

## Sex Workers Of Colour: Roundtable

**Speakers:** Amina (CH); Amber (A) - SWARM; Roo (R); Mimi (M).

*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.*

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00:00:00 CH This panel is going to be a roundtable discussion about migrants—not migrants, sorry, that was my last panel—about non-white sex workers, or sex works of colour, particularly in the UK. Did everybody want to start off by introducing yourself? Your name, your pronouns and a little bit about your work or any activism that you do?

00:00:22 A Hello, I kind of feel like I don't need a microphone, but I use it because it's quite cute. my name is Amber. My pronouns are she and her. I am a full-service sex worker. I have been a sex worker for over ten years now in various areas of the industry: full-service sex work, brothel work, strip club work, just all the hustling. I wouldn't call myself an activist. I'm far too flaky and commitment-phobe to be an actual activist but I like to pop up and give people my opinions every now and again, via SWARM. And they're always really welcoming, which is amazing. So, yes, thank you for having me and hopefully won't bore you too much!

00:01:02 CH Hi everyone, my name is Amina. I'm also a full-service sex worker. I've done sex work in a multitude of ways. Whether it be brothel work, independent free styling, BDSM, clubs, things like that. Predominantly my sex work experience has been in Japan, that's where I started, where I was teenager and I lived there. Live in the UK now—I'm American if you haven't noticed—but I live in the UK now so, work here. And yeah, any activism, I guess I'm kind of just starting it, but I'm primarily interested in the experiences of black youth and black youth culture, and black sex workers and they intersect with migrant sex workers.

00:01:55 R Hi. I'm Roo, or Rooster. I mostly—or my pronouns are they/them. I mostly work in porn as a performer but also as a film maker. I also do some escorting work. In terms of activism I think I'm... yeah, because of—

00:02:23 ?? [off mic] There's been a crisis. I'm sorry.

00:02:26 ?? [off mic] What happened is we ran out of food so everyone had to try and source some food.

00:02:30 ?? [off mic] I'm a wee bit loud, I'm sorry.

00:02:32 R [off mic] We're just doing the intro. [on mic] In terms of activism I think I'm trying to advocate for better... better working conditions and safety for performers in porn.

00:02:52 M Hi everyone, I'm Mimi. I'm from—I'm Thai. And I am now living in Paris. So, I work as a sex worker in Paris at the same time I study. And that you know in this neoliberal society they force us to work and any kind of the social help towards my grants people  
00:03:15, it's not enough. And that's why we need that and for me, I'm—I do sex work. I also work with a trans organisation in Paris. Because like trans—I am also a transgender woman. So, work with transgender, my grant, and with HIV positive transgender people in Paris. Yeah. [Audience whoops, applauds]

00:03:44 CH Okay, so now we're going to do a few questions and then at the end we'll have time for questions—sorry. Now we're going to do a few topics and then at the end we'll have time for questions if anybody has any comments, things like that. So, the first question is, how has being a non-white sex worker impacted the way that you work, whether it be marking, rates, criminalisation, advertising, anything? How has it impacted the way that you work, in the UK or wherever you work?

00:04:20 A More than happy to start. I have no intro—inhibitions, even. Being a non-white sex worker—being a black sex worker—I kind of don't like the phrases, "People of colour" and "non-white" too much, because everyone's struggles are very different in this industry. And I often find white people do it when they're trying to be really politically correct,

they'll be like, "People of colour!" And I'm like, "Say 'black,' you mean, 'black'," Or say, whatever. For me, being black, literally impacts everything I do in every walks of life and I don't mean to do that in like 'the race card' kind of way but it's the truth. Being a black sex worker, just makes it bloody difficult, you know? You're perceived worth in this industry is lower. You know? You—very much like in other areas of life - you have to do more, give more, and be more, just to be level with your white counterparts, you know? There's also this idea - it kind of like intersects with like Class—being black, you know? Clients are like, "Oh, well you're not very ghetto!" You know, they assume certain things about you, you know? For me, you know, I'm quite a curvy woman and I have a certain style so they're always like, "Oh, you speak quite well!" It's really patronising! Throughout every sort of aspect of working—you know when I worked for agencies, I was always told I cannot charge as much as my white counterparts, you know. But in a very matter of fact way, in an, "Amber, no one's going to pay the same for you as they would pay for her, don't be stupid!" And, thankfully for me, it really put a fire in my belly, up my arse? I can't remember the phrase! [Audience laughs] It put a fire in me to go out and be like, "Actually, I'm going to do this myself because you're wrong and you're a fool." But yeah, it's been really hard. And in some ways, I'm not going to lie I do think there are some benefits. I work a lot abroad. I've calmed down now as I have a dog, but I've spent a lot of time travelling the world, and in various markets actually being black, for me, was good. It was a selling point. It made me stand out from the crowd. I was different. But then again, that's where it crosses with the like, fetish. You know, you're 'exotic.' I'm not exotic, I'm from South London! You know, that's not exotic! But you know, and that's when they men would be like, "Oh!" you know, "She's so brown! She's so different!" But I've managed to use that to my advantage in some ways, so that's not too bad. But yeah, even now I consider myself to be—I think I've passed the peak of like the best I've done in sex work. I'm kind of going like this now. But even when I hit there, I definitely did feel like everybody else could outperform me just because of Whiteness. Like if you're a plain white person, with not that much to offer, you're still in the same level as someone of colour who has a lot to offer, in my opinion.

00:07:01 CH [off mic] Does anyone else have an experience to add?

00:07:02 R I think, yeah mainly, having to—it's kind of intersects in terms of, I think, in terms of being like non-binary, and then also being like queer. I think a lot of maybe clients see you as... either just like a kind of cuckold kind of thing or maybe not like, not really bi,

and stuff like that. So it's very like an interesting kind of, you have to kind of navigate, these situations like in a really... I don't—I wouldn't say, 'lie to yourself' but it's, you know, constantly being up against something and kind of having to reaffirm yourself and your identity. And... yeah, and when it maybe comes to porn, there's maybe not like a lot of roles offered to, uhm... yeah, people of colour, as it's still you know, very much in a kind of fetishization kind of way, or exotification, or very much tokenistic. I think even though like a lot of the work that I've done in porn is like in feminist porn or ethical porn, I still feel it's like... tokenisation, or like, "We need to kind of hit our diversity quota." You know or, "We need to—here's all these like cookies for you, getting this token brown person."

00:08:39 A Yeah, just to touch on kind of being a token, very much so. I've worked in brothels, worked a lot in Switzerland, and in these brothels, you'd have say thirty workers, but at any one given time you're allowed one black worker. So, I'd kind of question it. I turned up for a shift one day and there was another black worker. I'm five foot five, brown, you know, a size twelve to fourteen. And this worker was like five eleven, looked like Lupita, the most stunning woman I've ever seen. And I'm like okay, apart from the fact we're both women of colour, what do we have in common? You know, she has short cropped hair, I have long hair. She's got small boobs, I've got—whereas you've got ten blonde women who kind of look like Britney, you know, I don't, you know? So, you very much are a token issue. So if a guy turns up and is like, "I like black women!" It's just like, "Well there you go! You've got one!" And it's so frustrating. You know? Like even for us two, we are so different, we are both black women but we're two completely different people. And it's really frustrating to just be pigeonholed as your race. It's like they remove every other qualifying feature about your personality, or your being, and just make you black. But at the same time, you have to forget your black because that's not a hard thing, relax!

00:09:52 CH One thing I feel like also for marketing specifically is ugh... so for black workers, I think specifically—I'm not sure how it is for Asian workers, but I know for black workers I feel like I have to play up my class. Like I have to really be like the most bougie, like, you know, "I suck dick with a pinkie in the air"-type person, you know, something like that? Just to like to offset these stereotypes that people have about you know... black women in general, and black sex workers. I don't know it just really can get to you like as a person. Like, I've kind of just put away like the morality bit of it because you know, at the end of the day I'm there to make money, I'm not there to you know... I don't know. But it's just

really, it really just makes you feel like... I don't know, it just exists with all jobs, really. Like, I've been working jobs since I was like fourteen. Obviously not sex work, but like other jobs until I was fourteen and like I've dealt with like racism in numerous other jobs but it just feels like for sex workers, like it just seems like the industry is okay to kind of be—well, it is okay to be racist, you know like the marketing, everything behind it. I don't know, to be a black worker, I feel like, I kind of—like how Amber was saying—can't charge the same as other people charge, and I don't know, it just kind of really gets to you.

00:11:31 M I would like to talk about fetish—how do you say, fetishiz—feti?

00:11:36 A [off mic] No one can say that word. [laughs]

00:11:38 M Yeah, yeah, that word. The fact that they try to fetishize?

00:11:41 A Yeah.

00:11:41 M Right? Fetishize. Fetish—Fetishization. The fetish [laughs] fetish! [Audience laughs]

00:11:50 A [off mic] They're fetishized.

00:11:51 M [Laughs]. Yeah, yeah, fetishization of our identity. As a sex worker I'm, yeah, I'm—I suffer from this kind of fetishization and also as a trans woman also because yeah, they saw me as a racialised girl and trans woman in the same time. It feels like yeah, you have to be like the result of two kind of oppression that they need to push it into my body. I want to mean, what I want to mean is that yeah, what we feel as a sex worker is something more really intense than what people in general, in the society, face. Yeah, I mean that, actually. The fetishization of our identity exists in every domain. I mean that it isn't just sex work. It's like when you go to the, to the job interview, people ask me, "Ah, you are Asian! You look beautiful! Can you stand up?" In order to give my, my interview properly they will ask me like to turn around, "Oh I like your body! Do you love my size?" Something like that. Even the police reproduce the same kind of stereotype of the sexualisation and racialisation of my identity and it's kind of fucking bullshit. Sorry. [laughs]. Yeah, it is true. And the thing is that when we are sex workers, it's like we face a kind of this stereotype every day. It's like,

“Oh, I come to you because I know that you are Asian, and you are my type of girl.” And a kind—

00:13:33 A [off mic] It's almost like the assumptions?

00:13:35 M Yeah, some may say, “You must be like a slave, a good slave for me,” some kind of, these kind of comments all the time. I didn't mean that every client is very bad, like that, but most of them, many of them that came to be our clients, they had a fetishism about my Asian identity. And as a trans also, “Oh, you are exotic, as Asian, and you also have a dick! You are a woman with a dick!” And people try to think that wow, it's something, wow. I didn't fight some of their errors 00:14:09, but when they try to fetishize our identity as something like their passion, their ‘wow’, as something they would love to possess, but in reality, in the society they never defend our rights. This is something that seem to be hypocritical. They love us but they never defend our rights. Just want us to be slaves but don't want us to have the same rights as them. They come to fuck us, but they don't want to defend the decriminalisation. That's strange.

00:14:43 A it's like one of the things I love saying to clients who are like, “I love black women! black women are this!” I'm like, “Oh so your wife's black then?” And they're like, “I mean, no.” It's that whole thing of like, behind closed doors [microphone interference 00:14:54]. [off mic] Yeah, it's like, “Behind closed doors I can let it out, like I love black women, black women are this!” But you wouldn't be seen dead with one actually on the street. Sometimes I question them and they're like, “Well, it's not the same thing. It's not. You know, real life is a bit different.” And it's like ah, and it's that shame! You know? [laughter] Would you, would you—do you have any trans friends? Do you have anything— but no. [Audience laughs]

00:15:19 R Yeah, what you were speaking on, even on how you have to like to play up. I think there's certain stereotypes that you have to play up. Like you have to kind of be able to take more or give more. And it's just like... yeah, it's like, honestly, I'm not really like that. And it's just, having to play into this kind of role that is based on a stereotype. And I find that a lot—very, yeah, something very difficult to kind of like engage with. And also like, even when you're, yeah, even when you're like the victim of some sort of violence of whatever, like I think being black or whatever you're... yeah, like you're not... hurt as much? Like

you're not seen as like visibly—yeah like you can kind of take more and you have more endurance and you have no like—yeah, to, like, violence, you have like, yeah, higher tolerance to violence.

00:16:26 CH I think that also intersects with like, the criminalisation of sex work and some places where the stigma to it. So, I don't know how it would be if I were a white sex worker but just as a black woman in general I don't know I would ever go to the police about anything. But just added the fact that I am a sex worker, I think that makes me feel even more vulnerable to the way that black women are perceived. and then sex workers are perceived. It's kind of this intersection. And then also I feel that like with clients and stuff like that like, I've seen a lot of people talk about reviews in the sense that, "Oh if you're a good provider like, you don't have to worry about reviews!" And all this type of thing. But I feel like as a black pro—sex worker I start off like with this whole review culture. Like, it's toxic in general, but I feel like for black workers, we start off like already negative then we're kind of like, building up the point whereas like, a skinny, cis—you know?—blonde, white woman is already going to start off at a ten and basically they're just like knocking it down from there. And it just really feels unfair because you see people talk about like wage gap; they don't talk about the wage gap like within sex work, you know? Nobody wants to address it. this kind of leads into the next question I wanted to ask. So, how can we address racism within the sex industry? I know that, we're probably asked this a lot, like black people, brown people, you know, people who aren't white, I guess. We're asked this a lot: "Oh! What can we do to teach people about racism?" And it's kind of gets old but, I just kind of wanted to have some discourse on what we can address: sex—or racism within the, you know, sex work. Whether it's clients but also amongst activism circles and fellow sex workers.

00:18:21 A Do you—do you mean what we can do as black workers or what white people should do?

00:18:27 CH [off mic] Like... what...

00:18:27 A 'Cause I—there's nothing I feel like I should be doing. I feel like it's on others.

00:18:29 CH [off mic] I mean like, how to be good ally, and just about activism in general.

00:18:33 A Okay, so essentially, what do we need from others to try and make this better?

00:18:35 CH [off mic] Yeah, that's it.

00:18:37 A Got it. Sorry, I was like, "There's nothing I should be doing! It's all on other people!" I think firstly like recognising that there's a difference between uplifting voices of people of colour and speaking over them. Like, that's a big thing. Also not patronising people! Never presume people's experiences. You know, even as black women, our experiences will still be different. You know, they might have similarities, but they will be different. You know, like I—anecdote: there's this thing on the internet recently where people are like, "I really want to stand with people of colour! So, I'm offering all black clients ten percent discount!" And I'm like, "What?! You're doing what?! You're giving men off money?! What?! No!" It's bullshit! Take that ten percent and donate it to sex workers of colour or something! I think, yeah, as with most things, I would say the number one thing is listening. Just shutting up, not taking up space, and listening. But you know, I think that's quite an overall thing. I think, you know, as sex workers, you know [laughs]... I find sex workers, like many other people, are very good at tokenising. So, you know, you'll be a circle and they'll have their one black friend so that they can put them in the group photos so they're not racist. And it's like, look around you. If you're surrounded by white people, why is that? You know, unless you live in a place where there only are only white people, why is that? That's something you've chosen to do. I think, analysing your own behaviours in that way, addressing them, you know, trying—working with other people and not, not doing it to fill a quota. Not, "Oh, I should help this black person get work!" That kind of thing. Like if you work in an agency, and there are people of colour who are being paid less than you, question it. Ask why! You know, if your rates are higher and you work with them, tell the client they need to match the rate. Or, what I like to do when I do doubles with other workers is, we put our rates together and we'll split it evenly so we're both doing the same work for the same money. You know, why should my labour be worth anymore—any less than yours? Like, how can I be friends with you? How can I break bread with you? So, I think those would be the biggest things for me. And also, one of the things that pisses me off so much is if you're going to do something, do it. Don't do it so you can go write a blog about it or talk about it. That's just performative and it's disgusting. I would rather you do nothing. There's so much of the, "I helped a black person!" Like, "I donated!" Like, shut up! You know, just do it! And

it's with everything. So I think personally, for me, just think, "What can I do better?" That would be the first step, I would say. And also, just remember that it might be okay for us to self-identify as certain things. Like, I know in my marketing I use a lot of terms that I'm uncomfortable—that are racist, that I find racist. And I'm sure it's the same being trans and stuff, but don't assume that those words are okay for you to use, or for you to consume, they're not. And if you're confused, ask me: "Hey, is that—can I say 'ebony?'" No! I'm black. You know? [Laughs]. What I use on the internet isn't how we speak in real life.

00:21:37 M Yeah, I agree. It's like, today's—we need to talk more about internalised racism. That is in, in any movement like in LGBT movement you may think that, "Oh yeah, we are friends with your BPOC LBGT community! But I don't want to say that you are black, you are Asian, or something like this because you are going to discriminate yourself," some kind.... These kinds of allies, I want to tell them that, actually, you have to assume that in this society, yeah there are some kind of internalised racism in our, in our community. In the LGBT community, in sex workers' community, in any kind of pro-democratic or even, leftist democracy that tries to be—how do you say?—colour-blind? I don't like the word 'blind' because it's against the people who are handicapped but again, it's the word that can explain to them that they try to pretend to colour-blind. That, "Oh! You are not different from us! You see? You are friend of mine! If I'm racist how can I be friends with you?" They rise up everyone, not rise up BPOC LGBT communities specifically. But it's bullshit. As you said, I want to repeat again, I have to say to these people, "Shut up and question your privilege! And question why we don't have the same rights as you." And these the reality that BPOC people, especially migrant BPOC people, they suffer from a lot of dehumanisation 00:23:10 poverty and no food, nothing, to have the same as the white, mainstream sex worker or LGBT people. And they have to acknowledge that. That's—we are not at the same power structure and these power structures really discriminate from having the same rights—although we are sex workers, we are the same—but me? I don't have paper. Me? I have to go to the police every three years, four years to renew it, and I may be refused for the next thing. And that is what you never suffer or face it. And these the thing that you have to acknowledge first. Assume the difference of the privilege you have and what we don't have, and then you will be able to be our allies. And then, yeah, that next thing is that, I wanted to say like, and let the concerned people, the BPOC people like this, to express themselves instead of talking for them. I understand some people, maybe some time they don't find the right person to talk about this subject but, you should not like be there all the time, as white

people, to be like, “Yeah, I will talk always for the BPOC people.” If you have and you  
00:24:24 know someone let them express themselves. Don’t steal their place, don’t steal  
their voice. And let their voice be heard as who they are. Yeah.

00:24:39 CH Thank you.

00:24:40 R Yeah, I think it’s very... like what Amber was saying. Like, you just have to—I  
see people talking a lot about it. Like, you know, being allies or being activist and being  
engaging and doing a lot of these kind of things but not with much, not actually doing it. Or  
doing very little and thinking that’s okay. And I think, I came across a word which kind of  
separates like allies from accomplices. So, you want people who are accomplices and who  
are actively working towards like dismantling or, you know, actually doing the work. And I  
feel a lot of what’s happening is people just talking a lot about being, being passive allies.  
And that is extremely... yeah, it’s just been, you know, something that we’ve just talked  
about for so long that I’m kind of over this discussion of allies. And it has to be like no, stop  
that and just do the work and be like accomplices. And it’s not—it doesn’t just apply to POC,  
or like marginalised identities, it’s for like, everything. You know, sex worker rights and like, if  
you’re an ally of sex workers, stop like, don’t just talk about it. You know, actively, you know,  
engage and stand up for those rights. But, I think there’s just too much talk about it for like,  
for centuries. And yeah, I just want people to just do the work.

00:26:33 A I’ll just say, as well, I said earlier that I didn’t think people of colour had  
anything to do and that’s wrong. Like I was wrong, I admit it [chuckles]. I think it’s also  
important for us as sex worker of colour to stop and check our own individual privileges and  
to know that whilst we are all people of colour, we might all be black, or all be Asian, we all  
have really different experiences. And even, you know, you were talking about like migration.  
You know, I’m British. I was born here; I have a British passport. My struggles will never be  
the same as yours, who might have you know, more precarious immigration status. You  
know, I still don’t feel comfortable with the police, but I know that I have more rights in a  
certain way. You know, even where it comes to language barriers, you know, I speak fluent  
English and I think it’s important for us to continually reassess what we can do within our  
own community to try and—it’s something I know I’m personally, I feel guilty of sometimes,  
just focussing on my own troubles and just forgetting that actually, I should be doing more to  
help others who are similar but have it even harder.

00:27:34 CH Thank you, one last point on that one. I was going to say how - we kind of discuss this in the migrant sex worker panel—but, within sex worker communities and sex worker rights, I think people are mostly trying to be good for this kind of issues. But you do often hear people say things that are very xenophobic or very racist and nobody calls them out. And if you're like the only black person there it's like, well I don't want to be—well, maybe some people might be more comfortable saying something but some people, you know we don't always want to be the one to speak up. Yeah, the angry black woman! [Laughs]. You know? I don't—like why are people not calling this out within even our own activism, you know, communities? Because sex workers are all different races, ethnicities, backgrounds, migration statuses. We're not the same. So, this is something that people need to keep into account if we're going to have solidarity and you know, work together towards causes. But the next question I wanted to ask is, "Do you feel that non-white sex workers are represented enough in the media, activism, legislation? Do you think that there is enough representation of people like yourself, who are people heard?"

00:28:55 M [Laughs]. I think that everyone here knows the word 'token' or 'tokenism?' A lot! We see a lot of BPOC people in the television but not enough. Not the same amount. It's not that equal, actually, compared to the total amount of the white people or dominant people on the television or on the media. But the thing is that, many of the people who arrive at that point where they can be seen on the media, they can be heard on the media, most of them, they try to reproduce the same, the same way of thinking. They are BPOC but they think like white people! I don't mean white people individually but this, people who tell us, "Oh you are white hater!" No, I'm not white hater, but there's a real white privilege. And many of BPOC people who get to this point, in order to protect their sister, brother and their friends who are from their old community who are oppressed, who are killed every day, they protect the white privilege. They talk, they be friends with the people who oppress us while 00:29:58 questioning us. And it's so disgusting in many kinds of television programmes, some kind of like, the racist jokes are made again and against BPOC people, and BPOC people are there and then, "Ha Ha Ha! Ah yeah, it's funny, it's funny!" Fuck! They should stop these kind of people. They are toxic. They are cancer for our community. I mean that not every BPOC people on the media are like that, but there are so many who just are there and reproduce the same things. And I think that this kind of cultural production, we need—yeah, it doesn't mean that we are BPOC people and we will be aware of the condition of life

that we, that we have today and the privilege that we don't have. Many people just like [say] that, yeah, the identity politics is important but no, it's not everything. Identity politics can be yeah, representative, but it doesn't mean that those who are woman will understand the rights of women. Many women do not defend the rights of abortion. Many people who are LGBT people may work for the extreme right party. And many people who are BPOC people, some of them like Trump, for example. And it's the same kind of thing: that we need to, learn it and to make the people who will go to the media to realise that when you are going to represent us in the media in front of everyone should be responsible and accountable and you do not represent the real experience of the oppressed community that you are from. And this is the thing that I want to say.

00:31:36 A Thank you, I agree. I look at it from two perspectives; you're looking at this panel now and we're all people of colour. How often do you see an all people of colour panel? Now, how often do you see an all people of colour panel that aren't talking about being people of colour? And this is something—and this is no shade to the organiser. Valerie has done a fantastic job and the fact that they would make space for us is so important. And the fact that there's so many people here when there's loads of other amazing panels is really important, and I appreciate it. But it's that thing of A, remembering that we're experts on more than just our race. You know? I have writer friends. I have a writer friend who does a lot of writing about that she's fat and she's like, "It would be really good if someone just got me to write about the weather or something one day." And that's how I feel. And then sort of, in terms of the media, I mean I do think people of colour—sex workers, there's some representation but what we need to look at is what type of representation? A lot of the time it's that very stereotypical negative representation. Like, "Oh! There's an Asian worker! It's a show about trafficking! Oh, there's a black worker, she's ghetto, in the southern parts of America and she has a pimp!" It's like, why can't we just have a nice Secret Diary of a Shitty Call Girl but she's black? And it not centre around her being black? You know? That's a thing. Or like, "There was an Asian in this show, but she was a domme and she had to have funny coloured hair!" Like that sort of thing! And in terms of activism and speaking and books and stuff, I don't think there is enough, but I also appreciate that being able to speak is a privilege. Being able to speak means that using things like your white privilege, your immigration status, makes you comfortable to speak. You know, not having kids makes you more comfortable to speak. And it's normal that being cis-gender, British, white, makes it easier for you to speak. So, I understand why there is still lack of representation and I

personally would rather be underrepresented than be tokenised. I would rather just see nothing than have that person there just for a bit of clout, if that makes sense. I feel for me, one of the biggest things would be seeing more workers of colour speak on things that aren't just about colour.

00:34:05 CH I agree, basically, with what both of them said. I think being able to be out, again, is a privilege that a lot of people don't have. If you're not white then you might be more marginalised; that, again takes away some privilege of being out and then that leads to lack of representation. Whether it be, not just in the media but legislation and dialogue on sex workers. For example, SPACE International which is anti-sex work, abolition organisation within the UK. They did an entire event on women of colour in the sex industry and they basically had these women go on stage and tell these traumatic experiences about them or that had happened to them. It's like, they had these—but they don't tell you that SPACE is basically being funded by like these white—most of these people organising this organisation are white. But they're just using these people. I'm not downplaying their experiences, they—of course maybe they had very traumatic experiences but it's just I think we're worth more than just talking about our trauma and things like that. Like, I don't know, it just feels a bit dehumanising when they get to that point. A lot of people use the so-called 'sex workers of colour' as like a talking point to either talk against sex workers for sex work, rather than just letting us talk for ourselves. It's just so patronising. I wanted to—did anybody have any more comments on this question?

00:35:45 A Yeah, I was just going to say, it was probably about a year ago and I mean it was a Bindel article, so it was always going to be shit [Audience laughs]. But it was about, "One of the reasons the sex industry should be criminalised is because the sex industry is racist." And it was like, "Look! Wow! What I found out!" And us, the workers of colour are like, "Wait? You didn't know this?" But furthermore, what industry isn't racist? If anything, this is probably one of the few industries where we can try and earn as much as, you know.... And touching earlier you talked about the wage gap between men and women, but what people don't talk about is the wage gap between white women and women of colour. And this is across the board, not just in sex work. I think it's something like, women of colour make seventy cents to a white woman's dollar. But no one wants to focus on the racial aspect. And that's where I think white feminism really comes into it. Because they're like,

you know, “Feminism!” And it’s like, [under breath] “Intersectional feminism!” [Audience laughs].

00:36:44 CH Yeah, the whole bit about sex work should be abolished because it’s racist, it like, okay, I think I’ve been called like—sorry, I’m using this word—but I think I’ve been called like a, “nigger” in every single job that I’ve had. Or have heard that word in every job that I’ve had. I think I’ve heard it maybe a little less in sex work, if that makes anything better? So, I can kind of rationalise it to myself. I don’t know. I still don’t want to be called it, but I just don’t get—well, at least I get paid like [laughs] at least a bit better. So, the next question is on decriminalisation. So, we often talk about decriminalisation in sex work activism. How do you think decriminalisation intersects with race, and would change your experiences?

00:37:33 A Personally, my biggest thing - for ages, I was always like, “Decrim! Decrim! Decrim! Woo! Decrim! Decrim!” And now it’s been put to me by workers of colour, “What after Decrim? Decrim isn’t going to fix it all.” And that’s not to say we shouldn’t be championing it—for it, because it’s an initial first step. But, especially for migrant workers of colour, we need—this is where it should intersect so hard with borders and so on. Just borders [laughs] not getting rid of borders. And stuff like that. So, I definitely think Decrim will help some people but what about the others? And I hate—I worry often that once we get it, because we will get it—we’ll forget about the workers that still, you know, need help.

00:38:16 M [laughs]. Yeah. So, I think that decriminalisation is really important, but racism is a sort of problem that isn’t so important to be spoken [about] today, too. It’s like yeah, decriminalisation—if you talk, especially about 00:38:32 decriminalisation, yeah it might concern the sex worker in general, the whole, the total sex worker, but if I’m—for example, if the UK is de, de—not decolonised [laughs] Yeah, decriminalised! Yeah! [Laughs]. If the UK is decriminalised but not decolonised it means that me, as a migrant sex worker who doesn’t have the UK paper, I may be sent back to my country anywhere, any when, if I cannot fulfil the criteria of the immigration of the UK. And that’s why when we talk about decriminalisation, we should not think that is the whole idea of the fight of sex worker, because we also live in the nationalism, nationalist idea that we find that there are borders everywhere. And many people who are BPOC people who migrant to work in many countries, we suffer from that, not just legal—criminalisation is a big problem, yes, but in the

same time, we are afraid that we will be sent back to our country, even though you are person of the country you still do not begin your sex work but if the police find you, you will be sent back right away. And it's some kind of the thing that yeah, decriminalisation must come together with the decolonisation, and also, the fight against capitalism. Because, yeah, if we have the decriminalisation but we are still poor, we still don't have the social protection, our condition of life is not respected, and housing is also discriminating against the people. I ask how can our lives be better if we do not have all of this in the package? It's like if you fight for the rights of sex workers, you are fighting for the rights of women of colour, BPOC people, and also you are fighting against the capitalists also. This must be together. You cannot disassociate—I mean, like, “Oh I fight for sex workers, but I am neoliberal! I love the neoliberal politics!” But you see that your friends are craving—are dying because of that. You have to see it. That is the problem that is related together. Yeah.

00:40:57 R    Yeah, I think to even just add on to that, we see things like the Windrush generation, or the Windrush scandal, where, you know, even Decrim will not protect certain people, or certain marginalised identities. But if—and I was actually going to talk on, even if we look on—this is not really related—but if you look at even just legalisation of weed in the US [Audience member laughs] and how you still have [laughs]—

00:41:39 A    [off mic] Black people in jail, but they're not rich! [Audience laughs]

00:41:40 R    Yeah. [Audience laughs]. So, yeah, it's—I draw a lot of parallels between some of these things. If I think about porn, and the way it's little by little—or, maybe not little—like, recently it's become very... I think, pornographers recently are maybe really high on the whorearchy. And it's become very—you get a lot of middle class or very privileged people who are actually also performers. And I think you still get things like the wage gap and you still get things like, you know, privileged people getting more work than marginalised identities. So, I feel even if Decrim was a thing, just look at any kind of work that's out there right now. You still have a lot of people who are in positions of power or who are getting a lot of work. You will still have those same things, those same structures where a lot of marginalised identities—you know folk will be really suffering. Because we—they're not given access to those things because those structures are so deep-rooted in our society. So, fighting for Decrim is great but it's still just going to be like—you're still going to have working class, trans folk, people of colour, all of those very marginalised identities really suffering, and not being able to get in there, unless we address those issues, too.

00:43:53 CH I definitely agree with the sentiment that decriminalisation isn't the end goal. Obviously, it's nice, it's what we want, but we have to think about the future beyond decriminalisation. And with decriminalisation, racism isn't just going to magically go away from our society! Poof—it's gone! [Laughs] It's not going to happen like that. I think specifically thinking about this from an American perspective, prostitution in America is so racialised and I think a lot of the stigma deals with obviously race issues but criminalisation. I do think a good aspect of decriminalisation is that it has the prospect to—what's it called when they get rid of someone's criminal history? Like, not exonerate or expunge? Yeah, I know that some people say that there's a way decriminalisation can be implemented, and it can expunge some criminal histories. Which I think it very important because in—again, I'm speaking about America, but I'm sure the same for the UK. A lot of these prostitution charges happen to primarily black women, migrant, Asian women, Latino people. So I do think it will intersect with racial issues, but I do think of course, we need to talk about the future beyond this.

00:45:18 A And I think, for me, it's very important to be aware of what type of Decrim we're going after. So, for example—and I didn't realise this until quite recently—we always talk about the New Zealand Model: "New Zealand is great, they have Decrim! You know, sex workers are reporting crimes, this is great! This is great!" And I'm someone who's travelled a lot to worker, and I remember being like, "Right, I can get a working holiday visa, I'll go to New Zealand for two years and I'll work there." Then they were like, "Wait, no. You're a whore. Oh no. You can pick grapes in the field." Do they have grapes in New Zealand? [Laughs]. "Like you can work in retail, you can do this. But you can't do sex work on a working holiday visa." And I was like, "But why? Decrim means sex work is work. Why can't I do this?" So, then I did more and more reading and it's like, "Oh no, we gave you Decrim but at the expense of migrant workers." So, it's like, who's Decrim is it anyway? You know, and looking at South Australia, they've been offered—now they have criminalisation, and they've been offered Decrim quite a few times over the years and every time they've refused because they're like, "We only want Decrim for everyone. We want Decrim for street-based workers, we want Decrim for migrant workers." And I think it's so easy to forget about other people; myself, I didn't realise that. So, I think at the end of the day who need Decrim most? Who needs Decrim most? You know, these are the people. So, I think it's really important for us to amplify the need for this more and more because what worries me now is that we'll get

Decrim in, but it will be like New Zealand and people will be like, “Woo!” And then there’ll be the people who’ve been shut out by it who’ll feel really ripped off and pissed off like, “What have we fought for?” You know? So, obviously it just goes to show more about how Decrim is such a wider issue, it’s not just about sex work. It’s about migration, it’s about policy, and so on. But I think, yes being conscious of [laughs] sorry—my dog! Of what the Decrim that we’re asking for is, is very important and I want to hear that happen more.

00:47:26 CH Thank you. Is there any last statements from the panellists before we move to questions? Nothing? Okay. Can we start with questions? We have about twenty minutes, so—

00:47:40 Q1 Wow, I am just so overwhelmed and I just want to say—hopefully I’m not too loud.

00:47:48 CH [off mic] Hey can you say your name and your pronouns?

00:47:48 Q1 Yeah, so I’m Mirna—I’ll be on the panel on the anti-trafficking perspective. So, I’m an academic and I’m south Asian origin and I consider myself an ally to sex workers. And I’ve done work with sex workers in India. The first thing I wanted to say is thank you for the fabulous and powerful anti-racism and intersectionalism—intersectional feminism work you did here in this session. I have learnt more from the four of you than I have learnt from any monographs or articles that I’ve read. So, thank you for this valuable knowledge production. In academia we’re all about citation and all of that, and I just wanted to thank you for your knowledge. I think it’s absolutely incredible. The second thing I wanted to say was, as an academic ally, what can we do? And as an academic of colour—a woman academic of colour, what can I do to help elevate your voices within the field of sex work research, of which I am a part? But I’m also conscious of the fact I don’t want to create—be seen as creating divisions within the sex working community. Amina, I was talking to you before about this as well, so as a female academic of colour, how can we elevate your voices? And what can we do?

00:48:59 A For me I would say the number one thing is thank you, because I know I’m more comfortable talking to a person of colour than I am to a white person about certain things. Not necessarily because white people aren’t good but because I don’t want that pity

that comes from it. And then a lot of the time it comes from soothing someone's white guilt. I don't have time for that at all, unless I'm being paid. I think, just as much research as you can do [laughs]. Just do lots of research. I don't think beyond that there is that much. I'm very much an advocate for sex workers doing their own research as much as they can. And that's not to discredit your work. You know, I think an expert is an expert, but so much we outsource so many things when we have such able and capable within our industry. But I know this isn't an answer but just continuing to ask people that they can aid and helping sex workers become self-sufficient and do their own stuff as well.

00:49:59 Q1 Just to follow up quickly. For example, if I wanted to write a paper about your experiences and I wanted to include all of you as co-authors, and have you be a part of the knowledge production, would that be something that you think sex workers would appreciate? Sex workers of colour?

00:50:14 A Personally, I think it would be fantastic. As I said, I think it's really—like, so often things are done by people and I'm appreciative of them, but I think for fuck's sake, couldn't you have given funding to a sex worker who was just as capable? I don't want to read anything that doesn't have sex workers at the core. So, I think co-authoring is a brilliant way of involving sex workers directly. But also, it's the whole, "Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish, feed him forever." Sex workers understanding how we can create and do our own research would be a really valuable resource. And I think giving sex workers resources such as that can sometimes be more helpful than even just research. And asking what the areas are. Also, yeah, because there's a lot of shit statistics out there.

00:50:59 Q1 Yeah. Thank you.

00:51:04 CH Sorry just to add on, what Amber said, just listen to sex workers. And co-authoring, I think, is a great way. Also, so I am doing a bit in academia now—I'm not like an expert or anything but, just kind of learning my way through—and from a lot of the literature that I read regarding sex workers, specifically people who are antis, but you kind of see this as well from other sources, they already go into it with a predisposed bias, and narratives, and things like that. So, I think it is really important keeping sex workers there to check you, or just to say, "Hey," like, you know, "this is a bit biased." Or keep things informed.

00:51:47 M Yeah, recently I was searching for a book that I really appreciate. The book's author is Patricia Hill-Collins. I really love her, and I think that the fight of many BPOC people who are in the academic world, it's hard. Because it's not just because you are doing academic work, but you are going to fight against all the oppression, as a woman, BPOC, and also every kind of things that try to push you out from the sphere that you are working for your community. And for me, I thought that the academic world is not as linear—how do you say? Something that can be separated out of other worlds, or out of other dimensions of the reality that we are living in. It's like some people who say that, "Yeah, I do academic work, I do not do activism." For me, it's bullshit, because you are taking some kind of position of power in your hands. You know that, actually you have more privilege than the others. I appreciate all BPOC people who are the academics like Patricia and others, who try to use their own space that they have to bring the power to empower us, to let our voice be heard, and to let our problematic be discussed in society. Because when you have already your privilege, the other things, you must realise that there's nothing that can be, "Art is only art." Art can be politics, politics is everywhere, even in your university, in your knowledge. The way we get access to the knowledge, the validation of our knowledge, is all kind of really 00:53:32 politicised and as a woman of colour I really love all of you to support us, to bring our voice, and to represent it in the place that we cannot go. Like me, cannot go to your place but if you can, I would love you to, like, let our voice be heard.

00:53:55 Q2 Hi, my name is Calta 00:53:57. I am an ally and one thing that strikes me a lot—not just really within this room, because this room seems great, I really liked—I really enjoyed this conversation. But it seems like a lot of people within this talk overall are very—they have a lot, they have like, quite a large chunk of privilege, from my point of view. It was touched on briefly. And I'm wondering that within your experiences of working with activists and stuff, how much do you feel is being done? Is there enough being done to reach out, to protect, and support more marginalised sex workers who—I know quite a few sex workers who I don't think they'd be very comfortable coming to this kind of event. They—it's not like their scene. It's very politicised. It's very—you know? It takes quite a lot of privilege to be able to step back and also vocalise your experiences like this. So, I'm wondering what is being done? And what do you think could be done more?

00:55:16 CH Thank you so much. I think that's a great question. This, again, intersects with what we talked about in the migrant sex worker panel. But I think, for community building we

need to be more accessible to people who may not have the academic background that some people have, may not come from a certain economic status that you know, some people in activism have. Because I think a lot of times in activism it's from a very middle class, you know, like I said, academic standpoint. So, people might not have—you know, if you're just a sex worker and you've never met any—like before I came to the UK, I didn't even really know what a sex worker was! I was a sex worker, but I didn't—I just knew like hoe, hooker, that kind stuff. I didn't know anything about—I didn't even know there was activism surrounding sex work. So, I definitely think it is very important to get people involved who—not everybody has to be an activist, not everybody has to be politicised. You know, we don't all have the time and privilege to be able to do that. But it is very important to make people feel like they're involved, to call out these racist, xenophobic comments that are made, and make people inclusive. And additionally, I think that instead of this tokenism that happens in activism—and it's not just in sex work activism, it's in all walks of life, there is tokenism. But I think that for sex worker rights, sex workers of colour, trans sex workers, marginalised people need to be put at the forefront of this movement, because we're the most impacted by criminalisation.

00:56:59 A Yeah, I think that's a really fantastic question. And I want to start by saying I'm someone who—I feel very confident talking in front of people. I've got a big mouth, I feel fine, I don't give a shit. However, I find myself really confused sometimes when people are using certain acronyms for organisations, when people are using words with more than seven characters in them. I'm like, "The what of the what?" And I think one of things I feel like we need to do better is using laymen terms. Sometimes it feels like people show off when they use fancy language. It's nothing but showing off. Can you say it simply and still get your point across? Yes. And I think as a movement and as a community we need to talk about that more, to make it accessible in that way. I'm going to talk on this conference in particular, the organisers of this, I personally feel, have done very well trying to make this more accessible. I won't go too deep into the nitty gritty but if you can't afford to get here, we're going to help you afford to get here. If you're going to speak, we're going to help you. You know, and there's no questions asked, it's this is this. Doing small things: accessibility and stuff. So, in terms of—because some people, who has three days to take off?! And not work, and come here? You know, having things like childcare available for free, which, I just—hats off because they've done really, really well and I've been so impressed by it. In terms of being able to speak, it will always be the most privileged people that are most

comfortable to speak. The people sitting here being like, “I’m a sex worker!” In front of fifty people you don’t know is a risk. You could know someone who knows someone. If I had kids, you could tell social services. So, some people never will feel comfortable so I think it’s important to look at how we can get their voices up here, even if they’re not actually able to be up here. So yeah, I think that’s a really big thing. Just making it more accessible in that people feel—also, the other thing I wanted to say was, we had a sex worker-only day. And for me, the number one voices I care about in this industry, in this what? In this world, are sex workers! I don’t really care how that much how allies—not talking about you in particular but like, I’m not fussed if civilian, a civilian muggle [laughs] [Audience laughs], if an ally doesn’t feel as comfortable as sex workers do. And I think the number one thing is having sex worker only safe spaces. And I think we can find that those spaces are a bit more—you know, but there’s, we can always do better, we can always make them more accessible. And I think that there needs to be a way to speak to those people, to say, “Hey, what can we do for you?” But I will say that I do think a lot is being done constantly. And I do think organisers, some people like Valerie, have done so much. They’ve thought of everything.

00:59:56 CH We have ten more minutes so we’re going to take—yeah, we can take three more but please be brief.

01:00:04 A? [off mic] It’s us that talk too much! [Audience laughs]

01:00:12 Q3 Hey. Hi. I just wanted to say thank you so much. Oh, hello—my name is Oge  
 01:00:12, my pronouns are she/her. I’m also an ally. And I wanted to thank you all so much. Like mention that I’ve learnt so, so much. Nothing surprising, really because we’ve been  
 knew 01:00:30 but this is so interesting hearing it from you. And I wanted to pick up on something you’d mentioned around the use of language and fetishis—that word that no one can say [Audience and panellists laugh]. And just particularly in porn. And I wanted to ask how—it’s quite a loaded question, so if you can’t answer it it’s fine—but how do you look after yourself? Because it’s really hard sometimes having to like, if you don’t identify with the work but you’re having to market yourself in a way that you don’t really like, you’re not comfortable with, maybe in porn, but you said the use of the word, ‘ebony’ and stuff like that. How do you look after yourself? Because it can be quite heavy mentally, I think. If it is? It might not be, that was an assumption. Goodness.

01:01:17 ?? [inaudible]

01:01:24 A Within my own marketing—I mentioned it a bit yesterday, but it was sex worker-only day. The way I see it is, white men who are the majority of my clients, they will always look at me and see my race first, and racially fetishize me. So, instead of just letting that happen, I'm going to take it, turn it on its head, and use it to my benefit. So, there will be words like 'ebony', there'll be phrases, there will be—down to photos! Poses, stuff like that. And it is really hard, and I know some people who refuse to use them. They're kind of like, "My pride says 'No!'" And I respect that, but unfortunately not everybody has the ability to do that. And I think, the only way I get through it is by saying to myself, "Fuck them." Like, you do what you got to do, you make your money, you put it in the bank, you feed yourself, and you move on. And by letting—by talking about the fact that I don't like—like being very vocal to everybody else, and bitching about it, just, you know, that to me is self-care. It's being able to meet up with a friend and be like, "Fucking white people!" You know? [Laughs]. And it's just that is the best way. I don't think—and for me, I have a goal, I set it yesterday. I have a goal to never use those terms again. But, things like SEO, a lot of it's not even just about clients and what they like to read, it's about being high on internet searches. Men don't search 'five foot five, brown person of colour.' They search 'big booty ebonyes,' so you use it. And you just—I think you just deal with it.

01:03:01 R Yeah, I think what I've had to develop is a performative self, which is very, I think, separate from my authentic self. And in some ways, in a way playing up to that performative self. And yeah, once that's over then it's in some ways there's no [Audience member sneezes][A's dog barks twice][Audience and panellists laugh][A's dog barks]... Yeah there's no... it doesn't impact me as much. [Audience and panellists laugh]. Yeah. So, I think that's how I manage. But I think some people, they have a very split way of working where, "Okay, once I'm outside that door, and I come back home, once I shut that door, that's all on the outside." Which is, yeah, I don't know if that's the best way to deal with it [laughs]. It's like one way that I deal with things.

01:04:33 CH Okay, two more questions.

01:04:38 Q2? Sorry, I just wanted to say something about that as well because I do fetish work. I guess when you make a living fetishizing different aspects of your being, I think what

I've realised is that it's—your identity is a process, so I guess maybe when you're working you're choosing bits of yourself that are—and exploring that with your clients as well—but that in turn makes you explore it with yourself as well. For me, personally, if I—I don't feel uncomfortable doing it because I feel like if I let myself go there and was exploring the uncomfortability of it then I would take that into my personal life as well. So, I think it's so individual how we explore those things. And also, the relationship with a client, as well, is something that can be quite, maybe, special? Because I have clients who, you know, like my blackness but also see me for who I am. So, I take those things as learning curves, as well; how you can actually engage your client with the process of transformation and breaking down the boundaries between—the preconceived boundaries between yourself and your client. Because I think that's actually where a lot of the changes happened, it's when you can get on a level with somebody and they can leave understanding more about yourself. And okay, yeah, he might come to me because I'm ebony and because I'm black and all of that but actually, I'm this person that's outside of that. So, appreciate my blackness in this moment but also, I'm more—I'm someone else as well. So that's helped me come to terms with it in that sense.

01:06:26 CH [off mic] Thank you for sharing that. That was great.

01:06:37 Q5 Hiya, yeah, for the people who don't know me, I'm Andie. I'm a sex worker of colour. I've been a sex worker for ten years, doing various forms of sex work. And also, a migrant. I just wanted to pick up on all three things that have been said. Firstly, to do with how we can include more marginalised voices in the sex worker activist community. I've done a lot of work. I'm quite active, I guess, as an activist, purely on the basis that I am out as a sex worker—so, I was forced to be out as a sex worker. And the thing I really want to say is we don't all have to be politicised as sex workers. I work with a lot of sex workers of colour in brothels and—most of which are migrants in precarious situations—and they don't want to be politicised, they just want to survive. And that is also very important. And also, an important way to also include them in this movement is that you don't have to be part of the sex worker rights movement, if you don't want to. That's an I'm—that's very important for survival. Also, I'm also exhausted of activism. So, you know, that's, you know. We don't always have to be politicised in everything we do. And there is this pressure, as well, even in our movement for all of us to constantly do this work, especially if you've been doing it for a long time. It's nice to see regular faces here but we've all been doing this for a very long

time. Some of us even longer than others. And it gets to the point where it's exhausting, and we're constantly having to say the same thing over and over and over. So, it's okay to also take a step back and depoliticise sometimes. Another thing as well, in terms of just what was last said, as well, there's also a huge privilege in being able to talk to your clients when you're a fetish worker compared to when you're working in a brothel, or you're working the streets. So that's also very important to remember that even within sex work, and the whorearchy, that there's also levels of privilege in terms of the work that you do. Many of us in brothels—I've experienced an extreme amount of violence from clients in brothel work, and other forms of work that I've done. I don't always—I would just, sometimes I just need to dissociate and not even engage in what's happening to me and that's fine. And I think there also needs to be—we need to come away from this idea that sex workers have to do all this work with their clients. Because we fucking don't. Like, it's not our job to; we're not getting paid enough to educate our clients. That's a whole other level of emotional labour that we don't need to do. And actually, that's on everyone else to do. I hate this idea of when people are like, "Oh, but what are you doing to educate your clients about consent?" And all this kind of stuff. It's like, "What are you doing to teach the men in your life about consent?" Why does it have to fall on sex workers to do that work when that is a level of privilege to be able to do that and engage with your clients in that way? Another thing, in terms of self-care: just removing yourself from the sex worker rights movement sometimes is also a good way of self-care. Because a lot of us are doing this, even like a lot of members here, in SWARM and everything, like we're doing this out of our own pocket. And when you're a worker and you're also trying to educate people on your life, it's extremely exhausting. And there—I mean, I personally don't like sex work, I don't like my job, I can't wait to leave. I've been doing it for ten years and I'm a bitter hooker and I'm so exhausted. You know, and like, and also, I do forms of survival sex work, I've done more privileged forms of work, I've done less privileged forms of work. And it is a lot, it is a lot, and it shouldn't just fall on sex workers to have to even lead a movement. And that's very important. What can other people be doing in terms of supporting us? Well, listening to us but also asking what they can do without is having to give them a cookie every time. Yeah.

01:11:03 M? [off mic] Thank you. [Audience applauds]

01:11:08 CH [off mic] Thank you everyone!

[End of recording]

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