Justice and Sex Work: Developing and De-centring Debate

**The gig economy: Learning from sex work**

*‘How the state pimps us all’*

Ruby

*Red Umbrella Sweden*

Jenny Kronman

*Department of social work, Gothenburg University, Sweden*

Contact: jenny.kronman@socwork.gu.se

Research on platform economies and the gig economy have gained increased scholarly attention in the last decade. Critical platform studies (Alfonsson, 2019; Aloisi, 2015; Fagioli, 2021) argues that the economy of work on-demand via apps restructure labor and creates new forms of precarity, mostly focusing on the situation for migrants. However, research fails to recognize sex work as part of this economy, and how such work has existed long before the gig economy (and on-demand apps) became popularized.

In the mainstream Nordic context, sex work is considered as violence against women, as exploitative and therefore as *non-work*. However, considering the vast Marxist literature on labor, work is per definition exploitation of the bodies of workers. The Nordic law, policy, and discourse on sex work as violence and non-work, makes it almost impossible for sex workers to gain recognition, to unionize, claim labor rights and basic protection. While it is not illegal to sell sex, everyday acts are criminalized through means of surveillance, policing, evictions, and deportations. The Swedish state positions sex workers as unworthy of the state, yet not their taxes.

Anti-trafficking organizations campaign to shut down sex work internet platforms, without recognizing that it pushes sex workers ‘back to the street corners’. Benefits of online platform work are more agency, safety, and financial stability for sex workers. However, sex workers are also negatively affected by the platforms’ design and policies, which are developed without consideration of sex workers’ health, safety, and wellbeing (ESWA, 2023).

We argue that research on the precarisation and platformisation of work has much to learn from sex work. Drawing on insights from sex workers, we suggest other ways of understanding work by centering experiences of workers in the intersections of criminalization, informalization, and the gig economy. In doing so, we make visible the tensions, contradictions, and continuations of exploitative labor.

. I took part to this online/tech sex work reading circle some time ago and here is a list of resources on the topic I had on my Zotero. I am sure these will be of use for you in working your paper forward and situating your work in ongoing discussions. There is a lot of new research coming out on this topic! And yours should be there with them ☺ Please ask me questions if you are not able to locate some of the resources.

Anon. n.d.-a. “ACLU Opposition to S. 3398, the EARN It Act.” *American Civil Liberties Union*. Retrieved April 2, 2020 (https://www.aclu.org/letter/aclu-opposition-s-3398-earn-it-act).

Anon. n.d.-b. “Anti-Trafficking Review Issue 14.” Special Issue – Technology, Anti-Trafficking, and Speculative Futures

Are, Carolina, and Susanna Paasonen. 2021. “Sex in the Shadows of Celebrity.” *Porn Studies* 8(4):411–19. doi: 10.1080/23268743.2021.1974311.

Beebe, Bianca. 2022. “‘Shut Up and Take My Money!’: Revenue Chokepoints, Platform Governance, and Sex Workers’ Financial Exclusion.” *International Journal of Gender, Sexuality and Law* 2(1):140–70. doi: 10.19164/ijgsl.v2i1.1258.

Bhalerao, Rasika, and Damon McCoy. n.d. “An Analysis of Terms of Service and Ofﬁcial Policies with Respect to Sex Work.”

Blunt, Danielle, and Zahra Stardust. 2021. “Automating Whorephobia: Sex, Technology and the Violence of Deplatforming.” *Porn Studies* 8(4):350–66. doi: 10.1080/23268743.2021.1947883.

Carolina Are. 2021. “The Shadowban Cycle: An Autoethnography of Pole Dancing, Nudity and Censorship on Instagram.” *Feminist Media Studies* 0(0):1–18. doi: 10.1080/14680777.2021.1928259.

Grant, Melissa Gira, Melissa Gira Grant, Melissa Gira Grant, Melissa Gira Grant, Melissa Gira Grant, Melissa Gira Grant, Melissa Gira Grant, Melissa Gira Grant, Melissa Gira Grant, Laura Weiss, Laura Weiss, Katelyn Burns, Katelyn Burns, Melissa Gira Grant, Melissa Gira Grant, Gabriel Arana, and Gabriel Arana. 2021. “The Real Story of the Bipartisan Anti–Sex Trafficking Bill That Failed Miserably on Its Own Terms.” *The New Republic*, June 23.

Hardy, Kate, and Camille Barbagallo. 2021. “Hustling the Platform.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120(3):533–51. doi: 10.1215/00382876-9154898.

Office, Contact Information Contact: Frederique Mazerolle Organization: Media Relations. n.d. “Using Online Ads to Spot Human Trafficking.” *Newsroom*. Retrieved April 30, 2021 (https://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/channels/news/using-online-ads-spot-human-trafficking-330687).

Stardust, Zahra, Danielle Blunt, Gabriella Garcia, Lorelei Lee, Kate D’Adamo, and Rachel Kuo. n.d. “High Risk Hustling: Payment Processors Sexual Proxies and Discrimination by Design.”

Stegeman, Hanne M., Olav Velthuis, Emilija Jokubauskaitė, and Thomas Poell. 2023. “Hypercategorization and Hypersexualization: How Webcam Platforms Organize Performers and Performances.” *Sexualities* 13634607231170174. doi: 10.1177/13634607231170174.

Stuart, Rachel. 2022. “Webcam Performers Resisting Social Harms: ‘You’re on the Web Masturbating… It’s Just about Minimising the Footprint.’” *International Journal of Gender, Sexuality and Law* 2(1):171–98. doi: 10.19164/ijgsl.v2i1.1259.

Swords, Jon, Mary Laing, and Ian R. Cook. 2021. “Platforms, Sex Work and Their Interconnectedness.” *Sexualities* 136346072110230. doi: 10.1177/13634607211023013.

Uttarapong, Jirassaya, Ross Bonifacio, Rae Jereza, and Donghee Yvette Wohn. 2022. “Social Support in Digital Patronage: OnlyFans Adult Content Creators as an Online Community.” Pp. 1–7 in *CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems Extended Abstracts*. New Orleans LA USA: ACM.

VaughnHamilton. [2022] 2022. “SW\_Research.” This is Vaughn’s list of sex work resources, there is a special section for tech & sex work, check it and check her out!

https://github.com/VaughnHamilton/SW\_Research/blob/ffcc5cbc8fdb46091435fded5eacc068bfc58483/README.md

Easterbrook-Smith, Gwyn. 2022. “OnlyFans as Gig-Economy Work: A Nexus of Precarity and Stigma.” *Porn Studies* 1–16. doi: 10.1080/23268743.2022.2096682.

Felkins, Shawna. 2022. “Cripping Sex Work: Disabled Sex Workers and Racialized Disgender in the Online Sex Industry.” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 42(2). doi: 10.18061/dsq.v42i2.9175.

Sanders, Teela, Jane Scoular, Rosie Campbell, Jane Pitcher, and Stewart Cunningham. 2017. *Internet Sex Work: Beyond the Gaze*. New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

Siegel, Karolynn, Alan Chen, and Eric W. Schrimshaw. 2023. “Dating and Hookup Apps and Websites as Facilitators of Entry into Sex Work.” *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*. doi: 10.1007/s13178-023-00809-z.