

## Editor's note: Ronald Weitzer

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Sexualities

2018, Vol. 21(5–6) 715–716

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DOI: 10.1177/1363460717690714

journals.sagepub.com/home/sex

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Professor Ronald Weitzer has written a short piece to *Sexualities*. It is a commentary in which Weitzer examines the notion of stigma in the context of sex work. He points out that stigma is not determined but has the possibility of change and suggests 'a set of preconditions for the reduction and, ultimately, elimination of stigma from sex work', which includes neutralization of language, a more balanced representation of sex work in the mass media, decriminalization, industry mobilization, sex worker activism, and intervention from the academia. We thought this piece would generate discussion and thus open up theoretical debate as well as practical concern about policy and legislation regarding sex work and stigma. We then invited scholars to comment and the following have agreed to write a commentary: Professor Teela Sanders, Professor Wendy Chapkis, Professor Jo Phoenix, and Professor Minichiello (together with Professor John Scott and Mr Cameron Cox).

The result is a lively debate. On the one hand, Minichiello and his coauthors supplement Weitzer's argument by pointing out the different effects of stigma in male and female sex workers and stressing the importance of studying sex work as an everyday practice away from the pathological paradigm, which in turn helps formulate sensible policy and legislation around sex work. Sanders articulates three key ways to further rethink the 'complexities and possibilities of resisting stigma and working toward the project of destigmatization', namely the intersections of sex work stigma with gender differences (e.g. proper femininity) embedded in these sex workers, the activism that has been done by some practitioners inside the industry, and the power of the legal reform. On the other hand, Chapkis and Phoenix both emphasize that sex work (or 'whore') stigma cannot be eliminated without a full examination of how it intersects with other inequalities such as race, class, gender and sexuality. In particular, Chapkis urges us to pay particular attention to the work done by feminist, queer and critical race theory which has analysed whore stigma and proposed 'strategies to resist, subvert, and undermine it', whilst Phoenix argues that the intersectionality of sex work requires one to rethink 'wider

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material inequalities or social power' and even a critique to neo-liberal consumer capitalism.

We now publish Weitzer's original piece, the four commentaries, and his feedback here. We hope this fruitful and exciting exchange of ideas helps us rethink about the nature of stigma (in particular 'whore' stigma) in relation to sex work. Is stigma theoretically useful to grasp the complexity of the lived experiences of sex work? What is the ideological and material function of the stigma? In what ways does sex work stigma interconnect with different types of inequalities embedded in the workers' lives? What are the wider social, cultural, economic and political contexts of understanding stigma? How can stigma be reduced? What are the policy implications of dealing with people who sell or purchase sex? The issues raised in this exchange of ideas force academics, activists and policy makers to rethink about the theoretical usefulness of the notion of stigma and the policy considerations of how to end stigma and other inequalities embedded in sex workers' lives.