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ABSTRACT.

The majority of previous research conducted on sex work has reflected and reinforced popular cultural constructions of sex work. This present study examines alternative constructions of sex work from the viewpoint of sex workers themselves using the discourse analytic method developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Parker (1992). Nine female sex workers were interviewed on a wide variety of relevant topics. The analysis revealed that five distinct discourses were used to construct sex work. These included construction of the dissociation of the self; clients as being everyday types of men who were further constructed as being wounded, as having a higher sexual drive than women and of sometimes being friends and lovers; the 'whore stigma'; sex-as-work and sex work as valuable. In general, these discourses presented positive and powerful ways of talking about the sex work industry. Participants recognised the stereotypical and stigmatic ways that they were constructed in social discourse and actively concentrated on resisting such language about sex work. The participant’s alternative constructions of sex work generally functioned to justify sex work as being valid work. The results of this study have relevance for other socially marginalised groups in society, which are confronted by prejudice, stigmatisation, and oppression.
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