



Journering through the Sex Indu

It was as if the job that I thought nobody would 'really' desire and was lost to me in deep mystique and stigma, was suddenly within my reach and better than I could have ever imagined. I was first introduced into the possibility of working in the sex industry through a friend who was engaging in street based sex work. They exploded colourfully through all my bland stereotypes of any kind of sex worker. They were powerful, highly capable of assessing situations, knew their shit about health and safety. More than anything, they had an inner strength or belief in themselves that no matter what, they would do what it took to take care of themselves. I naively asked them why they would risk their safety by working on the street when they could be working in a 'safe' brothel. To this they replied that this is how they feel most comfortable working in the sex industry, where they could gain the most control over their work and autonomy of their body and the 'risk' they feared was more about policing of street based sex workers. With this introduction to sex work I started exploring my options in the industry. First I tried a strip club. It was easy enough to get a shift but the actual reality of the strip club scene was a little sinking. Most of the women fit comfortably into beauty norms; not many tattoos or piercings, slim, Anglo, long hair. I didn't look like any of them. I was small and brown with dodgy stick and poke tattoos and messy hair. When I complained about this to my friends, they told me that I could use 'being different' to my advantage. Well, yes, I know this but that doesn't make it any less intimidating. It brought back old memories of being in school but a hyper school where all the other girls were seen as the 'popular girls' and I was the new, weird immigrant that didn't know what to do again.

Then I tried my luck at a peep show place. I felt much more comfortable entering the industry here. I was confronted again about my race through clients and managers but this time I had an avenue to explore and define it for myself and felt a little more self-assured. I first became aware of the idea of myself being visibly 'different' when I came to Australia. Initially, I couldn't understand why suddenly I didn't feel as at ease with my environment, as outgoing and expressive as the other Aussies at my school. Everything about me and my family seemed like it was just a little off colour, not quite right. We just didn't function like any of my Anglo friends' families. It was as simple as these little things like talking about sex with my parents. Are you kidding me? I couldn't talk about what I did yesterday without getting into trouble! Even when I eventually grew fairly assimilated and started identifying as Australian, no one else really did. The question on everyone's lips was "where I am from?" 'New South Wales' was just not far enough and I was supposed to be flattered by their curiosity and not just constantly questioning my place in the only country I feel is home. So, working in the sex industry, this was even more exaggerated. I mostly worked with Anglo clients who wanted me for my exoticism. It didn't matter what I wore or did or the fact that I spoke with an Australian accent, I was always exotic. The difference was, in the sex industry, I actually got something in return for being 'exotic' and not just a feeling of 'otherness' by well-meaning but oblivious people. I exoticized myself harder than any of the clients, managers or workers and hustled it for all its worth. Is that a tribal tattoo? Hell yes (not at all!), it signifies my coming of age in Madagascar (never been there), a place you have never been or



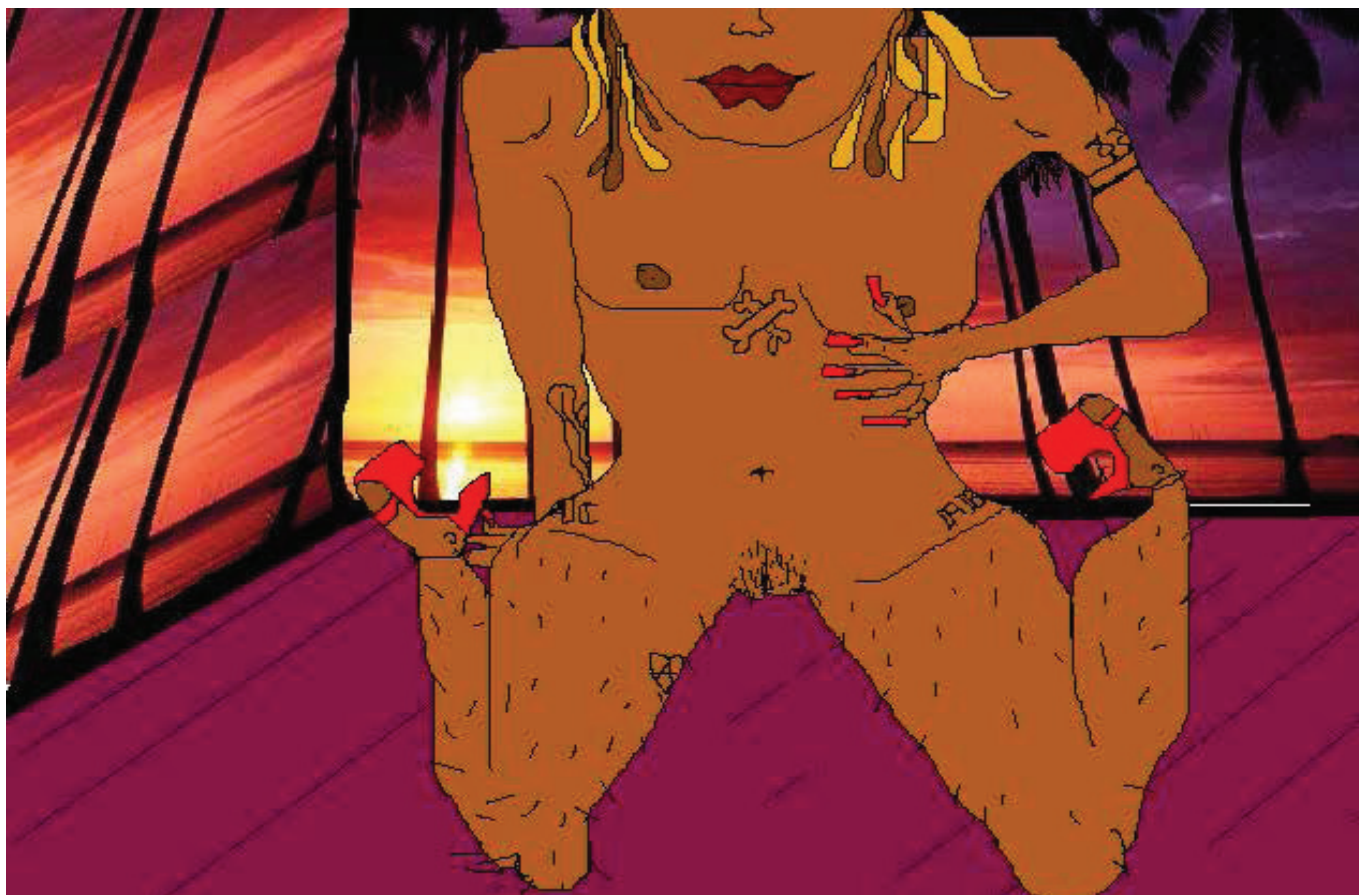
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know anything about. I could take control of my exoticism. I could decide what I wanted to give away.

This all being said, I have been confronted with comments such as being told that I would never make as much as a pretty blonde girl. Maybe, if you don't fit so neatly into these archaic images of beauty you need a little thicker skin or maybe just a little darker skin to power through. What really helped me though were my peers and talking

and eating and finding ways to make sense of it all. But not everybody has this. It would be awesome if our experiences were represented more. We are all different and don't fit into any neat box or stereotype about vulnerability, exploitation or empowerment. We all navigate and experience the industry in our own vibrant and strong ways. We all have a wealth of knowledge about tricks, about coping, about our place in the world that is worth sharing.

- love 'you know, she's kind of brown with dark hair' xx



Pic: Journeying by contributor