and useful interventions when I see people veering towards transphobic feminism, when I see them veering towards sex worker exclusionary feminism, or corporate feminism or whatever. Because I think galvanising and mobilising other people by being able to make those interventions is really important and using your voice strategically, I think, as an ally, as somebody who wants to stand in solidarity with someone else, is also really important. Because often obviously people from those groups don't want to do that because they shouldn't have to, but also, it's like, it takes away from the labour that they have to put in in other places essentially.

00:59:24 CH But also... sorry.

00:59:25 JM No no, you go.

00:59:25 CH Also I think to be an ally you need to understand what the person you want to ally to understands about themselves. So it can't be your idea of what for example a trans person is on which you're basing your allyship, it's what the trans or non-binary person themselves understand by being this, or the culture within trans constituencies has a need for. That should be the basis for the allyship, not the kind of mainstream idea of, "This is what trans is, this is what I support," which can be more difficult, which can be more challenging. But it's—without that kind of work being put into being an ally I think it's a meaningless conversation.

01:00:16 HR I was going to add like, maybe also being like an accomplice? So instead of just being an ally as in like passive, like actually you know—just adding to what you said—actively you know putting in the work and labour. And yeah, we need

as many kinds of active allies as possible. And you know, that work so much in interpersonal relationships and not just always out, you know, like protesting. It just always falls down into you know, your own personal relationships and households and stuff like that. And it's hard to call in or call out your parent or your boss or whatever; those things are hard—or colleagues and stuff. But I think that's where the meat of it is, and then expanding. And also, about like... people who can't articulate, their kind of... I think the question was not being able to articulate well? I think just letting them articulate in whatever way that they can and then signal boosting what they've already said, because then you know, I think what we run into is not just, not respectability but academia kind of, you know, intellectualism. Or we run the risk of running it into, so like you're not able to intellectualise this in a certain way so therefore I might speak over you or I might... yeah, yeah, speak over you and just, you know, take it as my own.

01:02:31 M For the question about the people who could not like articulate our ideas or probably some kind of like... they have the difficulty to communicate their problems, I have the advice like, yeah, you need inspiration. So, it's like me as a migrant person, I find that it's difficult. Many people from our community who are migrant sex workers in France, they have a lot of passion inside themselves, but they don't know how to, how to tell that to their friends. They begin from nothing, like me: I don't know how to speak English, it's not my language, and the thing that made me feel that I need to learn it is because that... I cannot like, stay like that, I cannot just like, let it be. I cannot let those kinds of oppressing people step on our heads, step on our lives, and seeing my friends dying because of the repressive things. So the kind of thing... this experience teaches me to know that I need to do something. It's like, "You need to learn French," "You need to learn German," any kind of language to decolonise it from inside. Some people—yeah, you don't want to destroy it and you need to know how it works, how it functions, and yeah, if you want to give advice to someone who doesn't know to express themselves, maybe ask them about what they like. Some people may like to see movies, some people may like to fuck, to do whatever it is they want, to draw. So let them do what they want and put your perspective into it. You can express it into various ways, like with art, or people who don't get access to art, maybe they can do other things, sport; any kinds of the things that should not be limited. Your life is too, already, limited for the whole life, you should not limit or restrict yourself. Just let yourself... let yourself be yourself, not let the system be itself. And do what you think you are able to do, and if you find that

those people are still getting lost, maybe it takes time. You cannot judge someone, because this person is wild. It's wonderful. She finds what she likes since she was so young and it's great. You should not judge yourself or let people judge yourselves in comparing, by comparing to the others, because each person has their own specificity and we should assume this as a diversity that each person should not be put in the same, how you say, the basket.

01:05:18 JM Thank you, anything else from the panel?

01:05:23 J I think also part of the politics of standing in solidarity with other marginalised groups, with trans people, with sex workers, is also knowing like, just when to shut the fuck up? Like... [giggles] I think, you know, the politics of allyship really do, because of the way they're configured, end up centring those who are more privileged structurally. So I think, you know, when I was reading your book *Juno*, you know, both you and Molly were talking about the fact that sex workers are spoken about so much by people who are not sex workers or people who have exited the sex trade. And it means that sex workers' voices, narratives, experiences, analyses are not centred within these... when we speak about sex work. So I think just knowing when your voice is needed and then just knowing that actually, I'm going to direct whoever it is to these resources because people can talk about their own experiences themselves. People have voices, you know? So I think I do struggle with this idea of people being voiceless or not able to articulate it; people are articulating their experiences at all times, it's on us to listen and prioritise those voices. [Audience applauds]

01:06:44 LC Allyship—it's me again—just a really quick thing actually is I feel like lots of times people forget about really practical allyship? And like, we worry a lot about talking over people in the movement, you can be an ally without talking at all. Like firstly, give us money. [SWARMcollective.org/donate](https://swarmcollective.org/donate). No please, give us money. But also like, if you have skills, if you happen to be a trained accountant or whatever, offer it to organisations. Offer language lessons and stuff. All sorts of practical skills, and then like, so many events and stuff just need people to do really random stuff like leafleting or like, doing clean-up stuff. Some of the best allyship I've ever seen is Women's Strike have a group of allies who make food and provide childcare for all of the meetings and it's really, really great, and it's amazing allyship and it doesn't require people leading or talking over us at all.

01:07:59 JM Any other questions from the audience?

01:08:06 Q4 Hi, so I've noticed a little bit through the conference that at some points there's a kind of exhaustion running through the panels in that it can be hard to vision past just trying to access resources. And that a lot of people, when we're trying to be like, "Okay, where's the strategy, where do we go?" it kind of gets to well, we'd really like this small thing, and maybe if we had that we could go to the next. And in trauma informed approaches to healing we often come from a position of healing trauma through discovering joy or rediscovering joy. And so I was wondering, and I know you're all tired so it might be hard, I was wondering what gives you joy within feminist moments? I don't want to say spark joy, but [Audience laughs]... and you know, it could be a small thing or a large thing, but to me that feels like that can be a pathway to imagining a feminist future and imagining what gives us joy now and where that can lead us.

01:09:07 JM I really like that question and you phrased it better than I did, because when I—sometimes when I'm on panels I'll ask people what their tomorrow conversations are, which is what I did on this one, and that's actually what I'm usually getting at. Like, what would you do once some of the more difficult stuff is off the table, but with that question, and I'm not criticising the panel, but people usually still describe struggles and very rarely talk about the green pastures that maybe await us once we've you know, maybe gotten to... so thanks for rewording it is what I'm saying, and now I'll let the panel answer if anyone has joy What sparks your joy?

01:09:46 ASD I would say that through grassroots organising, the times when I feel a lot of joy... it's often when we do win those victories like on our demands, but I'd also say the much deeper level of joy that I get is when we've genuinely been able to foster solidarity within our groups and communities. And seeing examples of that and the transformative possibilities of that has really given me a lot of joy. I'll give you like examples, like Sisters has done a lot of reclamations, occupations over the last few years. I'm a part of East End Sisters, we took over a council flat in Hackney to demonstrate the fact that there were like one thousand empty council properties in the borough at that time. Took it over, turned it into a centre for like the community and obviously that means you know, when you open, the doors, lots of different kinds of people come and want to be part of that space, want to organise, want to be...

want to do stuff. And it, a lot of things got confronted. A lot of people coming from very different perspectives who... you know, it could be quite difficult. We had a niqabi wearing sister in the same space as a trans Muslim sister who you know, ostensibly... at the beginning it felt like you know, is this going to be a real serious problem? But actually, through organising—and this is just one example of many, many examples over the like, weeks and weeks that we were there—through organising around our demands and demands of the residents on the estate and the different people that were coming and what their needs were, and being able to create a space where we could meet our needs, by the end of that occupation it had been a generally transformative situation. So when you offer solidarity to people who you're not meant to be offering solidarity to, that you're not meant to be giving a hand to, that you're not meant to be helping out, often it really does change people's minds. It changes people's positions, their world view and you know, you're no longer in a position to be like, "I'm not in solidarity with you because you come from this background and that's too different from me," or whatever. Once that person has been on the barricades with you and has supported you and you've supported them, and you've broken bread together and you've also won things together, you've won demands together, it does have a transformative effect. And even though that isn't exactly about you know, okay, so we've made this organisation, we've got some demands and we've won these demands, this is quite internal in a lot of ways. But it, the joy is so much deeper for me than even the stuff that on paper is our demands that we've won, genuinely.

01:12:39 M Sorry. So my joy, it begins with myself actually. I mean it's like, as being a sex worker, I know how to learn the joy by myself first; it's like, learn to know your pleasure, how to make yourself pleasure, and learn that the other people may have another kind of way to get the pleasure. It's kind of like being a sex worker for me and being feminist at the same time. It's like the way to learn from yourself and transform it into collectivity. It's, I mean that your personal pleasure is a kind of way to open the diversity of the different things to the world and learn and accept it. It's a kind of like a technologist's 01:13:07 work. It's not just about yourself but before you are going to understand other people, you need to understand yourself more. And for me, it's like my idea of feminist things 01:13:21 is like anarchist society. For me I think that anarchist society is not about yourself, it's not just about individuals but it's about how to link, how to make a kind of like... how you say, it's like the main point of the bridge between your pleasure and the society. How can you make other people

be happy in their own way without colonizing them, without making them have the same pleasure as you? You respect your pleasure, you respect your job, your body, you can do whatever with your body and accept the others. And it's the kind of joy that I see, that I see myself and the others smiling together. Or if someone can be happy without smiling, that's also a great thing, and yeah, we need to respect that maybe some people may love to cry, may want to kill themselves; it's their right. For me, it's like euthanasia or some kind of... so we have to respect it, and it's the greatest joy. It's like song of Whitney Houston, learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all, and then transform it into the collectivity, yeah. [Audience applauds, laughs]

[Pause, mic cuts out?]

01:15:00 J I think for me, what gives me joy is a couple of things. I think as an academic, watching that process of someone becoming politicised and then seeing obviously the kind of different—what it leads to, the different actions, the different thoughts that it leads to, I think it's just so exciting to see people kind of come into consciousness in specific ways. So I really love that. And I think also, when you are marginalised in different ways in that you've got this kind of dominant script or kind of dominant framework for which you know, society's positioning you within, white supremacy is structurally positioning you within, then those cultures of care and love that are cultivated between like marginalised peoples. You know, it just reminds me that whilst we've got this kind of dominant script, it's not the only way we know ourselves or we're known to each other either, so that's what I love. Seeing how we hold space for each other, create space for each other's humanity when that's not recognised within society and how we then try and transform how we relate to each other. So I just love seeing alternative methods of care that don't look like mainstream norms or codes of care, so yeah.

01:16:29 LC I have a really, really simple one; the thing that brings me joy is the community of sex workers we've built. Like it's such an affirming experience coming into a place that's majority whore. And there's something like, just so life-affirming about meeting sex workers that I hadn't known before, and I think what's so beautiful about our community is that we would do anything for another sex worker. Like, complete strangers, we will offer up our houses, we will offer them money if they need help and being able to see so many old friends here and so many new friends

and people I've only spoken to on Twitter and stuff. Having names to faces and just like, realising that we all do exist and we're all really badass and it makes me feel so hopeful because I know with people like us in this movement there's no way it can really fail. [Audience applauds]

01:17:47 LO I really love this question and what Jade said made me think about this quote by Saidiya Hartman where she says, "Love is contraband in hell." And I think for me, it's my friends. It's my... the people around me that bring me the most joy, especially because when I was growing up, living a queer feminist life was kind of an impossibility, and being surrounded by other queer feminists, other queer Black feminists and having them in my life has showed me that we can live through those impossibilities. So just like yeah, having a gang and a team of people who support, care and love one another and who, for me, who I learn from every single day. That's what sparks the most joy for me. And also intergenerational conversations, when I get to be around older activists who have been working and having the same kind of struggles and issues as me it just, again, affirms it for me. And women standing in solidarity with one another just like, makes me cry. You can just show any video of women standing together and doing something and I'll start crying. [Audience laughs] So yeah, that's mine.

01:19:02 CH I've got not much to add, but I think that's, I think so as well. Communities of acceptance and communities of mutual acceptance, communities of mutual self-help and support and communities where we can have conversations which build on that and develop that. And quite straightforwardly, that's what brings me joy.

01:19:25 HR Yeah, I think I don't have anything more to add, I think it's been said. Yeah, definitely, the space that's been created over the last few days and just seeing how... yeah, how all of us have put so much energy into this and it's been really, really like... well, I've been blown away, so thanks.

01:19:51 JM That seems like a good note to end on and I hope that everybody feels walking out of here like they have that joyful centre refocused for them in their vision so that we can all move on and get to these feminist futures. Before we go, it would completely remiss of us to close the conference without paying a small tribute to some of the people who've made the conference possible. I think it's obvious to

anyone who even glanced at the programme how much work went into the last couple of days. For a small organisation like SWARM to create anything that's got multiple days, multiple strands, start and finish times, is pretty incredible. And it wasn't just achieved but it was completely pulled off and then some, and that's what sex workers do, pull it off and then some. And I just wanted to...

[End of recording]

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