

# EVIDENCE OF WOMEN BUYING SEX DISRUPTS NEO-ABOLITIONIST SEX INDUSTRY NARRATIVE

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Congress Theme: Many strands make up one rope

Congress Stream: Behavioural research and advocacy

Presentation Type: Research-based Oral

## **Introduction:**

There is a disjunction between evidence of women buying sex and the political activism of neo-abolitionists. Neo-abolitionist framing of the sex industry positions people buying sex as perpetrators rather than consumers based on a belief that buying sex is fundamentally a male activity and through conflation of sex work with female slavery. This presentation draws on a series of studies providing evidence of women buying sex in Australia and considers the influence on academic, political and social debate about sex work.

## **Methods:**

The first study aimed to identify contemporary discourse about women buying sex in Australia through a textual analysis of online audience responses to commentary on a televised commercial advertisement depicting sexual tension between an Australian woman holidaying in Bali and a local waiter. The other studies provide empirical evidence of women buying sex through a thematic analysis of data from interviews with 17 sex workers about their female clients, and a phenomenological interpretative analysis of data from interviews with 21 women who have bought sex in Australia.

## **Results:**

The first study found a lack of audience sensitivity to the possibility of women buying sex. Three distinct discourses were noted in audience contributions: sex work is work and women who buy it are empowered; sex work is inherently exploitative and if women buy it they are as bad as men; and stigma is gendered, whereby men who buy sex are seen as abusive and women who do so are either victims or sluts. Sex workers of all genders interviewed said their female clients were diverse and women who had bought sex considered their consumer role empowering.

## **Conclusion:**

Evidence of women buying sex challenges neo-abolitionist framing of the sex industry and broadens understandings. Debates regarding the regulation of the sex industry should include consideration of clients of all genders.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement: See example below:**

*The conference collaborators recognise the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need*

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*for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.*

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There are no conflicts of interest which relate to this presentation.