

How's a man to work

I know I'm a better, stronger more confident person when I'm doing sex work. This is never more obvious than after a period of not working. Having made the decision to go back to sex work late last year, I took the opportunity to reflect on male sex work and the options that were available to me in terms of where and how I could work.

The opportunities to work are vastly different for men and women. In Victoria there are 96 licensed brothels; only two of these have male sex workers. There are 28 escort agencies and only four advertise male workers. This creates an interesting scenario for the Victorian sex industry; we can observe the effect of having a small niche sector looks like within a larger market and we have a "mainstream" market that we can compare it to.

In theory, having a small number of workplaces has its advantages, particularly for licensees: the pool of clients isn't divided by many businesses; workplace standards and practices can be more easily set and controlled; and workers are able to look at a whole sector of the industry and decide whether or not it suits them.

Conversely, there are also market disadvantages to this situation: limited market outlet and therefore awareness leads to a limited capacity for the industry to promote business to new clientele; the control of working conditions is unbalanced in favour of owners/operators (eg: according to anecdotal reports from sex workers some licensees take upwards of 50% of the booking fee); and sex workers have limited options in terms of a venues to work.

While the pros and cons can form market stability with a large number of businesses (as can be generally observed in the female sex work sector), the same cannot be said about the smaller male brothel market. In order to be viable, businesses in this small niche market would have to tweak practices. In Victoria, there are no exclusively male brothels; these are dependent on trade generated by transfemale sex workers. While opening more male brothels could improve this situation, a decision made by VCAT in 2010, to block the opening of one in South Melbourne, demonstrates the complex factors that are preventing progress.

The evaluations that can be made about the availability of working opportunities can be argued out and the evidence that can be produced to make one assertion against another can make an excellent

doctorate thesis. I won't have enough space here to explore these with due respect. What is beyond argument is the observed outcomes of such a situation. Male sex workers have consciously reacted to the limited options the Victorian sex industry has given them. Despite only making up an estimated 10% of the workers, they represent approximately 50% of registered exempt escorts. Clearly, sex workers are make decisions about how they work and these can be based on the opportunities afforded to them.

So where do I work? Based on the options available to me and considering factors that limit the time I am able to devote to sex work, I only had two choices: work for an escort agency or go private. After a quick survey of escort agencies at the time, it was clear that from the amount of work available at the time (January) going private was to be the only way I could work. Having worked for a couple of months, some interesting observations can be made:

1. Despite many opportunities for men who want to have sex with men, there is a considerable pool of clients that are willing to access male sex work.
2. Within this group are clients that access the markets that are visible and engages with them. Often to be successful I have had to sell the idea of purchasing sexual services along with the services I offer. I work off a gay social networking site and have engaged with clients who previously would not have considered paying a sex worker.
3. I've had more luck by developing my advertising in a way that is different to traditional ways sex workers promote themselves. I feel that traditional advertising can fall into the trap of "time tested" techniques; this may ignore the fact that sexuality is be a psycho-social phenomena that is dynamic and ever changing. Advertising needs to change with it.

I'm really enjoying my time back at work. I thrive on meeting the challenges and reflecting on my practice to make it better. I'd almost forgotten how much it can build confidence, develop an appreciation of myself and my body and be really fun. It's good to be back.

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