

Performance as a Tool for Destigmatisation: The Berlin Strippers Collective's Sex Worker-Led Advocacy

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Abstract: This article explores the formation and activism of the Berlin Strippers Collective (BSC), now known as Slut Riot. The author, writing from his perspective as a trans sex worker and core member of the Collective's founding network, explains how the BSC arose in the context of German sex-worker association and activism. Drawing on an autoethnographic method, he uses his personal experience with the group as a basis for the article. The political goals of the BSC are explained, which include combatting Sex-Work-Exclusionary-Radical-Feminist (SWERF) ideas and pushing for decriminalisation by decreasing the stigma surrounding sex work. Next, important elements of the collective's organisational structure, such as the requirement that all members be sex workers, and its policy on transgender individuals are laid out. The BSC's activities, mainly performance art and media engagement, are described. Finally, to illustrate how the BSC's performances were a tool used to accomplish its political goals, the author presents a short performance analysis of an evocative theatre play entitled 'Merry Stripmas and a Happy New Queer', which was produced and acted by the collective. The primary intention of this article is to aid other sex-work activism groups through an account of a prominent Berlin-based sex worker collective.

Keywords: sex work, destigmatisation, decriminalisation, performance activism, collective organising, transgender

Bledsoe, Cosmo. 2025. Performance as a Tool for Destigmatisation: The Berlin Strippers Collective's Sex Worker-Led Advocacy. *Gender a výzkum / Gender and Research* 26 (2): 117–132, <https://doi.org/10.13060/gav.2025.017>.

As right-wing radicalism rises around the world, sex workers' rights are being curtailed through policies based on stereotypes that are imposed on them about what it means to sell sexual services. The Berlin Strippers Collective (BSC), now Slut Riot, attempts to involve sex workers in the construction of narratives around their own identities in order to reduce the stigma from both state institutions and the public. This article is written through my perspective as a former member of the BSC and a sex worker. Through analysing the BSC's structure, performances, and eventual organisational transformation, it becomes clear that sex worker-led advocacy combats stigma by reshaping public narratives about the work and life of sex workers. The aim of this piece is to share first-hand experiences about the history and structure of this collective which other sex-work activist groups can use to aid their efforts to combat stigma and improve sex workers' lives. I will introduce the BSC, speak of my personal experience with them, explain their political goals and organisational structure, and detail their activities. To finish I will analyse one of the BSC's theatre plays to show how they destigmatised sex work through performance and then draw conclusions about the implications of their work for other sex worker groups.

Who were the Berlin Strippers Collective?

Founded in 2019, the BSC emerged in response to exploitative working conditions in Berlin's strip clubs, such as unfair fines, forced adherence to a strict schedule without a working contract, and racist and transphobic discrimination in club hiring practices. A group of sex workers met at their jobs in the clubs and started talking about their dissatisfaction with these conditions. They decided that a performance collective, where members could perform erotic dance styles to a wider audience on their own terms, could be both an alternative source of income and an activist platform. Their mission was to combat stigma surrounding sex work, advocate for better working conditions, challenge heteronormative standards about dress and gender presentation often enforced in strip clubs, and push for the decriminalisation of sex work in Germany. To achieve these goals, their activism combined public visibility with self-representation through performances at venues like queer bars, techno clubs, and the Volksbühne theatre. Notable productions, such as 'Merry Stripmas and a Happy New Queer', blended artistic expression with political commentary. Beyond performances, the BSC engaged in media advocacy through interviews, photoshoots, and social media campaigns, drawing from the German Prostitutes' Movement and global sex worker advocacy.

As a co-benefit, they created a platform where sex workers could find community and support each other. The BSC operated with an anti-capitalist, queer, feminist,

anti-racist, and non-hierarchical structure, ensuring collective decision-making and shared responsibility. While the BSC has since evolved into Slut Riot, their work laid the foundation for ongoing sex worker rights activism in many forms in Germany, emphasising community, solidarity, and self-representation. They utilised performance as a tool for intentional political intervention, spreading knowledge to the public and fighting simplistic stereotypes through dance and storytelling.

My relationship with the Berlin strippers collective

I met some of the founding members of the BSC at the first strip club I worked at in the summer of 2021. After becoming friends with several of them and sharing our unhappiness with the working conditions at the club, I attended one of their events at a local queer bar. Their grassroots, self-organised structure and strong political advocacy impressed and attracted me. Additionally, I was planning on undergoing an FTM (female-to-male) gender transition at that time, and I knew that the club I worked at would not allow me to continue to work there after hormonal transition. So the opportunities to perform and generate an alternate source of income in queer spaces through the BSC came at the perfect time for me, allowing me to pursue my gender transition. Through drag and pole performances with the BSC, I was also able to explore my gender identity in a way that had not been possible before. I quickly joined the group and remained a member for two years (2021–2023).

My experience as a member gives me insight into the inner workings and motivations of the group. Additionally, my occupational identity as a transgender sex worker allows me to draw on my own lived experience as a source of knowledge. Countless pieces, studies, and theses have been written about us by ‘civilians’ (a term colloquially used to denote individuals who are not sex workers), but just as the BSC espouses, it is truly revolutionary when we tell our own stories. It is in this spirit that this article was researched and written.

A history of German sex-worker association and activism

To understand the context for the creation of the Berlin Strippers’ Collective as a group in Germany, it is necessary to understand the history of the German Prostitutes’ Movement, informally known as the Whore’s Movement (*Hurenbewegung*). The exchange of sexual services for money, referred to by law as prostitution, has been technically legal in Germany since 1949, excluding street work in some restricted areas. But there have been many regulations imposed on sex workers by the state which have degrading effects on sex workers.

Tolerated but restricted

From 1949 until 2002, 'prostitutes' in Germany were required to have mandatory health (STI) checks, were not allowed to work in groups, and had no right to make the client pay if the client decided they did not want to. Clients could not be sued for payment because prostitution was classified in the law as '*sittenwidrig*', which translates to 'immoral'. Brothels were also not allowed to provide condoms or towels, because this was seen as 'promoting prostitution' which was illegal. Sex workers had to pay income tax, but did not get benefits and social services like all other tax-payers in Germany (Heying 2018: 26).

Sex workers and the AIDS crisis

Although the regulation of sex work has been going on for longer, the movement truly began in the 1980s alongside the rise of the AIDS crisis. This occurred because during the HIV/AIDS crisis, sex workers were both stigmatised as potential spreaders of HIV and called on by the German government to help prevent the virus's spread (Heying 2018: 35). This period essentially brought the situation of German sex workers into public view, and empowered many sex workers to mobilise for their rights.

By the year 1987, eight sex worker self-help groups were operating in Germany, including Hydra, which is still operating in Berlin today (Heying 2018: 28). In 1985, the first Whores Congress (*Hurenkongress*) took place in Berlin, where thirty sex workers gathered from across Germany and developed twenty-two social and political demands that would inform the development of the German Prostitutes' Movement (Heying 2018: 29).

Mandatory registration and the 'whore ID'

Many, but not all, of these goals were accomplished after years of advocacy in 2002 with the passage of the new prostitution law (Heying 2018: 36). But in 2017, the Hurenbewegung experienced a big setback with a new law requiring the official registration of all prostitutes with the state, which included mandatory health education as a prerequisite for registration. Now, to work legally, sex workers in Germany must register with the state to receive what they call the 'whore ID' (*Hurenpass*). If sex workers are not registered, they are working illegally and can be prosecuted (Heying 2018: 44).

Registration requires the applicant's name, date of birth, nationality, and registration address, and must be done yearly at the local 'Prostitute Protection' authority. After providing this personal data and a passport/ID card, there is a health counselling session. The registration ID is then issued and must be carried and presented in order to work at some registered workplaces such as brothels or shown to the po-

lice if asked. There are multiple drawbacks to this regulation, including the fact that it excludes undocumented workers and certain groups of visa holders like students. Both categories of people often engage in sex work out of necessity, since other jobs that provide an income comparable to sex work can be difficult to find. Additionally, street workers often begin sex work quickly for survival reasons and either do not have time to wait to register or are unaware that they must do so. If sex workers are caught without this pass, they can be fined up to 1000 euros, which can be a devastating amount if they are in a precarious financial situation (Freie Arbeiter*Innen Union, 2018). Although the situation in Germany is safer for sex workers than in other places where the occupation is completely criminalised, sex workers here continue to face discrimination, stigma, and unsafe working conditions.

The political goals of the collective

It is notoriously difficult to improve conditions at strip clubs and brothels because of the oppressive business structure that many managers and club owners in the industry employ. In Berlin, when managers do not approve of a worker raising concerns, they simply fire them and ban them from the club. The sheer lengths to which managers go to prevent sex workers from speaking to each other about working conditions encouraged the members of the collective to do just that.

Queer feminism and cis-heterosexual beauty standards

All the events the BSC were involved in had the purpose of educating the public about sex work through a queer feminist lens and enabling sex workers to take control of the telling of their stories. Because the conditions and hiring requirements in Berlin strip clubs are set by managers who operate according to cisgender heterosexual beauty standards, it is often expected that strippers conform to a certain mainstream beauty ideal. Although many anti-sex work advocates use these conditions to argue that sex workers are promoting these beauty standards, the BSC believed the problem lay with the managers, not the workers. They argued that rather than trying to abolish heteronormative standards in the industry, the proper response is to create alternative sex worker-led spaces, where workers who choose to do so can express themselves differently.

Decriminalisation: sex work as labour

The BSC viewed sex work as a labour issue. Sex work is a job just like any other job and therefore should not be subject to specialised laws regulating or criminalising it (Leigh 1989). They were pro-worker above all else and viewed themselves as a group

of workers fighting for better working conditions. They held the view that workers engage in sex work for many different reasons, but the choice should be theirs to make (Cruz 2020: 194).

One of the narratives that they pushed back against is the Sex Worker Exclusionary Radical Feminist (SWERF) view that sex workers are not able to consent to having sex for money. This anti-sex industry narrative, though it may seem to be concerned with sex workers' wellbeing, actually ends up taking away sex workers' agency by speaking for them and labelling them as exploited, even when sex workers do not agree with this portrayal. Teela Sanders (2016) explores the question of whether sex work is inevitably violent in their paper on the SWERF position and its shortcomings. 'Prostitution' has historically been constructed as an inherently violent occupation and social role. Violence is a reality in the lives of many sex workers and street sex workers experience the most violence of all the subgroups under the sex work umbrella. SWERFs claim that this violence is due to the nature of the transaction between sex worker and client, but Sanders argues that this violence stems from the criminalisation of sex work and the media's depictions of sex workers as victims.

Transforming the language of disgust through destigmatisation

Therefore, the BSC believed that fighting for the decriminalisation of sex work and sharing accurate, destigmatising stories about sex workers from their own perspective is more useful than condemning the sex industry as a whole. Their overarching goal was to reduce stigma in order to reduce violence and discrimination against the sex worker community. In his article on reducing the stigma surrounding sex work, sociologist Ronald Weitzer (2017: 725) argues that:

since stigma is not inherent in any kind of behavior and is instead a social construction, it can be countered and deconstructed. And such destigmatization can have important consequences for other aspects of sex work: If prostitution is allowed 'to function in a social climate freed from emotional prejudice' (Ericsson, 1980: 362), it then becomes 'imaginable that prostitution could always be practiced, as it occasionally is even now, in circumstances of relative safety, security, freedom, hygiene, and personal control' (Overall, 1992: 716).

The SWERF narrative depicts sex workers with a 'language of disgust' (Sanders 2016: 11) that violent men latch onto to legitimise their actions. These men do not view sex workers as human beings but rather as a subclass of humanity. And due to stigma about the profession, this violence is accepted by the public as inherent to sex work. The BSC attempted to share information directly stemming from their

lived experiences to help well-meaning people understand how to show solidarity with sex workers.

Sex workers' rights should be protected and workers should enjoy the same benefits as all other citizens. Specific laws targeting the industry should not exist (Comte 2014: 24). When Sex work is criminalised in any way, even under regulations like the Nordic Model, which only criminalises clients, sex workers suffer (Jordan 2012: 1–17). The BSC, like many other organisations, such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, UNAIDS, the World Health Organization, and sex worker advocates around the world, supported the decriminalisation of sex work, rather than legalising it through registration, which is the current situation in Germany.

Stigma and the deviant prostitute

Although the members of the BSC view sex work as a labour issue, the general public in Germany and abroad mostly view it differently. This is because sex work is still heavily stigmatised and the 'prostitute body' is constructed as deviant. The BSC tries to move beyond this and intentionally reduce the stigma by confronting it with defiance. The direct involvement of sex worker-led groups in this process has been and will continue to be essential for any further change to take place. And, of course, to achieve better working conditions, they need to gain some support from the general public and non-sex workers. The fact is, however, that many people who have never been involved in the sex industry simply have no information about it other than the mainstream narratives pushed in the mass media.

Collective structure and membership requirements

Before dissolving in 2024, due to internal conflicts over collective goals, the BSC had a self-organised and decentralised structure. No individual member held any particular position of power. All major decisions were made through consensus voting. We attempted to meet in person about once a month to keep the group spirit strong and have a meal together. General meeting topics included upcoming events, our merchandise, and the political climate surrounding sex work. Prospective members had to be based in Berlin and to be working or have previously worked as a stripper.

Not a pole-dance group

Pole dancers who had never worked at a strip club were not accepted, although many applied. It is important to emphasise that the collective was not just a pole-dancing performance group. It was an organisation of sex workers who worked together to

decrease the stigma surrounding sex work and this often had very little to do with pole dancing. On this topic, the collective member guidelines stated that:

as our name implies, we are a strippers' collective and our activism and shows are closely related to the problematics of strip clubs and aim at achieving independence from strip club managers. Therefore, experience in the field is relevant. Exceptions to this are trans sex workers if they want to work as a stripper but have faced discrimination finding a job or safe space in strip clubs. (Berlin Strippers Collective 2022)

The exception for transgender sex workers is important because of the unsafe and often hostile working conditions trans people face in Berlin strip clubs.

The inclusion of transgender sex workers

In Berlin's mainstream strip clubs, it is often very difficult for trans people to find a safe job. Transfeminine people often have to completely pass as cisgender women to be considered for a position, and they face discrimination and violence if it is discovered that they are trans. Transmasculine people (especially those on hormone replacement therapy) may have to disguise themselves as cisgender women at work, which can often cause extreme dysphoria. They may also have to attempt to explain their transition to clients, who are often cisgender men who are uneducated about transgender people, leading to unsafe situations.

Therefore, the collective accepted transgender people who had worked in other areas of sex work but not at strip clubs. The collective had several transgender members who benefited from this essential policy. They aimed to give marginalised sex workers a voice, and recognising the difficulties transgender people face in the Berlin sex work industry was part of that mission. If potential members met all these requirements, current members considered their application and voted on their admission to the collective.

Activities and practices

The main activities the collective was involved in were performances, gogo-dancing and pole-dancing gigs, press interviews, collaborations with other sex worker activist groups, management of a successful Instagram page/Patreon, and selling self-made merchandise. Members of the collective could create and organise their own events if they had a unique idea and took the initiative to make it happen. The collective owned two portable poles, purchased with the shared budget.

Workshops and sex-worker pole exchange

Workshops were also a much-loved event, especially the Valentine's Day lap dance workshop. The BSC also hosted a free 'pole jam' or pole practice hour only for sex workers at a local pole dance studio. This event was born from a desire to give sex workers a space to practice pole with colleagues if they do not have access to expensive studio classes or practice spaces dominated by civilians.

Performances within alternative and queer nightlife

Performances by the BSC quickly became a staple of Berlin's nightlife scene. Some members of the collective, including me, performed in drag style at queer bars. The BSC has also performed at several alternative festivals in Germany, including the Whole Festival and the Fusion Festival. Their presence in the community led them to be recognised as one of the forty clubs and collectives that made significant contributions to Berlin club culture at the 2021 and 2022 Tag der Clubkultur (Day of Club Culture) Award Ceremony. As one of the forty winners of this prestigious award, the BSC received recognition and a 10,000 euro grant from the Berlin Club Commission, the Senate Department for Culture, and the Musicboard Berlin.

Collaboration with other activist groups

In Berlin, there are several other sex worker and queer activist groups that the BSC collaborated with. Trans Sex Works, Hydra e.v., and the Black Sex Workers Collective are three of the other major players in the Berlin sex work community. Notably, the Black Sex Workers Collective is also groundbreaking for the Berlin sex work scene and has a membership of only Black sex workers; they, too, have received the Tag Der Clubkultur Award and funding for their outstanding contribution to Berlin's nightlife (The Collective). Occasionally, members travelled for gigs to neighbouring countries to collaborate with other sex worker collectives. The BSC saw itself as part of the larger 'Hurenbewegung' in Germany and the world and collaborated with other organisations that had similar missions.

Media and public engagement

Collaborating with the press was one of the most effective ways for members of the collective to share their experiences with people who may never have set foot in one of their shows. The BSC has been featured in many publications across Germany and beyond, including the *Berliner Morgenpost*, *VICE Germany*, *The Economist*, the *Berliner Zeitung*, *Dazed & Confused Magazine*, *Lola Mag*, *I Heart Berlin*, *Tip Berlin*, and *Playful Mag*. For example, in their interview with *Dazed & Confused Magazine*, the BSC stated that their main motivation for forming was:

to tell our story in our own words; sex work is a hot topic, but you hardly see sex workers taking ownership of their own narrative. We want better working conditions; we don't want to pay out half of our earnings to clubs in commission; we want to create and manage our own projects. To be autonomous, self-organised, and make collective decisions around how and who we work with is radical. It's also a fuck you to the top-down patriarchal capitalistic systems usually found in the business world - collective collaboration is a way to challenge and overcome many of the issues found in modern capitalist societies. (Dawson 2021)

Social media is an effective tool for combating what Weitzer (2017: 722) describes as 'cultural lag', or time it takes for social norms to combine with legal norms, which, because of the speed and reach of social media, emerges when there is a push for legal reforms. For this reason, members were active almost every day on the Instagram page, which had around 20,000 followers. Every month, the collective posted a timeline of events, as well as members' own stories about their experiences with sex work. Even though Instagram is an important tool for sharing information, the BSC was required to censor all words related to sex work (e.g. s*x, skripper, br*thel, wh*re) and to cover nipples in photos. The account was flagged several times for 'sexual solicitation', even though none was occurring. Members were constantly double-checking whether everything had been properly censored before posting. Sex workers are currently being targeted on social media platforms and activist collectives do not get a pass in this. Some alternatives, such as Bluesky, are popping up now and becoming popular with the community for their more inclusive practices.

Performance as political praxis: Volksbühne performance analysis

I believe that to truly understand the power of the BSC's performances to destigmatise sex work, the reader would have to see one in person. Since that may not be possible, I will provide the next best thing, a performance analysis. I will intentionally employ a non-traditional writing method of mixing description with analysis, since I want the reader to feel as if they are experiencing and processing this theatre piece in real time as an audience member.

On 23 December 2022, the members of the Berlin Strippers Collective acted in a self-written tragicomedy at the renowned state theatre Volksbühne at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, attracting an audience of over six hundred people. The show was titled 'Merry Stripmas and a Happy New Queer' – a self-reflexive show on the working conditions of a Berlin strip club. The setting was a strip club holding a Christmas party (Merry Stripmas and a Happy New Queer Showcase).

Act I: Fines from an exploitative manager

All of the members played strippers, which was an intentional choice. So often, sex workers are portrayed by civilians in the media and in performances, so playing themselves was a way to take control of their own narratives. At the beginning of the play, all four characters on stage are bored, waiting for a customer to come in. Suddenly, a door-like noise echoes and everyone sits up, thinking it is a customer. However, it is actually another stripper who is two hours late. The voice of the manager booms, 'Cristal, that's fifteen euros for being late. Aphrodite, ten euros for texting. Charly, ten euros for book reading. Mädels, arbeiten!' To the audience, fines for things like texting and reading a book may have seemed ludicrous, but managers often fine strippers for insignificant things like these. By controlling the dancers' behaviour so strictly, the managers exert power over the strippers and act like pimps towards workers who are nominally independent. One of the reasons the BSC was founded is because they believe that managers who operate their clubs in this way keep sex workers down. Throughout the play, the manager's voice continues to come across the loudspeaker and exact fines from the dancers for other ridiculous reasons like 'unseasonal behaviour' (not wearing Christmas outfits) and even being sad.

Act II: The 'doll client' and the whorearchy

In the next act, there is a mannequin sitting in one of the chairs on stage, which represents a client. Since the client is not represented by an actor, but by a lifeless doll, his voice is taken away. With this artistic choice, the BSC echoed the following words from the book *Revolting Prostitutes*: 'nobody will give us our power: not the police, not our bosses, not our clients. (...) Sex workers have been made to listen; now it is our turn to speak' (Smith, Mac 2018: 220). The clients' voice here is unimportant; we never hear his perspective on what is happening because he is literally a prop that allows sex workers' voices to be heard.

Another topic that the BSC addressed in the play was the *whorearchy* which is a term used in sex worker circles to name the internal stigma within our communities. Although it is common to offer services that go beyond a lap dance at Berlin strip clubs, this is still stigmatised in the industry. One of the characters in the play, Melody, sits down in the chair near the customer and contemplates what will happen if she tries to sell more than a lap dance. She thinks, 'I don't want that the manager knows about it or even worse that a co-worker finds out. (...) Probably, they already think I'm a cheap hooker who has no clue how to make good money. I'm so tired of getting price-shamed. Let's support each other instead of being competitive. It's my body and my decision' (Melody). In all of their performances, the BSC attempted to show solidarity with full-service sex workers and repudiate the whorearchy. Stripping is sex work, just like working at a brothel or working on the street. Although people

within these different subcategories experience different levels of privilege, the BSC members used that privilege to liberate all sex workers, not just strippers.

Dignifying traditional stripper style dance and the BSC Manifesto

Throughout the production, three more strippers share their inner monologues followed by a pole-dance performance. During the pole-dancing scenes, some of the strippers completely undress – a consciously performed public act of liberation that resonates with the BSC Manifesto (2021):

Through undressing we express our freedom. We will not tolerate the restrictive expectations society has laced us into, like a heavy gown. They expect us to wear the corsetry of the eternal double standard: Be subservient, be sexy, remain respectable. We reject systemic sexism, and song after song, we take off those corsets and peel off those expectations. Dancing to the rhythm of freedom, we climb higher and higher up the pole, reaching for liberation. (...) We gathered in the red light, and now we step into the daylight. (...) We cast off stereotypes that tell women they can be either sexual or smart, but never both.

By undressing and dancing sexually in a theatre context, the BSC made a statement that we strippers are proud of what we do in an artistic sense. We fight for labour rights, but we are also talented performers. Traditional strip club style dance is difficult and requires artistry and athleticism. By performing this type of dance in a theatre environment, strippers claim that their artistic practice is worthy of such a place.

In the end, none of the strippers manage to convince the customer to spend, and the mannequin is carried off the stage. Attempting to cheer up her colleagues, one of the dancers (Cristal) rallies them by speaking to the group of strippers and saying, 'Look at you, you're all so beautiful. Talented. Charming. Skillful. The world should belong to us. (...) There is no such thing as a bad night as long as we have each other.' The focus of the production is on the strippers, their stories, and the solidarity they have with one another.

Backlash to the theatre as a strip club

However, the production did receive backlash online. After the play took place, the Volksbühne posted on Instagram about their gratitude to the BSC for performing. Some people were not happy that a prestigious theatre was giving a platform to sex workers. One person left the following comment under the announcement of the play on Instagram:

Somehow embarrassing to turn the theatre into a strip club (...) It's just cheap – sorry. Clearly, I stand by my criticism – ass wiggling is just zero art. If you really want to make a queer theatre, then just leave out the stripping. Yes, for me, it is a cheap, blasphemous work. (volksbuehne_berlin)

This comment makes it clear that the sex work movement still has a long way to go before sex workers can exist in society without stigma, and reinforces the importance of sex worker-led advocacy groups such as the BSC. By turning the theatre into a strip club, the BSC packed the house and were able to tell their stories as sex workers to a large audience. They proved that 'ass wiggling' is, in fact, art, and that audiences will pay to see it. And most of all, they showed that any serious queer theatre should include sex workers as performers if they want to be truly committed to intersectionality.

A change in organisational structure and the transition to Slut Riot

Although the BSC dissolved in 2024, the spirit and advocacy goals live on in Slut Riot, a performance company co-founded by Edie Montana, a former founder of the BSC, and Mei Magdalene, a former member. After speaking with them about the transition, they reflected that the rapid growth in the number of members of the BSC without a clear structure from the start created organisational issues that made co-operation in a non-hierarchical manner difficult.

Conflicts of interests arose about whether to prioritise members' financial goals through performance bookings or the collective's general political aim. These conflicts could not be resolved because there was no leader, and no consensus could be reached on these issues. Many members who dealt with the administrative side of the BSC were overworked and although there was much discussion about paying them an hourly wage, the legal and financial conditions required to do so could not be sorted out. Montana and Magdalene decided to shift the structure into a performance company, which involves a hierarchical approach. However, they claimed their personal experience with exploitation in their working environments could be used as a tool to avoid replicating these structures and break the chain of oppression.

Slut Riot now functions as a resource and networking platform that books sex workers for performances and spreads awareness about sex worker rights. This is what eventually led to a change in the organisational structure of the BSC: some individuals in the BSC were more concerned about financial gain than adhering to anti-capitalist and inclusive values. Division erupted in the group because of their influence, and while providing an alternative source of income for sex workers was

one of the BSC's hopes, the primary objective was to destigmatise sex work from an intersectional lens. Montana and Magdalene felt that this goal was being lost in the search for individual financial gain. Coming from this experience, one suggestion to other collectives who want to function in a non-hierarchical manner is to establish clear standards of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and contribution requirements for membership and stand by these standards. Another suggestion was to define the non-negotiable group values early on and always refer back to them when making decisions. Otherwise, the structure can be easily exploited by individuals who do not prioritise the shared political goals.

Conclusion: implications for sex worker advocacy

In the documentary entitled *Outlaw Poverty, Not Prostitutes*, capturing the 1989 World Whores' Summit in San Francisco, the founder of the International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights stated that:

we need to mingle together, there is no question, and this movement, the most important start, is contact, is talking, is realizing that those divisions between us have been imposed and that they're artificial, and that our lives and concerns have a great deal in common, but we can only know that by talking together, by building personal relationships together, and by building a political analysis based on all of our experiences. (Leigh 1989)

The BSC continued the sex worker activist legacy of establishing contact between sex workers and civilians, who may otherwise never meet us unless they were our clientele. Although fighting stigma is a big task, it is also a simple one: sex workers must share the truth of our experiences so that those who wish to can understand our lives and work. By speaking about our lived experience, we can break the cycle of shame surrounding the sale of sexual services for money. This is a powerful strategy that could go into the toolbox of other sex work activist groups. The solidarity of our fellow workers and allies will support us against the inevitable backlash we receive when pushing against stigma.

As a sex worker myself who developed much of my political consciousness in the BSC, I can say that I am proud of what I do. I talk about it openly, because I hope that all sex workers will be able to do so in the future without fear. And I know we have many potential allies who just need sex workers to educate them on how to properly support us. Many people have never even met a sex worker. By telling our stories, we can educate the community in Berlin and globally about sex industry politics.

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