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Student Participation in the Sex Industry: Higher Education Responses and Staff Experiences and Perceptions

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Abstract

This paper discusses student sex workers in higher education in Wales from an institutional perspective. It investigates how student sex work is dealt with within higher education and in doing so highlights the lack of higher education policies/guidance/training to assist staff members who have experiences with students working in the sex industry. Drawing on data from The Student Sex Work Project, the research found that staff's knowledge on the legalities of sex work and on appropriate referral pathways is inadequate. While some institutions as well as staff deem that student sex work would bring the reputation of the university and/or the profession for which the student is training into disrepute (necessitating disciplinary action), other institutions and staff indicated that student sex work requires an individualised approach which can offer support in different areas. The paper argues that steps need to be undertaken to make the higher education environment inclusive for all students, including those who work in the sex industry.

Student Sex Work; Higher Education; University reputation; Professionalism

Introduction

The funding of higher education has undergone continuous changes over the last decades and across the globe, resulting in many countries in substantial shifts in the higher educational cost burden from the government onto the individual students and their families (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). While this trend is by far more pronounced in the US, it is also increasingly seen across Europe (Johnstone, 2004; Payne et al., 2013). Expecting students to contribute a bigger share of their higher education cost implies that students need to have access to financial resources. In this context it may not come as a surprise that there are indications of increased involvement of students in the sex industry, especially given the societal trend towards normalisation and mainstreaming of sexual consumption (Attwood, 2006; Brents & Sanders, 2010).

Due to a lack of measurement points over time it is not possible to state with certainty that student involvement in the sex industry has increased. Nevertheless, 'student sex work' is increasingly reported in the media (e.g. Barrett, 1997; Chapman, 2001; BBC News, 2004; Duvall Smith, 2006; Awoyera, 2012; Dolman, 2008; Channel 4 News, 2012; Sedgeman,

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2004) as well as by a growing body of academic literature. Indeed, research in the United Kingdom (UK) as well as other parts of Europe and Australia has established the widespread existence of student sex work (e.g. Roberts et al., 2000; Roberts, Bergström, & La Rooy, 2007a; Roberts, Sanders, Smith, & Myers, 2010; Sanders & Hardy, 2013; Lantz, 2005). While such research is typically rather small-scale, a recent large-scale study was conducted on the issue in the UK (Sagar, Jones, Symons, & Bowring, 2015) in which 6,773 respondents from the higher education student population participated. The study found that between 4.29 per cent and 5.33 per cent (95 per cent confidence interval) of the respondents had worked in the sex industry in some capacity. In that study the 'sex industry' covered a wide range of activities referring to sex work as well as managerial or auxiliary roles within the industry (e.g. brothel manager or driver for sex workers) although the latter were very rare in a student population. Sex work in its turn is understood according to the definition by Weitzer (2010, p. 1) in terms of 'the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for material compensation'. As such the term 'sex work' can be used as an umbrella term for a wide range of behaviours that imply varying levels of intimacy (e.g. phone sex, erotic dancing, web cam sex, escorting and prostitution).

The widespread existence of 'student sex workers' as discussed above automatically raises the question of *how do higher education institutions deal with students that are engaged in the sex industry*. This is an important question to ask given that they work in a highly unregulated industry that leaves them at risk of stigmatisation and discriminatory societal responses as well as violence (e.g. Scoular, 2004; Krüsi, Chettiar, Ridgway, Abbott, Strathdee, & Shannon, 2012; Sanders, 2004). With tuition fees from students now keeping the higher education economy afloat the responsibility of educational institutions to respond pragmatically and facilitate and provide health, safety and welfare support for students actively considering or actively engaged in work in the sex economy cannot be disputed. A large-scale study in the UK (Sagar, Jones, Symons, Tyrie, & Roberts, 2015) found that the motivations and experiences of student sex workers were diverse and it is suggested that there is a need for tailored support and service provision that goes beyond stereotypical understandings of student sex workers. For example, while economic reasons loom large in students' motivations to work in the sex industry, many were also found to be intrinsically motivated for doing this type of work (in terms of anticipated enjoyment) rather than feeling forced into it. In addition, the difficulties experienced by student sex workers were found to be highly diverse and not necessarily related to the work itself. Therefore, given the misconceptions about sex work, the complexity and diversity of the work, as well as the social stigma the work can attract, the authors argue that it is very important that higher education institutions themselves do not take part in any discriminatory behaviour towards students who take up roles in the sex industry.

In the UK, higher education institutions have by and large not only had very little to say on the topic, they also appear to avoid the topic all together. For example, Roberts, Bergström and La Rooy (2007b) have described the difficulties of conducting research on student sex work including attempts by managers to block research on the topic. Importantly, such actions should not be seen as idiosyncratic responses on the part of individual institutions. However, at the national level, *The Independent* newspaper in 2013 (Brown, 2013) considered the economic contribution of student sex workers to the UK higher education economy and suggested that UK universities were 'refusing to face up the facts' about student involvement in commercial sex. It also emerged that *Universities UK* who describe themselves as 'the representative organisation for the UK's universities' had tried to pressurise *The Independent* to drop the story (Roberts, 2013).

To our knowledge only one study has been conducted on higher education institutional responses towards students' involvement in the sex industry and that study focused on higher education policies in England and Scotland. In that study, Cusick, Roberts and Paton (2009) sent *Freedom of Information* requests to 326 higher education institutions to which 236 responded. None of them were found to have a specific policy, although almost a fifth of those responding suggested matters may be covered by policies which cover disciplinary regulations and codes of conduct or which refer to misconduct and bringing the institution into disrepute. This is despite the fact that selling sex is a legal activity in England and Scotland and the fact that many of the same institutions have anti-bullying and harassment policies in place that support individual privacy. The authors concluded the following:

Although no institution had a policy on staff/student involvement in commercial sex, all of these responses implied that the institution concerned viewed such involvement with 'taken for granted' disapproval. It is also clear (...) that staff/student participation in commercial sex is widely perceived as some kind of institutional threat (Cusick et. al, 2009, p. 191).

However, it is now incontestable that across the higher education landscape substantial numbers of students are involved in the sex industry and that these students will bring their concerns regarding their health and wellbeing with them when they come to study (Sagar, Jones, Symons, & Bowring, 2015). This raises concerns that the higher education institutional stance with regards to student sex work is potentially detrimental to the wellbeing and welfare of students who are engaged in the sex industry. Furthermore, nothing is known about how higher education staff deal with the issue. If the needs of student sex workers are to be addressed, then students' relationship with frontline staff has a particular significance. It is important that those people who are expected to play a role in the wellbeing of students are knowledgeable about a myriad of complex issues relating to sex work and that they are aware of the legalities of sex work and appropriate referral pathways should it be necessary to use them.

The aim of the study presented here is to clarify how student sex work is dealt with in the higher education environment in Wales. While there are clearly important differences between different types of sex work, for example in terms of whether or not there is a direct intimate contact with a client or in terms of how the work is organized (e.g. selling sex in a parlour versus independently from home), we are interested in institutional responses towards all sorts of sex work given that these can all lead to institutional scrutiny and elicit concerns about the university's reputation. Attention is paid to higher education policy as well as the experiences of higher education staff. Based on the results, suggestions are made for the improved social inclusion and wellbeing of students who work in the sex industry. More specifically, the following five research questions are formulated:

1. What policies do higher education institutions in Wales have in place with regard to student sex work?
2. Do higher education staff have experience with students engaged in sex work?
3. How do higher education staff respond to students engaged in the sex industry and are they able to provide the support that might be needed?
4. Do higher education staff have a good understanding of the laws on sex work?
5. What do higher education staff need to be able to deal appropriately with a situation of student sex work?

The study makes use of data that were collated in the course of *The Student Sex Work Project* which is a three-year research project that was instigated to produce relevant empirical evidence on student sex work that will inform the development of policies and protocols which can be embedded into UK higher education. However, the findings will be of interest to all higher education institutions where student sex work exists.

Method

Quantitative and qualitative data are used in a complementary way. The research question on higher education institutional policy is answered by making use of 'Freedom of Information' requests. The research questions on higher education staff's experiences, perceptions and needs are explored through both survey data and personal interviews.

Freedom of Information Requests

Under UK legislation, the public holds the right to access information that is held by public authorities which is implemented under the 'Freedom of Information Act 2000' (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents>). Freedom of Information requests were sent to all (nine) Welsh universities and all universities responded to this request. The request asked the institutions to provide information on the following areas:

- the existence of policies at the higher education institution in relation to supporting students involved in the sex work industry
- the processes carried out by a member of staff, if a student was to disclose working in the sex work industry
- the procedures undertaken if a student was to be discovered working in the sex work industry

University Case Study

Participants and Design

An online survey was distributed among all staff from one university in Wales (with over 10,000 students) by sending an email with the invitation to participate. In all 138 staff members replied, forming a self-selected volunteer sample. The survey was granted ethical approval in 2013 by the College of Law Research Ethics board at Swansea University.

Questionnaire items

Questions addressed respondents' role within the university, and whether their job involved direct contact with students (yes/no). Further questions were only asked to those who held roles which involved direct student contact (N = 106).

Experience with student sex work. Respondents were asked whether or not a student had ever disclosed on engagement in any of a number of listed activities connected with the sex industry. Those who experienced disclosure were asked to provide further details on this including their response to the disclosure by means of an open-ended question. They were also asked whether they knew where to find guidance, advice or support on the issues of student sex work in order to meet the needs of the student (yes/no). In addition to actual disclosure, respondents were asked whether they had ever suspected a student to be involved in sex work even if the student had not disclosed this (yes/no), and why that was the case.

Perceived needs among staff to deal with student sex work. Respondents were asked what they would need if a student were to disclose engagement in the sex industry. They were presented a list of six possible options and multiple options could be ticked (e.g. 'a work

colleague to talk to about the disclosure' or 'information about the law around sex work'). Respondents were also asked whether or not they would benefit from any training, guidance or policy on the matter (yes/no) and for those who said 'yes' which of five possible initiatives they would find useful (e.g. 'online guidance' or 'face-to-face training').

Perceived legality of sex work activities. Respondents were asked whether or not their response to a potential disclosure would depend on the legality of the activity concerned (yes/no). Respondents' knowledge on the legality of different activities related to the sex industry was measured by presenting them a list of various activities whereby the respondent had to indicate for each activity whether or not they thought this is legal in Wales.

Personal interviews with Higher Education staff

Qualitative information was retrieved by personal interviews with student support staff and elected Student Union officers (who are also on the payroll of the university). In all 31 respondents (21 female, 10 male) were interviewed, spread over the at that time twelve Welsh universities (currently merged into nine universities). Those interviewed were recruited either from contact made at the launch conference of *The Student Sex Work Project* or from contacting staff across Welsh higher education institutes. Just under half (n = 14) were staff who worked within student support services (three nurses, five counsellors, five support services staff, one financial adviser), while the remaining 17 were elected Student Union officers. All data which are presented have been anonymised and the identities of participants are not disclosed. Ethical approval was granted in 2012 as part of the *Student Sex Work Project* ethical approval.

Questions addressed whether students had disclosed participation in any of a number of listed activities related to the sex industry, and if they had - what the nature of the disclosure as well as the response of the respondent were. Additional questions addressed speculations on students' involvement in the sex industry, perceived support needs of student sex workers, the perceived legality of different types of activity connected to the sex industry, knowledge of services and policy with regards to student sex workers, and the perceived appropriateness of a specific policy on the issue.

Findings

Research Question 1: What policies do higher education institutions in Wales have in place with regard to student sex work?

The Freedom of Information requests showed that student sex work is not an issue that has been on the agenda of higher education institutions in Wales. First, with regard to the question on the university's policy to support student sex workers, four out of the nine universities referred to their policy of offering individualised, 'tailored' support for all students and to provide equal access to existing health, wellbeing and support services. This was a highly positive finding considering that the needs of student sex workers are not uniform, as discussed in the introduction. Reference was also made to existing working relationships with support services outside the university. One university, however, stated that there is no need for any policy given that student sex work 'is not an issue' (sic).

Second, universities had no specific formal processes in place that staff can carry out if a student were to disclose working in the sex industry. Six universities mentioned that action would be undertaken depending on the needs of the student, and referred to the existing

formal referral processes to available services (e.g. financing, sexual health or counselling). There was one university in which staff had been given training on the subject and collaborated with 'Women's aid'. One university limited its response to providing a link to the university's student support centre, suggesting that regular protocols for service provision would apply.

Third, universities had no procedures in place if it was discovered that a student was working in the sex industry. Again, universities would treat such a case in much the same way as any other situation, meaning that they would take on a personal approach and take appropriate action depending on the students' needs (e.g. look at opportunities for financial aid or emotional support). One university referred to collaborations with the police and a rape crisis centre, suggesting that student sex work was interpreted in terms of sexual assault. Two universities indicated that they would take action against the student in case the university's reputation would be put at stake, particularly when the student's behaviour would be subject to some sort of 'police or legal investigation'. It was also noted that a 'suitability for practice enquiry' might be undertaken where a programme followed was accredited by a professional body. One university limited its response to providing a link to the university's policy on student conduct and discipline.

Thus, most universities in Wales indicated to take on an individualised approach to students who work in the sex industry but no university mentioned any specific policy towards student sex work. It is therefore not clear whether universities are aware of the specific needs that student sex workers may have, especially in terms of a need for confidentiality. In addition there are some universities who would look at the issue from the angle of disciplinary action rather than the provision of tailored support.

Research question 2: Do higher education staff have experience with students engaged in sex work?

Of the 106 members of staff that participated to the case study and who had a role that involved direct student contact, 12.3 per cent (13 respondents) reported having received at least one disclosure of sex work from a student. The most common form of activity disclosed was erotic dancing and stripping (nine students), followed by prostitution and escorting (seven students), glamour modelling (four students), being a naked butler (two students), being a professional dominant or submissive (one student), acting as a receptionist in a brothel, sauna or massage parlour (one student), and being a driver for sex workers (one student). In addition to actual disclosure, several of the staff members indicated to have had 'hunches' about students being involved in the sex industry.

Also during the personal interviews with university staff, it was discussed that there had been speculations about certain students being involved in the sex industry:

There have been quite a few cases where we, you know, looking through bank statements and looking at income expenditure reports, income and expenditures don't add up and you make a judgement I suppose, and the wondering comes in. (R10-Head of Student Support)

Some staff were also concerned that the issue of stigmatisation would prevent students disclosing to them. For example, there was a concern that students might feel that they could not disclose to a support service as it might become general knowledge on their academic record:

Our mission statement is focussed on the non-judgement nature that you get when you come here. It is very much student-centred, so we aren't going to judge what the student may or may not be doing. The worry you get with students is that the thing they'll tell you will end up on their academic record, which is a mythical thing which doesn't exist anyway. There is just no way that could happen. (R11-Head of Student Support)

Research question 3: How do higher education staff respond to students engaged in the sex industry and are they able to provide the support that might be needed?

The university case study and the personal interviews with university staff showed that disclosures were dealt with very differently, from a 'doing nothing' approach to two responses of warning the student that if they did not cease, there would be some form of disciplinary action. Also practical advice on sexual health and on counselling was offered and referrals had been made to student support services, the GUM clinic (GenitoUrinary Medicine) and a Drugs Project. The following quotations from the university case study illustrate responses where the main concern was the university's and the profession's reputation:

I was concerned as the student was training to be a health care professional and there would seem to be a conflict of interest here between needing the money and being a role model for society. Following discussions about this with the student and with other staff in the college the student decided not to continue with this work. (Survey R44-University tutor)

The student was advised that posing for pictures while scantily clad could put herself at risk and bring the reputation of both the university and the profession for which she was being trained into disrepute. She was advised to ensure that if she continued to post pictures on Facebook that she must not add anything that could link her to the university or her chosen profession. (Survey R140-University tutor)

However, in comparison, we also received responses from the university case study that indicated that the primary concern of staff was the student's wellbeing.

I provided my personal work contact details so that she did not have to deal with multiple members of staff regarding her situation. (Survey R112-Student services staff)

Likewise, one Head of Student Support (R10) stated at interview:

It was a chat around the 'do you really want to do this? Are you doing it purely because of the money side or is it something you want to do? How are you keeping yourself safe? Who knows you're going?' So we were talking around safety and why she was doing it and were there any other alternatives because it was purely for the money.

Five out of the thirteen respondents from the university case study who experienced a disclosure confirmed that they did not know where to look for support or guidance. Also the personal interviews with university staff showed that service provision for student sex

workers was not something they had previously thought through. There tended to be an assumption that the main support need of student sex workers would be sexual health and safety, as well as emotional- or wellbeing support. Overall, support staff indicated the need for an individualised approach and signposting the student to the most appropriate support service:

There would actually be a journey that we would want to engage the student in, with regards to the presenting issue, the underlying issues and the resolution to all of that, and the underlying issues can be several, financial, emotional, legal, whatever. Those services we provide are based around dealing with people as individuals and finding for them a support package and a resolution which works for them as an individual. (R12-Head of Student Support)

It was also suggested by an elected Student Union officer that not all students who work in the sex industry necessarily need support and that confidentiality would be key:

They might be absolutely fine, it depends what their reasons were for getting in to it. Potentially like emotional support or just someone to talk to I think is important. Because it might be a case where they don't talk to anyone about it and so having a confidential space where they know it's not going to get back to anyone, I think it's really important. (R26-Student Union Officer)

Research question 4: Do higher education staff have a good understanding of the laws on sex work?

One third of the respondents that participated in the university case study expressed the view that the perceived illegality of an activity would affect how they would respond to a student upon disclosure (36.8 per cent). An even higher proportion indicated that it would affect what they would do in terms of follow-up (42.6 per cent). The results further showed substantial discrepancies between the actual and the perceived legality of various activities that are related to the sex industry. Table 1 shows for each activity that was presented the percentage of the respondents that thought that activity was legal and the actual legality of that activity according to the law for England and Wales. Selling sex on the street was largely known to be illegal while working as a stripper or erotic dancer were clearly known to be legal. There was a lack of clarity about selling sex in a private place and less than one in three respondents knew that this is a legal activity. Also selling sex through an online webcam is a legal activity but this was not perceived by all respondents as such. The majority of the respondents thought that selling sex from a brothel is an illegal activity which it is not; it is brothel keeping which is the illegal activity.

Table 1. Perceived legality of various activities related to the sex industry (N = 106)

	Perceived as legal	Actual legality
Selling sex on the street	9.57%	Illegal
Buying sex on the street	10.52%	Illegal
Selling sex independently in a private place (1)	29.78%	Legal
Buying sex from an independent sex worker in a private place (1)	29.47%	Legal
Selling sex from a massage parlour or brothel	11.95%	Legal
Purchasing sex from a massage parlour or brothel	14.89%	Legal
Selling sex under the same roof as someone else (2)	7.44%	Illegal

Working as a stripper in a strip bar or club	95.74%	Legal
Working as a pole dancer or lap dancer in a bar or club	94.73%	Legal
Working as a topless waiter or waitress	86.02%	Legal
Running a brothel	6.31%	Illegal
Assisting in the running of a brothel	10.58%	Illegal
Providing sexual services through an online webcam	52.68%	Legal
Providing sexual services through phone chat lines	67.74%	Legal

(1) such as from a privately owned house or flat

(2) thus at least two sex workers who work from the same private place

Also during the personal interviews with higher education staff it was found that the laws on sex work are very confusing. An element that feeds the confusion was that the laws are not always put into practice:

This is going to sound quite silly of me but I'm not entirely sure what a brothel is? Because we have one on (*name of road*) and as far as I know that's a strip bar although it probably also has other services which aren't made apparent to the licenses of the building. (R20-Student Union Representative)

Research question 5: What do higher education staff need to be able to deal adequately with a situation of student sex work?

The respondents that took part in the university case study were asked what they would need if a student were to disclose engagement in the sex industry. The majority (62.8 per cent) indicated that they would need university policy or guidance around the topic; almost half (45.7 per cent) indicated they would need information about services; 40.4 per cent would need information about the law; 29.8 per cent would need a professional to discuss disclosure with; and 25.5 per cent would need a colleague to discuss disclosure with. A minority of 14.9 per cent said that they would not need any information or support.

With regard to the need for specific guidance and training on the issue, one third of the respondents (37.2 per cent) felt that they would benefit from this. When asked to specify what method of delivery would be appropriate to them, online guidance was by far the most popular (indicated by 65.4 per cent of the respondents), followed by short face-to-face training (55.8 per cent), paper guidance (34.6 per cent) and substantial learning that would require more time (15.4 per cent).

The personal interviews with higher education staff confirmed that some staff would find it useful if they could fall back to university policy in case a situation of disclosure would occur:

I think it's that kind of situation that might not happen very often but it would be really useful to know what to do in that situation or to quickly find out what to do in that situation. Anyone that gets that disclosure you've got a real range [of responses] especially because of the moral issues. What will be said to that student [on disclosure], you want to make sure that it's not 'that's disgusting!' can you imagine? (R26-Student Union Representative)

As the following quotation illustrates, some participants were very concerned that the university should have appropriate policy in place:

If students feel that they have no option but to do sex work, so I'm not talking about it being an optional lifestyle, but if students are at a point where they feel they have no other option but to do this in order to feed themselves, then that's something we need to look at and deal with and we need to have a policy on it and we need to look at it and deal with it. (R8-Support Service Staff)

At the same time, however, some respondents were more wary towards policy and argued that policy should not be too restrictive or explicit:

I don't like policy; I prefer guidelines because I like to have the ability to make my own inferences. Policies are too restricting. (R5-Student counsellor)

I feel this should be covered by bigger robust policies. We should not have a policy for everything, it should all be covered. (R13-Head of Counselling Services)

While the need for training was not specifically discussed during the personal interviews, the respondents did mention that there is a need for raising awareness on the issue:

It's all awareness, if you don't know then how can you help them? What does sex work mean? What sort of support are they likely to need? Would they be offended if somebody said 'why are you doing that?' (R10-Head of student support)

One staff member referred to the benefits experienced with regard to training that she had received on the issue of sexual assault and thought that staff would similarly benefit from training on the issue of student sex work:

We had some excellent training about the support that's available locally to students who have been victims of sexual assault and it really, amongst the whole department, raised the issue and we became more aware and more comfortable in discussing it amongst ourselves, of being confident about knowing what to do if that comes through the door or we get that phone call, and even just dealing with students who perhaps do disclose something. So given the sort of response to that and the positive response that we had amongst the staff about that, then absolutely it would be really, really useful. (R9-Financial advisor)

Discussion and conclusive comments

A significant number of higher education staff have experienced students' disclosure on engagement in the sex industry or have had presumptions on such engagement. At the same time, there are currently no specific provisions or policies in place at any Welsh university – a situation which Cusick et al.'s (2009) study suggests is likely to be mirrored throughout the UK. Likewise, given the paucity of research in this area we would suggest that this could travel far beyond the UK, across Europe and further afield. Given the lack of guidance for staff in this area, it is not surprising to find that in our study few higher education staff members felt able to offer advice or support to students on issues around sex work, despite being able to identify a number of needs which included sexual health, safety and general student wellbeing support. In addition, staff responses indicated poor understanding of the

legality of a range of activities associated with the sex industry and an expressed desire to have some policy or guidance around the issue.

The finding that higher education institutions as well as higher education staff indicated the need to adopt an individualised approach for student sex workers is definitely sensible. A large-scale quantitative research on student sex work points to the diversity of the student sex worker population in terms of motivations, experiences as well as needs (Sagar, Jones, Symons, Tyrie, & Roberts, 2015) and therefore any approach to student sex workers should be tailored to individual circumstances. However, there are certain issues that are of particular importance with regard to student sex work. As such that same study on student sex work indicated while some student sex workers fear violence, a significant issue for participants was the need to keep sex work secret and fear of stigmatisation. These issues need particular attention in any individualised approach and demand heightened attention to student confidentiality.

While the study showed that most of the higher education institutions in Wales did not take on an explicitly exclusionary stance towards students who work in the sex industry, there were several issues that need to be addressed in order to make the higher education environment an inclusive and safe place for all students, including those who take up work in the sex industry. It was found that higher education institutions remain concerned about student occupations within the sex industry and behaviour that could be deemed to bring the reputation of the university either of the profession for which the student is training into disrepute. The fear for damaging the university's reputation does not weigh up, however, to the risk of discriminating against the student and higher education institutions have a pastoral responsibility towards their students. Essentially, the universities' responsibilities lie not in censoring or policing what their students do away from the campus but in ensuring their wellbeing on it. As Cusick et al. (2009) argue, any potential institutional enquiries into the circumstances of a student's involvement in commercial sex which is a facet of their private life ought to be prohibited under the harassment and bullying policies which most institutions operate. Furthermore, given that sex workers are known to easily fall victim to stigmatisation and discrimination (Sanders, 2005), higher education institutions have a role in protecting student sex workers in much the same way as they have policies in place to protect other minority groups.

Likewise, a range of professionalisms continue to implement professional codes of practice that may render a student who engaged in a sex industry occupation 'unfit for practice'. The Nursing and Midwifery Council Guidance on Professional conduct for example demands that students not only possess the skills, knowledge and good health to carry out nursing and midwifery safely and effectively, but also that the student possesses 'good character'. Students are reminded at clause 53: '*...your behaviour and conduct inside and outside of the university and clinical placement, including your personal life, may impact on your fitness to practice and ability to complete your programme*'. Further clause 54 demands that students '*uphold the reputation of your chosen profession at all times*'. The great irony here of course is that research has made links for many years between sex work and the caring professions (Sanders, 2005). Also, sex worker testimonies indicate that sex workers sometimes see themselves as sexual health educators and therapeutic counsellors (Sanders, 2006) and there is a growing acceptance of sex workers who work specifically with disabled clients (see for example, TLC Trust, 2008). Perhaps the greatest paradox in the context of the nursing profession is that the Royal College of Nursing supports the decriminalisation of sex work (the removal of laws that criminalise the selling of sex) and has done since 1995 (Carvel,

2005). Back in 1995 the College highlighted the need to rid sex workers of stigma, shame and victimisation – social conditions that prevent workers from accessing health services (Clement, 1995).

It is clear that policy/guidance and training can go some way in providing a more inclusive higher education environment. This would assist staff at higher education institutions to approach student sex work appropriately and confidently. However, the individual and collective obstacles to providing effective support are further hindered by the widespread inaccurate perceptions regarding the legality of various kinds of sex work as well as the stigma attached to sex work occupations. While addressing the wide variety of professional codes of practice a student sex worker may fall foul to lie beyond the remit of this study, we call upon professional bodies to re-engage in discussion regarding sex work occupations and fitness for practice – particularly given the social and economic mainstreaming of the sex industry (Bretns & Sanders, 2010).

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