

# Spiritualised Sexuality Discourse: Impacts on Value Judgements

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*The realm of consumption of the sexual has long been a heated battle-ground for feminists, with the realm of discourse most often centring on how work in the sex trade can be viewed as making women powerful or powerless. Sexuality has in either circumstance been viewed as something that has power in itself, and the inference is often that it has a place of deep importance on a very fundamental level in human nature. Books such as Pornography: Men Possessing Women had a strong effect in feminism and embodied the stance that sex is the channel through which power is most strongly wielded (Dworkin, 1981). More recently, Ariel Levy (2006) has critiqued the sex industry in the wake of the third-wave movement, suggesting that the sale of sex is merely a route towards further subjugation in the guise of liberation. Many theorists disputing these ideas do so from the stand-point of a spiritualised sexuality, which suggests that bringing the sexual more fully into lived experience as a whole can be a liberating and spiritually healthy experience (Sprinkle, 2001). Neither of these ideologies give a voice to women who may simply feel that their body can be used in many different ways to provide labour to generate an income. These means can range from stacking shelves, to providing sex for a paying customer – the ability to separate one's emotions concerning the sexual may not be a pathology in these circumstances, it may be a useful technique for making money.*

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There has been much heated debate in feminist communities concerning sexuality in mainstream society and the positive and negative impacts of what has been referred to as the 'pornification' of society. By only viewing the spiritual as something which is aligned with sacred texts, it can often be overlooked that spiritualised discourse can still be employed, albeit with relative subtlety. In this article, spiritualised

discourse refers to ideas circulating on the affect of lived experience on some internal spiritual life, leading to happiness, or dissatisfaction, and in some cases even psychological harm. Another defining factor of this spirituality is its essential nature, as something viewed as a fundamental part of all people and therefore taken for granted as a foundation for all further discussion. This pornification argument is thus often conflated with

notions of the sacred or the spiritual element of sexuality, something which in turn impacts the decisions made not just by academics, but by governments. I intend here to provide a brief overview of some of the predominant arguments and a critique of some of the notions underpinning them. Whilst critiques have previously been made of feminist engagement with morally conservative sentiments (see Hollibaugh and Moraga 2000; Vance 1992), I aim to illustrate the broader impact of spiritualised discourse on feminism, even in the 'sex positive' field. Reviewing the style of discourse, which often focuses on the danger or conversely the sacred and positive aspects of sexuality, I will evaluate the impact on women in society today - especially those who choose to engage in the sex industry as a means of income generation. If discussion of the sex industry and sexualisation in general is mired in 'common sense' notions of the essential or the spiritual, the real issues facing women in the industry could become obscured. I conclude by asking whether we are currently in a position to debate the impact of sexualisation in the media without first engaging in an analysis of the fundamental theories and habits of discourse we implement in these debates.

### **The Spiritual Dangers of Sex**

The censorship of explicit material has generally been executed

with the aim of protecting those perceived as vulnerable to the morally corrupting influence of images and texts since the proliferation of medicalised sexual discourse in the Victorian period. There was discussion of the role of sexuality in society previously, but there was a shift in tone, moving more towards the protection of the social body as a medicalised entity whilst at the same time retaining the spiritual notions of previous ages (Foucault 1990). The rhetoric used will be familiar to those who are aware of the debates surrounding contemporary sexualised media: 'Why do people go to dances? Always to amuse themselves, to take part in the common pleasure, and contribute to it, and very frequently to expose themselves wilfully to dangers, and to give freedom to passions they have difficulty in taming even in solitude' (Hulot 1857, 15, original emphasis). These dangers being that 'it is impossible to go to dances and balls without exposing this virtue [of chastity] to the greatest dangers' (Hulot 1857, 28). The control of sexuality on the basis of religious reasoning is clearly described here whilst elsewhere in Hulot's book, the dangers are described as being particularly great to women as they are perceived as being morally weak, seeking the approval of men in the form of sexual advances. Dances are here perceived as being a gateway to the loss of chastity, providing a highly sexualised cultural arena in

which the impressionable upper-class white women would lose sight of the importance of God (Hulot 1857). In an arguably increasingly secularised society it can be noted that the language used still hinges on the assumption of sexuality to have a highly spiritual or at least morally driven element; a notion which shall be examined throughout this paper (Woodhead, 2007).

In more recent decades, Governments have also attempted to control access to materials perceived to be highly sexualised, and it is important to note the additional affect of the economic climate on the pervasiveness of moral conservatism. Ian Taylor (1987) described the rise in moralist rhetoric in the Thatcher years, a time remembered for the financial crisis enveloping Britain. Elliott and McCrone described Thatcherism as voicing ‘the misgivings of many working class people about the changes in sexual morality and in a rhetoric ringing with phrases long familiar in chapel religion’ (cited in Taylor 1987, 309). These misgivings were tapped into to garner support for sweeping legislative reforms, especially involving a huge increase in spending on law and order. This increase was defined as being imperative to solving Britain’s perceived social crisis triggered by Labour’s former ‘permissive’ agenda. Indeed in the wake of riots in 1981, Taylor describes Thatcher’s speeches as urging for a ‘return to “Victorian values”’ (Taylor

1987, 315). Other government members and prominent right-wing allies reinforced this rhetoric; especially the Minister for Social Security, Mr. Howell, who ‘spoke of the sanctity of family life’ and the importance of familial socialisation in maintaining moral order (Taylor 1987, 315). Furthermore, he suggested that the woman’s role of child-minder and domestic labourer was ‘a decision of God Himself’ (Taylor 1987, 315).

### **Moral Conservatism in an Era of Cuts**

As described by Taylor (1987) and others besides, the Thatcher government heralded a period of increased rigidity of moral expectations, with a strong focus on ‘family values’ (Fox Harding 1999). A similar rhetoric can be seen in the often sensationalist coverage of ‘sexualisation’ from the Conservative section of the coalition government. In the current social situation, dealing with the impact of a recession, we once again find ourselves entering a period of increased moral and social conservatism. As in the Thatcher government, such conservatism can be seen embodied in legislation, reforms and reports spearheaded by the government. This reaction is not limited to the Conservative Party, during the Labour government, at a time of deepening concern about the economic state of the country, a report was commissioned by the Home Office into the sexualisation of children. The report recom-

mended that 'lad's mags' be moved above the eye level of young people to avoid potential harm to children due to their seeing images deemed to be inappropriate, and government 'encouragement' of corporate responsibility concerning the sale of sexualised merchandise following industry and parental consultation (Papadopoulos 2010). The report also recommends that gender studies be given a core place in the school curriculum, supported by specialised gender equality training for teachers – these suggestions appear to have been ignored by both the Labour and Conservative/Liberal Democrat governments (BBC News 2011; Papadopoulos 2010; Wintour 2011). In the Home Office report, it is clearly stated that there is no interest in discussing what sexualisation is, or what its proven effects are. Papadopoulos (2010, 3) describes the aim as being to conduct an examination of the impact of this sexualisation through the use of 'empirical data from peer reviewed journals, and evidence from professionals and clinicians'. In a review of the report, Clarissa Smith (2010) criticises this use of the concept of sexualisation, a nebulous term which is fast gaining currency in not just the media, but academic and government reports. She also notes that the bibliography used by Papadopoulos is restricted at best: a full critique of the theoretical underpinnings and methodology used in the research is absent, re-

placed by a complacent acceptance of their findings.

David Cameron has recently commissioned another report into the sexualisation of childhood, seen to be driven by increased commercialisation in this area (Bailey 2011; Wintour 2011). The Bailey Review (2011) echoes the findings of Papadopoulos, asking for compliance with sexualised materials guidelines, by industries involved. Compliance, according to the report, should involve 'modesty sleeves' for magazines featuring sexualised content on their front covers, retailers adhering to codes of conduct regarding clothing for people under the age of 16 regarding sexualised slogans and padded bras, and prohibiting sexualised advertising near schools. Mirroring the rhetoric of the Thatcher era, David Cameron taps into themes recurrent in the mainstream media at times of economic difficulty, encouraging a return to 'family values'. He is quoted in a BBC News article as describing reforms put forward in the wake of the Bailey Review as a 'giant step forward for protecting childhood and making Britain more family friendly' (2011). Such rhetoric glosses over issues not adequately covered in these documents, and the criticisms made by Smith (2010) against the Papadopoulos report are equally apt for the Bailey Review. The debate concerning the definition of 'sexualisation' has been brushed aside in favour of an uncritical acceptance

of the prevailing media view. Even viewing sexualisation as a genuine threat, the recommendations would be extremely difficult to enforce, relying on a subjective judgement on what is to be classified as a sexualised slogan or image. Historically, the definition of what is considered art and what is considered pornography is enough to highlight the problematic nature of such legislation (Andrews 1997; Grant 1975). Aside from the difficulties in enforcing such restrictions as suggested by the report, the question must be asked, how will this impact women working in the sex industry?

As explained by McNair (1996; 2002), the danger presented by even explicit pornographic images is questionable and appears driven by the political and religious right-wing (Fox Harding 1999; Grey 2010). As the arguments in such reports are supported by biased coverage of the sex industry and commercialisation, the result can be the increased stigmatisation of those who choose to engage in the sex industry as a means of earning an income. The results include limited support for workers' rights in the sex industry due to its status as a pariah, and the exclusion women can feel due to the stigma of being a 'sex worker' (Goffman 1968; Roach 2007). In the first page of his Foreword to the report, Bailey states that society 'seems to have become more openly sexualised; the rapidly changing technological environment has its

benefits in so many ways but has also made the seamier side of humanity inescapable' (2011, 2). One of Papadopoulos' recommendations is that 'the government overturns its decision to allow vacancies for jobs in the adult entertainment industry to be advertised by Jobcentre Plus' (Papadopoulos 2010, 16). Women who may have wished to engage in work in the sex industry are thus disallowed from searching for jobs in the same ways that other people do. The industry is being reported against in such a manner that it is accepted as a simple fact that jobs in this industry are harmful and not to be approached in a similar manner to other work. It is clear that the introduction of 'modesty sleeves' for magazines featuring sexualised imagery would adversely impact the sale of such magazines due to the lack of visual advertising.

Sex and sexualisation is pilloried as a dangerous assault on people's psyche and something which can extend to anti-social and sexually aggressive behaviour. This is in spite of evidence suggesting that pornography actually does not cause harm in the ways suggested (Smith 1999). It has been noted that erroneous results may have been caused by the questionable methodologies in the reports (Gauntlett 1998; McNair 2002). The impact of such legislation would not just be the direct restriction of the markets being legislated against, but to further entrench the view of sexuality

as being a dangerous impulse and force in society that needs to be controlled. The stigmatisation following such reforms would no doubt impact the lives of women working, or attempting to find work in the sex industry: there would likely be less job opportunities as people feel reluctant to use the industry, or the negative psychological effects of being stigmatised. These examples of the government report recommendations show without doubt a negative view of any woman wishing to earn money through the use of sexualisation of her body. Not only would work be more difficult to find in a market contracting in the wake of such reforms, women would be further stigmatised due to the work they undertake. Increasingly conservative social attitudes can therefore alienate those with different perspectives on their own sexuality, such as people who may feel at ease with selling sexual services and find this preferable as a source of income generation.

The example of the 'slut walks' which have been recently taking place all over the world exemplify the strength of opinion on the subject of freedom for women to be able to represent their sexuality in the way that they choose to (Pilkington 2011). Women engaging in the sale of the sexual will be presented with less opportunities to get employment of this sort, but it is to be expected that those who do pursue such work will be further demonised as the in-

creasingly conservative social mores espoused by the Conservative/ Liberal Democrat government in the wake of the recession become more deeply engrained. In work which already carries a stigma for those involved, the increase of this stigma could increase the burden on those women who have often made a well considered decision to enter the sex industry.

### **Radical and Second-Wave Discourse**

It has been noted that the religious right have adopted feminist phraseology in attacking the sex industry (Grey 2011; Smith 1999). Whilst it has been argued that feminists may or may not be complicit in this joint attack, it often goes unnoticed that even when not openly religious, there is generally a spiritual element to the language used by anti-pornography campaigners (Grey 2010). Andrea Dworkin, whose work is well-known both in academia and feminist activist communities, has criticised the acceptance of the pornography industry in particular as an acceptance of the subjugation of women. In this sense, the language is predominantly one of the dangers of the sex industry. If we look also at the work of Sheila Jeffreys (1994), the emphasis here is also on the dangers of sexuality misdirected, suggesting that sex is a powerful part of life, something which must be carefully negotiated lest women be damaged in the process. Jeffreys



states that

In order for a lesbian sex industry to be profitable it was necessary to transform lesbian sexuality so that it would take the objectifying form necessary to construct lesbian sex consumers, consumers not just of mechanical products but of other women in pornography and prostitution ...

The result of this dramatic onslaught designed to reconstruct lesbian sexuality has been the partial incorporation of lesbians into the political structures of control of the heteropatriarchy. (1994, 20)

The inference here, one expanded upon throughout her book, *The Lesbian Heresy*, is that women are being forced to accept a patriarchal version of sexuality; one that is not suitable for radical lesbian feminists who are striving to equalise sexual relations.

Moving on to discuss the feminist magazine *On Our Backs*, Jeffreys notes the plethora of advertising spaces dedicated to the sex industry, both products and services: 'They are full of dildos. These dildos are clearly penis-shaped and they come with harnesses so that lesbians can imitate men fucking women' (Jeffreys 1994, 33). She goes on to proclaim that 'the dildos are commonly incorporated into sado-masochistic scenarios presumably because, like the penis, they symbolise male power and the ability to

violate women' (Jeffreys 1994, 33). The description of sadomasochism as something suggestive of a damaged psyche is something often repeated by critics of 'extreme pornography', and is another area in which we can see a spiritualised element to the connecting discourse (American Psychiatric Association 2000; House of Commons 2007; Jeffreys 1994). The real impact of sadomasochism and the reasons for partaking in such activities, or watching sadomasochistic porn, have been examined in other works, suggesting that the negative impacts described are usually done on the basis of limited or inaccurate information (Cross and Matheson 2006; Harper and Yar 2011). This is an example of the regulatory stance taken by not just the government, but feminists in the current era of moral regulation.

The quotes used to describe Jeffreys' (1994) position are selective, being located at the radical end of the feminist spectrum. However, even recently theoretical standpoints have been published which at first appear more mild and balanced, yet are still espousing some of the same value judgements as radical feminists. Unlike Jeffreys' (1994) work, some of this is highly credited in the current milieu. In *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, Ariel Levy (2006) also rails against the sex industry, claiming that feminist engagement in it is indicative of a naive assumption that feminism has

gone too far and has become anti-sex. One problematic area of Levy's analysis is the language she uses, conflating postfeminism, girlie feminism and third-wave feminism (Levy 2006; Showden 2009). Third-wave feminism is used to encompass all, and is more generally replaced by the derogatory pseudonym 'Female Chauvinist Pigs', or yet more concisely, FCPs. This relaxed use of language in a popular feminist text ignores the nuances of these different branches of feminism or post-feminism. Levy speaks in the same terms about groups such as CAKE, whose ideology is admittedly difficult to bracket into the above-mentioned feminisms, yet is instead grouped with discussion about Playboy and 'strippers'. Levy speaks little about the lived experience of workers in lap dancing venues, instead focusing on the idolisation of women working in the industry by those not working in them. However her views on the matter are made clear through the subtext of her book. During an interview for *The Guardian* shortly after the release of her book, Levy maintained that she was not arguing against the sex industry as a whole, rather that she was criticising the blind acceptance of 'porn star' imagery and the negative impact it could have on women striving to achieve equality (Cochrane 2006). Nonetheless, Levy's claim that porn stars are 'are giving up the most private part of their being for public consumption' is clearly sugges-

tive that she views the sexual part of oneself as something that should ideally be cherished and kept away from public view in much the same way that moral puritans of the past have suggested. Crucially, this view of sexuality as something sacred risks obfuscating the real issues often at the forefront of the minds of women working in the industry.

### **The New Feminisms**

On the other end of the spectrum lies Annie Sprinkle, ex-porn star, now 'sexologist' and artist. Sprinkle shot to fame through her live art/sex/education shows, especially her 'Public Cervix Announcement', which involved her allowing members of the public to peer into her vagina with the aid of a tube and a torch to look at her cervix. In a conversation with Linda Montano, Barbara Carrellas, and Gabrielle Cody published on Sprinkle's (2001) website, her personal emphasis on the spiritual becomes clear. Referencing chakras and engaging more with her 'more spiritual, priestess personas', she says of her work that 'it's really been using sexuality as a theme to help us all grow and learn. In the workshops and performances we facilitated together for ten years we saw some incredible magic, beauty, truth, acceptance, transformations' (Sprinkle, 2001). As a primarily personal account, as opposed to one calling for wider change to the view of sex work, the book focusing on Sprinkle, edited by Gabrielle Cody



(2001), should perhaps be viewed in a different light. Yet Sprinkle has claimed to be working in part to allow people to experience the 'healing' effects of the sexual. In spite of the drastically different view of sexuality as a positive source of healing and personal growth, Sprinkle once again engages in the discourse claiming sexuality as something special and sacred to be cherished, but also to be used for personal and group benefit. Here we see a parallel between the morally conservative attitudes and 'sex positive' attitudes, appearing as mirror images yet using surprisingly similar concepts of deeply personal attitudes towards what sexuality entails.

In *Whores and Other Feminists*, Nina Hartley (1997) also expounds the use of sexuality for personal growth. Something that both Hartley (1997) and Sprinkle (2001) agree on is that sex work can be beneficial in nature for the worker and the client, providing a release from loneliness and access to sexual pleasure and gratification. However whilst Hartley declares that sex work has granted her a more positive body image and a space in which she can explore a wider range of erotic experiences, she does not avoid mentioning the material gain which is also a factor contributing to her happiness in her role. Furthermore, Hartley accepts that there are negatives attached to the industry, such as having to be aware that it can involve coming into contact with 'the seamier side of life'

(Hartley 1997, 58). This account is useful as instead of referring only to the internal reasons for and against working in the sex industry, Hartley also describes the material factors that can result in it being a reasonable choice for many people. All jobs have their negative aspects, it may simply be that for some people stripping has less than other jobs they may be qualified to do, for example. Although the account presented in *Whores and Other Feminists* is more balanced on the whole, it is still clear that Hartley does view her sexuality in the same spiritualised manner. She describes that she wants 'to teach people how to use erotic pleasure as a healing force [as a] fulfilling sex life makes all things more bearable' (Hartley 1997, 60). This view of sexuality as a healing force is in itself not necessarily problematic: the problem occurs – as I will discuss further below – when such value judgements are internalised by researchers, who may then impact the lives of women working in the sex industry or those with atypical sexual tastes.

### **Research**

When looking at research into the sex industry it is apparent that there is a great need for reflexivity on the part of the researcher, which can often involve an examination of previous opinions on it. In Catherine Roach's (2007) book, *Stripping, Sex and Popular Culture*, she opens by describing her previous difficulties

in understanding why her friend, formerly an academic, left her job to pursue work as a lap dancer full time. Roach makes clear her initial preconceptions, allowing the reader to assess her views with full context. Roach illustrates the views of women in the industry, tying her theoretical work directly to the accounts of women working at strip clubs and information gleaned from being a non-participant observer watching the shifting fortunes of many of the women involved in her research. It is this sort of reflexive approach, based not just on engaging with theory already in existence, but also involving the generation of new theory when needed to gain further evidence of the lived experiences of women in their own terms. This, combined with triangulation with other research can allow for a space in academia where value judgements can be tested and the views of women's lived experiences to be taken into account.

In *Methods, Sex and Madness* Julia O'Connell Davidson discusses the way in which careful choice of methodological and reflexive techniques proved vital for her examination of prostitution work. As she explains, there are no easy answers or shortcuts for deciding on a methodological approach as there are inherent problems with providing a 'true' account of a person's life and the things influencing it. Pivotal in her research was noting a balance between respecting a person's own

account of their actions and the motivations behind them, whilst also noting external factors, both in terms of structural inequalities and even the impact of the researcher's class grouping (amongst other things) in garnering a very specific account of that 'truth'. As O'Connell Davidson explains, triangulation is important as it allows for a broader view of the same subject, which gives research the chance to be useful. Rather than being just one angle of one group's story, through using other research and carefully examining the methods of discourse, a picture of the various undercurrents affecting people's lives can be achieved.

### **A Theoretical Perspective**

The examples described earlier illustrate the way in which the perceived threat of sexualisation is still linked with notions of the spiritual, in spite of the increasing use of medical and scientific phraseology to describe human experience. From a historical standpoint, the control of sexual urges has been a key point of discourse emanating from the church, suggesting that the sexual should be restricted to marriage, especially with the goal of procreation. As described by Foucault (1990), methods of discourse have shifted from being centred on the religious to scientific and medical discourses, with the state and state apparatus being used to issue the message that only constructive sexuality (procreative sex) is acceptable.

Although there has been a shift to the proliferation of scientific and medical terminology, my examples show that religious and spiritual appeals are still made. The understanding of what sexuality is and the way in which it affects humanity is still made on the basis of religious and spiritual ideals. Those not living and working within the framework of accepted sexuality often find themselves represented as non-productive and anti-social (Colosi 2010; Cross and Matheson 2006; Roach 2007).

The psychoanalytical tradition has long been the proponent of the view that sexuality defines a person on a very deep level, providing further support for those making an essentialist critique of sexuality. When assessing a person's goals and aims and the impact of their thinking on not just themselves but on the world around them, it is their sexuality which is examined and spoken of (Foucault 1990; Freud 1997[1900]; Gagnon and Simon 1974). People are defined by their sexual actions and desires. These definitions can have a profound impact on people's lives, as in the example of homosexuality, people can be considered intrinsically different on the basis of which gender they are sexually attracted to and/or engage in sexual activities with (Gagnon and Simon 1974). There is little doubt that this propensity to encourage discussion of the sexual using accepted definitions and categories is the driving

force behind the ubiquity of sexuality in discourse concerning selfhood (Foucault 1990; Gagnon and Simon 1974). It is the spiritualised element to those discourses which can create a polarising effect, with some people at least publicly corresponding to accepted sexual identities and others being aligned with maladjusted or immoral sexualities (Goffman 1968).

There have been criticisms of the negative appraisal of diffuse sexualities. When reviewing McNair's (2002) work on 'striptease culture', it at first appears that his notions on the 'democratisation of desire' radically challenge the former view of sexuality as something which needs to be controlled and validated. However, McNair places a heavy emphasis on the self-defining aspect of the sexual, referring to sexual cultures and sexuality themselves as categories with minimal questioning of their validity. His statement that 'sex matters' is qualified by the role sex plays in society, from the biological imperative to procreate, to its highly influential status in relation to culture. These are things that I would not argue against, yet I question the heavy emphasis on the self-revelatory role in people's lives that McNair places such emphasis on. As Foucault explains, these ideas are the rails upon which our discourse is currently set, steering us in very particular directions in the course of our investigations. McNair's focus seems in a sense

inevitable as it restricts itself in the same manner; instead of claiming that the proliferation of sexualised discourses (both in text and image) are negative, he claims that people who are defined through particular sexual proclivities are free in a way that they were not before. This sense of the inner self gaining acceptance is one which is common to most writings on this subject, without questioning the nature of sexual discourse on a more fundamental level. The spiritual may not be writ large upon the analysis, but it still remains in the subtext, replacing the 'wrong', with 'right'. Sex work purely as a means to make money is covered, but only briefly, and one senses that this is perceived as a minor note. This is understandable as few people engage in sex work on this level, or at least we know of few, but this is a discussion that would open up the range of exploration of the matter. Allowing discussion on a more theoretical level, for example examining essentialising tendencies in the language we use, would allow us to see beyond the view of sexuality as a deep and defining characteristic of human nature. As McNair notes in his opening discussion, sex is as important as food in many senses, especially when noting prerequisites for the continuation of the human race – yet we are rarely defined by our taste in food.

### **Summary**

Even from the time of the Victorian's religious and medi-

calised judgements on sexuality, we can see a clear focus on particular groups and acts which are problematised. This discourse has continued largely unquestioned, and has been examined on some levels by Foucault (1990) in *The History of Sexuality*. Yet it is only with the examination of this discourse, unpicking and examining the assumptions underpinning it, that we are able to assess which ideas are founded in empirical data and which are the constructs of our culture. Without a broad understanding of the multifaceted nature of women's experiences in the sex industry, media coverage based upon a narrow view of social norms can be more deeply embedded, even in legislature, such as that controlling the production of 'extreme' pornography for example (House of Commons 2007).

In feminism, both in academia and in the media, we can see a spiritualisation of sexuality evidenced by the discourse used. Radical feminists have called for the criminalisation of pornography, representing it as the acceptance of women's subordinate position in society and the dominance of patriarchal violence. The description of the lower status of women has been linked to the expectation for her to give up something private, something deeply personal, as described by Levy (2006). In less radical accounts we can still see the sexual described as an intrinsically private part of the self; the baring of which means the

loss of self on the part of the women involved. The highly publicised nature of some of these accounts (for example that of Ariel Levy) has an effect on the wider public perception of sexuality, in spite of selective use of empirical and documentary evidence. Even moving to the political left of feminism, considering the perspective of women who see the sex industry as something with great potential for positive benefits, the sexual is viewed as a spiritual part of the self in many instances. I call into question the validity of these assumptions and whether they are excluding other voices from the discussion on sexuality and what it means. Some women may perhaps simply find prostitution or lap dancing a convenient and preferable alternative to other minimum wage work. What one person finds demeaning, and another empowering, may for some be a purely rational choice based on material gain. The value judgements made by commentators and researchers should be evaluated, and I call for more reflexive research, particularly that which provides the opportunity to generate new theory as opposed to merely replicating theory in a tick-box manner. The analysis of theory and discourse already in the academic and public domain is important, but so too is the continued generation of new theory, and gathering the accounts of more women working in the sex industry. Once this research enters the public domain

in the same manner as government reports and popular feminist texts, we may see more potential to challenge reckless legislation by governments attempting to pacify voters. The spirituality of sex may be important to some, indeed it may be important to most, however it is ultimately more important not to accept this as a common sense answer to all questions on sexuality.

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