



Carnal Knowledge: Epistemic Injustice and the Wisdom of Whores

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Introduction

Sex work has become a topic of increasing interest among academic research. Unfortunately, the knowledge base of this work has come largely from NGO, journalism, and academics. As we will explore, the voices of sex workers have been significantly lacking. This not only raises ethical concerns about the epistemic practice of this research, but also gives rise to grave ramifications for policy, law, and research—thereby directly affecting the lives of sex workers.

The experience of sex workers is stifled by a “web of stigmatisation” (Wailoo, 2006) which affects both their ability to produce and their

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ability to disseminate the discourse of their lived experiences. This is especially prominent in both popular and academic publications as well as in media discourse surrounding sex work. Both sex workers and certain scholars of sex work have argued that sex workers' unique social location; including a marginalised status, (il)legal working conditions, and stigma—which may or may not be compounded by other forms of additional minority stress (Meyer, 1995)—serves as a counterproductive influence to representing sex work as it actually is (Fox, 2018; Heineman, 2016; Jeffreys, 2010). In particular, sex workers typically do not have the social power to transmit their experiential knowledge in fields such as media or academia. When they do seem to have such, it is usually former sex workers—i.e. those who are currently not engaged in sex work and do not currently experience the multi axis oppressions of sex work—who contribute. There is a risk that their knowledge, given their lack of present engagement, is dated.

This lack of representation is not the fault of sex workers. Instead, throughout this chapter, we argue that it can be understood as a particular form of *epistemic* discrimination and one which has relatively serious real-world consequences. The voices of sex workers have been systematically excluded from academic discussions of sex work and this has caused both misrepresentation of and injustice to the sex worker community. This epistemic injustice is especially egregious given that the knowledge and lived experience of sex workers is essential to understanding how sex work actually proceeds and to implementing best practices in legislation and policies which apply to them.

This is not an entirely unfamiliar situation. As Dalmiya and Alcoff (1993) point out, the practical knowledge of midwives in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was systematically excluded from medical discourse on pregnancy and complications thereof. As they further point out, this isn't independent of the fact that the majority of the discourse was constructed by privileged men. All told, this was not because this knowledge was inaccurate; quite the contrary, it was often more accurate than the standing scientific knowledge. Rather it was because it was communicated in an oral form and didn't have the tops and tails of knowledge produced in more standard academic sources. The result of this was that much useful knowledge was excluded on grounds pertaining

to form, not to matter. Obviously, this was additionally an epistemic injustice towards midwives.

We contend that a similar phenomenon affects the knowledge of sex workers. Unlike midwives of the past, sex workers don't primarily distribute their knowledge orally. Rather, their knowledge is typically distributed through "community stakeholder literature". This "grey literature" is made up of online sources like blogs, listservs, forum posts, websites, peer-led organisation handouts, and email threads, as well as more traditional informal sources like zines, oral testimony, and (in)formal training. Given these repositories of knowledge, as well as standing prejudice against sex work and when the entire context is in mind, it's no surprise that their quite deep wells of knowledge about their work have not informed academic descriptions and analyses of sex work. And this systematic exclusion, we contend, is a significant epistemic injustice.

But what is epistemic injustice? How is it a distinctive injustice and how does it relate to other injustices that are more practical. We will start by outlining this, then turn to applying it to our particular case.

Epistemic Injustice

Epistemic injustice is a phenomenon where the cognitive goods of a class of people are either devalued, misinterpreted, or silenced (*hermeneutical injustice*) or ignored (*testimonial injustice*) (Fricker, 2007). We can say that someone or some group has suffered an epistemic injustice when their particular store of knowledge is badly interpreted (from outside) or simply ignored. Common examples of this include failing to have the ability to express the wrongs committed against you (as in many cases of sexual harassment) or excluding their lived experience as probative (as in the experience of many minority communities).

It is our conjecture in this paper that the knowledge of sex workers—in particular their lived experience concerning sexual health and intimacy in their personal romantic relationships—has been systematically ignored. This, we believe, constitutes a testimonial injustice. There is body of knowledge, established through lived experience, which simply

does not become a part of the academic discourse surrounding the romantic relationships of sex workers.

This knowledge includes the discourse amongst the sex worker community such as community-led publications (zines and blogs), social media, media articles, peer-led organisation publications, sex worker organisation information sheets, and pamphlets. The information contained in this knowledge, we think, is important to understanding the actual lived experience of sex workers. Moreover, that significant chunks of it have been ignored by academics constitutes testimonial injustice.

To be sure, much of this knowledge isn't contained in standard academic publications. But we believe that since sex workers are already such a marginalised population, it's no surprise that much of their store of knowledge isn't present in standard academic sources. Rather, it is often part of what is sometimes called *grey literature*. Defining grey literature isn't easy as it constitutes a bit of a "bucket" category between academic literature and hearsay. Grey literature, as described by Mahood et al. (2014), isn't peer reviewed, it's often difficult to categorise, it requires some kind of hand searching (as a consequence of not being standardly catalogued), and it, as Tillett and Newbold quip, "doesn't stand up on a shelf on its own" (2006). But, when academic literature doesn't work to capture a phenomenon, grey literature becomes, by default, the only place to pass information in a semi-rigorous way. So, to put our point more briefly, we claim that the exclusion of grey literature from the discourse on sex workers relationships, especially their romantic relationships, constitutes an epistemic injustice. Let's now continue exploring what epistemic injustice is, in some more detail.

Epistemic Injustice in More Detail

As the name suggests, epistemic injustice is concerned with wrongs relating to what we believe or what we can evidence. In recent years, this has become a hot button issue as it has been seen that in many contexts, the beliefs and evidence available to some, often non-academic, members of a community have been ignored or elided over (Kidd et al., 2017).

This specific form of epistemic injustice is thus worth singling out as a distinctive phenomenon.

As Fricker (2007) introduced the term, epistemic injustice is a form of discrimination in which “a wrong is done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower” (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). “Capacity as a knower” is perhaps slightly narrow: epistemic injustice should really be more concerned with wrongs that target the epistemic capacities and faculties of someone or some group. That is, a wrong is committed against someone with respect to their beliefs, evidence, or general ability to represent the world around them. Naturally, in such a framework, social power is always at play—since knowledge bears a “socially situated capacity for control” (Fricker, 2007, p. 13). Since our knowledge is often conditioned by our social standing, epistemic injustice has a decidedly political and social aspect. To be blunt, ignoring or misrepresenting our beliefs, testimony, and knowledge can be a violation of our rights both as individuals and as citizens.

Fricker identifies two distinct types of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. *Testimonial injustice* involves undermining or ignoring the credibility of someone’s expressed beliefs and/or lived experience about a subject matter. Or, anyways, when there is a *prima facie* reason to take such testimony seriously. *Hermeneutical injustice*, in contrast, is “the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to persistent and wide-ranging hermeneutical marginalisation” (Fricker, 2007, p. 154). *Hermeneutical*, in this context, pertains to the *interpretation* of one’s experience. So, more straightforwardly, hermeneutical injustice is the injustice of having a significant aspect of one’s experience systematically misinterpreted by those in power.

While we do not deny that there are aspects of sex workers lived experience that are systematically misinterpreted by those in power, we have chosen to focus here on testimonial injustice. This is because we think that this kind of epistemic injustice is particularly apt for the case of sex work. The testimony of sex workers *has* been ignored and this is a serious and rather obvious injustice. Moreover, we believe the data we have is better analysed in terms of testimonial injustice than in terms of hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs in what Fricker

calls the “credibility economy”. This is roughly the social environment where some are afforded high levels of credibility due to various forms of their social features—such as class, gender, physical appearance, educational background, and trade—and some are given nearly no credibility due to their social features. Credibility is itself a valuable social product that we can use and trade with one another to accentuate our own social standing.

We can further unpack this metaphor in the following way: our credibility with one another is a form of social power exchange. By taking seriously our testimony about various things, we are afforded social status. We are, in effect, producers of valuable epistemic goods. This tends to produce further valuable credibility in the future. On the other hand, by not taking our testimony about certain things seriously, we are denied social power. And this lack of social power in turn depletes our credibility about other things. And so on. Our credibility thus plays a valuable part in our testimonial exchanges and our ability or not to be heard and trusted affects our general social standing.

As noted by Fricker, sometimes epistemic injustice which is the product of the credibility economy is systematic—as systematic testimonial injustice “fits into a broader pattern of social justice” (Fricker, 2007, p. 27). Our subject here is a case in point as it is presumably in the light of the profession and prejudices surrounding it that the epistemic testimony of sex workers is ignored in academic literature on sex work. Moreover, as sex workers are often trapped in a “web of stigmatisation”—sex workers often have other social features that lead to stigmatisation, such as being poor, single mothers, people of colour, less access to higher education, and of less heteronormative sexuality and gender—their social standing and their resulting credibility are extremely fraught. Thus, the aforementioned features render sex workers vulnerable to what Fricker (2007) identifies as testimonial injustices vis-à-vis identity prejudice.

Why is this important? In any testimonial exchange, the recipient of the testimony must make a judgement about the credibility of the information received. They have to, in effect, decide the probability of the information being true. This judgement itself is usually informed quite heavily by standing preconceptions about the credibility of the source.

And these preconceptions are themselves often the product of preconceptions about the nature of the source and the distribution (and crediting) of their knowledge in the standing discourse.

Since the testimony of sex workers (as we'll show below) doesn't appear in the academic literature on sex work and since it's this kind of appearance that plays a role in establishing the credibility of sex workers as sources of knowledge, their credibility is further undermined by their lack of representation. To put it briefly, we have a reinforcing cycle of epistemic injustice. As they lack credibility, their knowledge isn't part of the academic sources on sex work. As their knowledge isn't part of the academic sources on sex work, sex workers lack credibility. This is a bit of an ouroboros of epistemic injustice. By ignoring sex worker voices, academic discourse and its subsequent debates amount to nothing more than fluffy hypothesis.

Why do we have this problem? As Fricker points out, it's often due to stereotypes about the social groups which inform how initially credible we find them. It should come as no surprise that sex workers lack the initial credibility which lands them in this circle of injustice. As former sex worker and journalist, Melissa Gira Grant, once wrote "whore is perhaps the first intersectional insult" (Grant, 2014). Sex workers are faced in a conundrum as sex work is one of the only instances in which someone is simultaneously considered a criminal and a victim. They are often characterised as bearing the brunt of a combination of the most marginalised social identities one can carry: drug addicted, homeless, abuse survivor, uneducated, and poor socioeconomic background. Because of this intersectional crux, and the subsequent responsibility to represent them, sex workers are put at a higher disadvantage than other marginalised groups when it comes to representation.

We now turn to establishing that the testimony of sex workers simply does not appear in the academic literature, leaning on the work of Matos and Haze (2019). Our discussion takes a relatively global span of data, looking at studies spanning 5 out of 7 continents. This is meant to respect the fact that sex workers are a migrant heavy population, with high mobility in their living and work situations (Almedom, 2005).

Sex Work from an Academic Perspective: Case Study on Romantic Relationship

The academic literature from, “Bottoms up: a whorelistic literature review and commentary on sex workers romantic relationships” (Matos & Haze, 2019) can be separated into three categories: (A) publications using romantic relationships as the primary object of investigation (Bellhouse et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2015; Matos et al., 1999), (B) publications which incorporate romantic relationships as part of a larger study (Abel, 2011; Bilardi et al., 2011; Dalla, 2002; Sanders, 2004), and (C) publications utilising a sexual health approach (Argento et al., 2015; Bhattacharjee, 2018; Deering, Bhattacharjee, et al., 2011; Deering, Boily, et al., 2011; Deering et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2005; McKeganey & Barnard, 1992; Ramanaik et al., 2014; Syvertsen, Robertson, Palinkas, et al., 2013; Syvertsen, Robertson, Rolón, et al., 2013). In total, 19 academic publications were identified on the topic of sex workers romantic relationships. An analysis of the aforementioned academic literature uncovered three prominent themes running through them: coping with stigma, issues with communication, and a focus on condom use. First, coping with stigma.

According to Bellhouse et al. (2015), sex work stigma functions as a major disadvantage for sex workers in their romantic relationships. For example, according to Jackson et al. (2009), the stigmatised nature of sex work itself situates sex workers in particularly vulnerable emotional states—hence, instances of partner-perpetuated stigma are especially detrimental to the sex workers’ sense of self. Dalla (2000) found that sex workers would internalise sex work stigma and come to the belief that they were less worthy of a loving partner simply because of their sex working status. Notably, it is not only sex workers who suffer from internalising sex work stigma in the romantic relationship. Syvertsen et al. (2013) discovered patterns of partners internalising sex work stigma, thereby harming their relationships and personal emotional health. Numerous academic publications found that in order to ease tension between their work encounters and romantic relationships, sex workers would frequently employ a range of coping mechanisms to combat stigma. Such coping mechanisms largely consist of implementing

boundaries between their personal and professional intimate lives (Abel, 2011; Bellhouse et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2009).

Communication is both a broad and complex issue for sex workers, particularly when it comes to disclosure. Disclosure does not stop and end at disclosing one's sex worker status to a romantic partner but is an ongoing process of what aspects of sex work to communicate as sex workers have to constantly internally negotiate what they may or may not disclose. The effects of disclosing sex work status are mediated by partner response and emotional processing (Bellhouse et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2015). Both Warr and Pyett (1999) and Bellhouse et al. (2015) reported sex workers having negative experiences disclosing their sex work status and the details thereof to a romantic partner. Many studies found that partner jealousy was an issue for sex workers, as it especially affected relationship satisfaction and/or communication (Bellhouse et al., 2015; Bilardi et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2015; Sanders, 2004; Warr & Pyett, 1999).

However, not all communication about sex work was necessarily a negative experience. A minority of the academic literature found positive experiences in communication. When communication was well received by partners, sex workers reported higher levels of support (Jackson et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2015; Ramanaik et al., 2014; Syvertsen, Robertson, Palinkas, et al., 2013; Warr & Pyett, 1999) and closer levels of intimacy (Bellhouse et al., 2015). High quality communication seems essential to dealing with stigma and subsequent relationship quality. Notably amongst the academic literature, communication is presented in a polarised fashion. Either it is a positive or negative experience for sex workers, leaving no room for complex dynamics. This polarisation contrasts with social psychological research, which suggests that communication in romantic relationships is a dynamic process (Guerrero et al., 2017).

Finally, 74% of the academic literature surveyed dedicated some or all of their analytical framework to condom use in sex workers' romantic relationships. This literature appears in two variants; to examine intimacy (Abel, 2011; Bellhouse et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2005; Warr & Pyett, 1999) or for the purpose of formulating HIV interventions (Argento et al., 2015; Bhattacharjee, 2018; Deering, Bhattacharjee, et al., 2011;

Deering, Boily, et al., 2011; Deering et al., 2015; McKeganey & Barnard, 1992; Murray et al., 2007; Ramanaik et al., 2014; Syvertsen, Robertson, Palinkas, et al., 2013; Wolffers, 1999). Notably, *none* of the community stakeholder literature mentioned the topic of condoms. We will return to this below.

Sex Work and Romantic Relationships from the Perspective of Sex Workers Themselves

We want to now highlight 5 themes, emerging from community stakeholder literature on sex work, which are not taken up by academics. “Bottoms up: a whorelistic literature review and commentary on sex workers romantic relationships” (Matos & Haze, 2019) establishes that there is a significant body of community stakeholder knowledge that occurs in grey literature which establishes themes that the academic research relationships were unable to uncover. This literature review analysed, compared, and contrasted, the findings from 19 academic publications and 17 community stakeholder publications on the topic of sex worker romantic relationships.¹ Of these 17 community stakeholder publications, a vast majority—16—illuminated findings/themes not uncovered in the academic research (Bellavue, 2014; Berkovich, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2016; Hooker, 2012; Iselin, 2018; Josephine & Simon, 2016; Josephine et al., 2014; Lewenstein, 2016; McMuffin, 2017; Petro, 2015, 2017; Shakti, 2016; Stryker, 2012; Syre, 2015; Respect Inc, n.d.; SWOP, n.d.).

The first theme from the community stakeholder literature is how sex workers find explaining the intricacies/complexities of their work to be distressing (Fitzgerald, 2016; Josephine et al., 2014; Petro, 2015; Stryker, 2012; SWOP, n.d.). For instance, in an article written for the online newspaper Huffington Post, sex worker Kitty Stryker discloses that navigating this kind of communication can even go as far as coercive sexual situations with partners who do not understand the personal/professional sex divide (Stryker, 2012). In an advice column for sex workers, sex worker Caty Simon suggests that a sex worker do “a bit of Sex Work 101” with the reader’s partner who is already distressed about coming

out before even having to explain the intricacies of the work (Josephine et al., 2014). In the same advice column for sex workers, sex worker Juniper Fitzgerald urges her reader's romantic partner to recognise the complexities of her labour to the extent that he will defend her honour should the situation arise wherein her "labour is reduced to a spectacle" (Fitzgerald, 2016).

Our second theme is guilt. Sex workers endure guilt at the hands of their partner over their work (Iselin, 2018; Lewenstein, 2016; McMuffin, 2017; Petro, 2017; Shakti, 2016). As a freelance job with unpredictable schedules sex workers is often presented with last minute work and a partner may guilt a sex worker into not taking a work opportunity, which thereby limits their financial opportunities. Shakti (2016), Iselin (2018), and Lewenstein (2016) have observed romantic partners taking on sex work stigma and unjustifiably guilt sex workers over sexual health concerns. McMuffin (2017) has seen firsthand sex working colleagues of hers be guilted by romantic partners for refusing to engage in certain sexual acts at home that they do at work. This, McMuffin (2017) argues, is sexually coercive behaviour; a form of abuse and "a fundamental misunderstanding of the fact that sex work is a job"—thereby demonstrating a disrespect not only to the sex worker but to sex work as well. Writing for a magazine, former sex worker Petro (2017) extends on McMuffin's sentiments, reporting that it is not uncommon for sex workers to internalise the stigma of their work, thereby viewing themselves deserving of punishment or abuse at the hands of their romantic partners—with Petro herself having suffered domestic violence of this sort. In a dating guide published on a sex worker website, McMuffin (2017) argues that romantic partners guilted sex workers over any aspects of their work is not providing the kind of support that's essential to a healthy romantic relationship.

Our third theme is happily never after. Several sex workers have reported that their partners first expressed approval of their employment, but as time and investment in the relationship progressed, these partners changed their minds. In the community stakeholder publications, it appears that asking sex workers to stop their jobs for the sake of their relationship is a common occurrence (Berkovich, 2012; Josephine & Simon, 2016; Petro, 2017; Respect Inc, n.d.). An information sheet disseminated

by Australian sex worker organisation Respect Inc (n.d.) argues that sex work stigma can give the romantic partner of a sex worker “ammunition” for maltreatment. Petro (2017) remarked in a magazine article that she had several romantic relationships with men who were fine with her sex work history at first, but as issues in the relationship began to arise, so did the partners issues with her sex work history. In an advice column for sex workers not only did the romantic partner in question change their mind, but they also actively got involved in disrupting the business practices of the sex worker seeking advice (Josephine & Simon, 2016). Advice columnists Josephine and Simon (2016) argue that by threatening her livelihood, this romantic partner is committing an act of domestic violence as they are controlling the sex workers’ financial situation.

Our fourth theme is concerned with the infantilisation sex workers report experiencing from their romantic partners as well as being given unsolicited advice on their work practices (McMuffin, 2017; Petro, 2017; SWOP, n.d.) In a dating guide published on a sex worker website, McMuffin (2017) argues that giving unsolicited advice constitutes not only a boundary violation, but also demonstrates controlling behaviour as well. In an article published in a feminist magazine, Shakti (2016) remarks on a phenomenon she’s observed in many of her peers wherein romantic partners will develop a saviour complex attempt to “rescue” sex works from the sex industry.

The final theme, fetishisation, appeared as the most common theme amongst the community stakeholder literature. Fetishisation is a phenomenon wherein dating partners refuse to grasp sex work on a holistic level—including how sex work affects sex workers both in and outside of work. This experience, in turn, leaves sex workers feeling objectified (Bellavue, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2016; Hooker, 2012; Iselin, 2018; Lewenstein, 2016; McMuffin, 2017; Shakti, 2016; SWOP, n.d.; Syre, 2015). In the literature, this phenomenon appears almost exclusively in the early stages of dating, as sex workers are quick to end the relationship due to how poorly this behaviour affects them. In fact, one sex worker seeking guidance in an advice column referred to these early stages as “trophying” (Fitzgerald, 2016). Sex work discourse appearing in blog posts, advice columns, newspaper articles, and online articles—sex workers from Bellavue (2014), Fitzgerald (2016), Hooker (2012), Iselin

(2018), Lewenstein (2016), and Syre (2015) all remarked on fetishisation experiences from dating partners where they were reduced to sex objects devoid of their humanity. This is in marked contrast to dating in the closet or dating for non-sex workers, as sex work is non-issue in these situations (Syre, 2015).

Several sex workers in the community stakeholder literature proposed their own monikers for this phenomenon. In an advice column for sex workers, one sex worker calls herself an “unsatisfying penis magnet” to these partners (Fitzgerald, 2016). A sex worker interviewed for an online magazine says his dates assume he’s a “rampant sex machine” (Lewenstein, 2016). McMuffin (2017) advises sex workers against becoming their “partner’s walking, talking, transgressive thrill” in her article written for a website utilised as a resource guide for sex workers. This early-stage dating phenomenon is primarily characterised about how the dating partner perceives sex work, not the sex work—and their subsequent, often explicitly sexual, expectations follow suit. These dating partners refuse to understand that sex work is work, and fetishising the sex worker to fulfil his own sexual desires (Hooker, 2012; Iselin, 2018; Lewenstein, 2016; McMuffin, 2017). Writing for a feminist magazine, sex worker Shakti (2016) urges dating partners of sex workers to “understand the difference between the fantasy and the reality”.

Analysis—Testimonial Injustice

We have now seen that there’s a grave disconnect between how the academic literature treats sex work and how community stakeholder literature does so. We now want to explain why this constitutes a testimonial injustice. We believe this is so for three related reasons. First, because the voices of sex workers on issues of grave importance to their general well-being are being ignored. Second, because in ignoring these issues, important facts of sex workers own experiences are not being addressed. And third, because a result of this is these issues are understood in a grotesquely inadequate way. This injustice becomes even more grave when it is, again, recognised that sex workers often come from social groups which are themselves subject to other epistemic injustices. This

means that these workers face injustice not only in their work lives, but also in their home and social lives more generally. Furthermore, sex workers are, for structural reasons, unable to equally participate in academia and therefore do not have the same access to the credibility economy to circumvent these kinds of epistemic injustices.

Take, for instance, the fact about condom use we mentioned above. The takeaway of some of these academic studies on condom use suggests that they are treating condom use as a measure of the intimacy of sex workers own personal and romantic relationships. Yet a condom lacks nuance, it is dichotomising and generalises a heterogeneous population. A brief inspection of, say, how sex workers advertise themselves for work displays that condom use, and which kind of condom use, is merely one of many ways sex workers control for the difference between their intimate and professional lives. After all, certain types of kissing are often reserved for their partners. As might be certain acts, certain aftercare methods, certain boundaries, and the like. In fact, given that sex workers do not at all concern themselves with condom use in their own literature and discussions, the academic literature's focus on condom use is denying the lived experience of sex workers. It is also dehumanising to sex workers, as according to Fricker (2007), epistemic injustice wrongs someone in their capacity "essential to human value" (p. 5). As explored above, there are countless ways to investigate the nuanced means in which sex workers constitute intimacy that aren't hyper focused on the genitals.

This is reflective of past critiques by sex workers of similar methodological approaches of whom have critiqued academia's preoccupation with using their bodies as a foundation for analytical framework (Fox, 2018; Heineman, 2016; Jeffreys, 2010). Furthermore, this stance is simply out of touch with the facts on the ground about condom use. Given how moralised condom use is in the post-HIV crisis world, this leads to real-world consequences in how sex workers are seen. It is exactly this kind of real-world consequence that makes the discrepancy—74% of academic publications being concerned with condom use and 0% of sex worker publications—between the two literatures such a dramatic case of epistemic injustice. Since, after all, an injustice has

already been committed in ignoring the testimony and hence the knowledge of sex workers. And this, in turn, has real-world consequences for policy concerning sex work, as we explore later in the chapter.

As emphasised by Fricker, a speaker's social location affects the interpretation of what they say. Privileged social locations can be discursively dangerous. For instance, due to their privileged position in the credibility economy, academics become so deeply entrenched in their privileged social location that they develop blinders to alternative sources of information. Academics are also possessed of an identity power to produce discourse without consideration of the marginalised community they are discoursing. This can and does result in testimonial injustice—in that outside the credibility economy of academic publications, sex workers themselves are producing their own discourse that academics ignore. The themes explored there are obviously of high importance to sex workers, yet they do not occur at all in the academic literature. In fact, there is a veritable mountain of irony in the fact that the academics studying sex work and the partners of sex workers bear a striking resemblance to each other in how they disregarded sex worker concerns. This irony not only resonates on a systematic level but illuminates some of the examples we've explored above.

Take, for instance, the fetishisation theme from the community stakeholder literature. The core definition of fetishisation in dating, wherein partners refuse to understand sex work on a holistic level, also applies to the academic approach of researching sex work as well. Reported experiences of dating partners refusing to wholly listen to their sex working partners, to do their own homework on sex work, or to take initiative in learning about sex work stands in parallel to academic researchers refraining from engaging in Patient and Public Involvement research methodologies, from engaging in bottom-up research methodology, and from incorporating community stakeholder literature in their research (Schram, 2017).

This underscores the importance of listening to sex workers. Not just listening but incorporating them into your own research. To do otherwise is to continue to commit the testimonial injustice we've just explored. We need to rectify the knowledge deficit on the part of academics to make it reasonable to use academic work in creating policy,

healthcare regulations, and implementing legal changes. In the next section, we will spell out some of these real-world consequences so as to dramatise that this is not only a case of epistemic injustice, but one which needs rather urgently to be addressed.

Analysis—Real-World Consequences

Let's move back to the point made above about condom usage in the context of HIV interventions as a focus of academic study of sex work. However, these are proposed interventions with grave implications. Fricker (2007) argues that through analysing the nature of the wrong inflicted, we can achieve a clearer idea of why something constitutes an epistemic injustice. Now, this focus stands in some tension with an important set of evidence on the ground.

First and foremost, sex workers have a lower rate of STIs than the general population (EIGHTH National HIV Strategy, 2018; Selvey et al., 2018). They also tend to be rigorous about prophylactic usage at work and well informed about sexual health (Caldwell, 2018). Furthermore, there are low rates of condom usage in romantic relationships in the general population (Matser et al., 2014; Visser et al., 2014)—so why should sex workers romantic relationships be treated any differently? This fixation on condom use in the context of HIV interventions reinforces sex work stigma and sex workers as vector of disease. The community stakeholder literature above revealed that a holistic composite of their work, personal lives, and all intersections between is important to sex workers, and HIV interventions are no exception. The most effective HIV interventions for sex workers have had a holistic approach (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Benoit et al., 2017; Cornish & Ghosh, 2007; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Harcourt & Donovan, 2005; Kerrigan et al., 2015; Ramanaik et al., 2014; Rekart, 2005; Shahmanesh et al., 2008). When these academic publications propose condom use in sex worker romantic relationships as a potential HIV intervention—the façade recedes—they are pathologising sex workers and treating them as a social problem. Thereby ultimately ignoring scientific consensus to fit a moralistic outlook. This suggests that the focus on condom use is

caused by the stigmatised underlying view that sex workers are vectors of disease, a view that is demonstrably false. This kind of misleading stigmatisation is caused by exactly the testimonial injustice we have decried above; no one could, if paying attention to sex worker testimony, hold onto such an outdated view.

This stigmatisation bleeds into deeper problems as well. It's not hard to imagine policy being enacted because of the academic literature on sex work and, as a result, this stigmatisation put into not just epistemic play, but legal play as well. One reason this is not difficult to imagine is that similar things have recently just happened. Measure B, an attempt starting in 2012 to require condom use in the pornography industry in California, is a case in point. This attempt, which was partially overturned by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, was opposed by many adult film actors on medical and safety grounds. As Nina Hartley, a porn performer who also has a degree in nursing pointed out in a deposition, condom usage during long shoots causes friction, microtears, and other health problems. Not only is it uncomfortable and painful for the actors, but unrealistic as well—condoms are meant for recreational, not professional purposes, they are designed to be used for short-term rendezvous rather than multi-hour athletic shooting events.

This kind of information was available to the courts as well. Adult film actors appeared on numerous occasions to testify about the bill and its likely consequences. Much of this testimony was ignored by those pursuing these measures. As porn performer Alex Chance pointed out, there was no additional input from performers when framing and motivating the successor measures. When a group of adult film actors, including Chance, met with the developers of a successor bill advocated by California assemblywoman Isidore Hall, they found that the developers were shockingly unaware of health risks, the actual details of porn production, and the like. All information that could easily have been gleaned from testimony and informal writings of actual participants in adult film production.

So, it's easy enough to see that there's a serious risk of nasty practical consequences in failing to take heed of the kinds of testimony we've been outlining above. To draw this link a bit more precisely, as Matos and Haze point out, links between romantic relationship quality and physical

health, psychological well-being, and quality of life are attested to all over social psychological literature (Dush & Amato, 2005; Loving & Slatcher, 2013; Meyler et al., 2007). When necessary prerequisites of quality romantic relationships, such as a lack of fetishisation, good communication, holistic approach and such, fail to be present, there will thereby be problems for the quality of life and psychological well-being of sex workers. Their voices, on what is necessary for them to have quality romantic relationships, thus need to be heard.

The testimonial injustice noted thus far not only does a disservice to sex workers, but to threatens the quality of academic research as well. Particularly when it comes to the social and health sciences. In widely regarded hierarchical models of scientific evidence, expert opinion is located at the bottom while systematic reviews and meta-analysis are located at the top. Accurate meta-analysis cannot be achieved without representative generalisable knowledge being present in the lower echelons of the pyramid (Ingham-Broomfield, 2016). If sex workers' testimonies are being ignored in academic literature in the lower bands of the publications in the pyramid of scientific evidence, then it becomes impossible for upper band publications to accurately portray the issues at hand relevant to the communities they are researching. Sex workers are, after all, experts on their own lives and their community stakeholder publications should be considered "expert opinion" when formulating research. Furthermore, without representative generalisable knowledge, the replication crisis already rife in the social and health sciences becomes all the worse (Mohr, 2008).

Of the academic publications amongst the pyramid, more often than not it is the upper band publications that are presented as accurate in legal contexts, healthcare platforms, educational policies which then inform guidelines and policies formed in the aforementioned. This can result in grave consequences as these groups are forming policies and guidelines that are not based on representative knowledge. This is especially egregious when the existing literature is mixed as to outcome. For instance, Nevada is the only state in the United States where prostitution is legal.² It also happens to be heavily regulated. Even though sex workers have some of the lowest HIV infection rates in the world and extraordinarily good health practices, they are nonetheless required to undergo

periodic weekly sexual health checkups. This even though there is plenty of literature demonstrating that *in general* voluntary health checkups are far more effective at preventing the spread of sexual disease. One cannot but suspect it's exactly because of prejudice that this general fact is somehow denied efficacy when applied to sex workers. Notably, it is important to highlight the link between mandatory testing and the dehumanisation of sex workers. Mandatory HIV testing has been deemed a human rights violation by numerous human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and UNAIDS (Blair et al., 2008; Bloomquist, (2008); Human Rights Watch, 2013;2004).

Furthermore, Jeffreys et al. (2012) argue that “implementation of mandatory testing is motivated by perception, rather than evidence or the best interests of sex worker health and safety”. Nevada is not alone in mandatory testing legislation. In the U.S., twenty-four criminalised states have mandatory post-arrest testing laws targeted against sex workers (Baskin, 2012), even though those laws violate several international human rights treaties the U.S. has signed. Furthermore Hatzenbuehler et al. (2013) have argued that stigma serves as a fundamental cause of population health inequalities. Sex workers are, due to stigma, unable to contribute to the credibility economy and are given epistemic injustice then they therefore cannot contribute to the pyramid.

The epistemic injustices committed against sex workers have held consequences on a geopolitical scale as well. In the United States the 2003 Global AIDS Act, created in part to facilitate national and international funding to curb HIV infections, states that any NGO receiving funding must “have a policy explicitly opposing prostitution” (Weitzer, 2010, p. 464) Otherwise known as the anti-prostitution pledge, it has forced developing countries in much need of financial aid to make ideological statements against the knowledge and testimony that sex workers have tirelessly brought to the fight against HIV (Chateauvert, 2014). Another implication is that sex workers cannot openly work for an NGO funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that does HIV intervention work. This systematically prohibits sex workers from contributing their vital knowledge to sexual health discourse. This stands in stark contrast to sex workers testimonies

of a long history in being active in the fight against HIV (Chateauvert, 2014) as well as comparing their jobs to that of sexual health educators (Sanders, 2005). Notably, the 2003 Global AIDS Act has been contested with both lawsuits and brought to the Supreme Court twice and on neither occasion were sex workers given the opportunity to give testimony of how this pledge affects their lived experiences and subsequent health and well-being. In the same vein, the U.S. Justice Department has a similar anti-prostitution pledge for applications in federally funded research on the sex industry (Weitzer, 2010). This categorically discriminates from sex workers contributing their knowledge and testimony to academia vis-à-vis federally funded research. As one can see, Fricker's credibility economy has far reaching implications beyond just the theoretical.

However, not all is lost. The Brazilian government's anti-HIV programme is considered by the United Nations to be one of the most successful in the developing world (Ramanaik et al., 2014). This is precisely because the government works intimately with sex workers, incorporates them in intervention planning and implementation, and—most importantly—holds value to their testimony and knowledge. In the early 2000s, the programme was funded by the Brazilian government and with a USAID cooperation agreement through the international AIDS Control and Prevention Project. However, that relationship ended when in 2005 the Brazilian government turned down \$40 million in funding from the USAID because they refused to sign an anti-prostitution pledge (Ramanaik et al., 2014). As Pedro Chequer, director of the programme, voiced:

Our feeling was that the manner in which the USAID funds were consigned would bring harm to our program from the point of view of its scientific credibility, its ethical values and its social commitment. We must remain faithful to the established principles of the scientific method and not allow theological beliefs and dogma to interfere. Sex workers are part of implementing our AIDS policy and deciding how to promote it. They are our partners. How could we ask prostitutes to take a position against themselves?

We shouldn't, though, let this hopeful example mislead. While we laud it, we recognise that cases like the tragic ones mentioned above can be multiplied as one likes. Misinformation about sex work filters into upper band publications, these publications are used to generate policy, such as the mandatory testing just mentioned or requirements on condom use in pornography, which policy is harmful to sex workers and at variance with the facts about their lived experience testified to in community stakeholder literature. So, we gently suggest that if this community stakeholder literature was paid more serious attention to, we would have better and more representative policy that did less to make sex workers lives difficult. In fact, we think the Brazilian case itself demonstrates the minimum of what is morally possible with respect to sex workers and the recognition of their views of themselves. And, how they can contribute to the general push towards the betterment of health and well-being in society at large.

Conclusion

Above we have done a few things. We've introduced the framework of epistemic injustice to characterise a certain plight of sex workers with respect to their knowledge. We've then demonstrated that there's a significant difference in the academic "upper band" publications on sex work and community stakeholder knowledge as represented in the grey literature on sex work. In short, much of the concerns and facts about sex work as observed by sex workers themselves are ignored in the academic literature. Rather, the academic literature focuses on issues, like condom use, that are of low or negligible importance to sex workers. We then argued that this constitutes an epistemic injustice; in particular, a testimonial injustice. We then went on to show that there are serious real-world consequences to this testimonial injustice. Policy governing sex work, for instance, is written in disregard to the facts about sex work that are widely known in non-academic sources.

This situation, we suggest, is untenable in the long term alongside a growing acceptance of sex work. We need better information and a more integrated knowledge base to write useful ethical academic publications

and policy and to ease the burdens of their labour for sex workers. Especially because these workers already suffer from massive prejudice and oppression. This epistemic injustice needs addressing and the first step in this is to give attention to sex worker's testimony with the credibility that they deserve.

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Notes

1. For methodology see (Matos & Haze, 2019).
2. Not only are sex workers heterogeneous populations, but there is heterogeneity within their own lives as well—and the different models of sex work legislation add layers to this heterogeneity. Sex work legislation models vary by country and district, affecting sex worker lives differentially. Unfortunately, due to space limitations, we cannot explore this notion further.

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