

Sex Work and Covid-19 In the New Zealand Media

Avoid the Moist Breath Zone

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<1> Chapter 1: Introduction

The worst tour of my sex working career took place roughly ten days before New Zealand entered our first Covid-19 lockdown. I had booked non-refundable flights, and wasn't sure if I should go at all, torn between a fear of catching the terrifying new virus which was sweeping Italy, and a different but no less pressing concern that if we went into a lockdown for an unspecified period my income would dry to a trickle. My phone was quiet. Clients were exercising their own self-preservation instincts, and I decided that going out to socialise was risky. Instead, I sat in my hotel room scrolling the endless news updates on my personal phone, occasionally checking if my work phone had ding'd without my noticing. The experience of the pandemic in New Zealand was undoubtedly different to that almost anywhere else: our initial lockdown was astonishingly successful, bringing the number of community cases back to zero. The experience of doing sex work in New Zealand is also quite different to that of doing it in most other places in the world, with the industry having been decriminalised for nearly twenty years now. The experience of endlessly scrolling the news during the March–April 2020 period was evidently one which I was not alone in, with research confirming this phenomenon both quantitatively, and highlighting the qualitative dimension of what came to be called 'doomscrolling'¹.

The intersection which exists between these three topics: sex work, news media, and the pandemic, is where this book's focus is located. Sex work is a nearly-universally stigmatized occupation, to a greater or lesser degree depending on the context, and the media is a key site where this stigma is produced, reinscribed, and may be negotiated and reduced². One of the stigmas which sex workers have been subjected to – described in greater detail later in this chapter – is the stereotype that we are vectors of disease. As the pandemic took hold, I was among those wondering how it would play out for sex workers: how would sex work be treated now we faced a situation where all members of the public could reasonably be

considered potential vectors? How would New Zealand's model of decriminalisation, and the gains which sex workers had seen in the ensuing decades since it passed, fare during a crisis of this sort? Importantly, in the context of media coverage, how would the operation of our sex industry and our legislation be *perceived* to function?

News media coverage of sex work in New Zealand post-decriminalisation has shown some movements towards a destigmatisation of the work. There is a conditional willingness to treat the people who do it as workers, who in a few cases may approach social inclusion and acceptance³. The ability to access this acceptability depends on how a sex worker works, and which other social groups and identities they belong to. Sex workers who work indoors, charge higher rates, see fewer clients, are tertiary educated, middle or upper class, and are pākehā or white are more likely to be deemed acceptable⁴. This contingent destigmatisation is often carried out through a process of comparison. One worker is positioned as relatively more or less normative than another, and subsequently closer or further from the rhetorical and stigmatised 'prostitute imaginary' who exists in the background of many media texts⁵. Migrant sex workers and street-based sex workers have often been subject to more stigmatising media representations than domestic and indoor sex workers, too⁶.

In writing this book I was interested in finding out if these divisions continued, and if their expression changed in any notable way during the first two years of the Covid-19 pandemic. I was also curious if the tendency to understand sex work as work would continue to progress, or might instead regress, conscious of both the susceptibility of sex work as a scapegoat for moral panics and of the way that during periods of cultural change prostitution law has sometimes become a focus, with sex work seen as a threat to the hegemonic order⁷. New Zealand is a unique case study for these questions, given our unusual sex work law and our unusual success in controlling the pandemic in its initial stages. Our mediascape is also comparatively small, making the collection and analysis of a representative data set more

manageable. In the remainder of this chapter, I outline the New Zealand model in more detail, then turn to the relationships between sex work and public health, Covid-19, the media, and stigma, as well as giving an overview of the methodology which I employ in this book.

<2> Sex work in New Zealand

Sex work was decriminalised in New Zealand with the passing of the Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) in 2003. The Act decriminalised all forms of sex work, indoor and street-based⁸, for citizens and permanent residents aged 18 and over. It also decriminalised associated activities, such as brothel-keeping or living off the proceeds of prostitution⁹. Prior to the passing of the Act, it was legal to accept money for sexual services, but activities such as solicitation were illegal, resulting in arrests and prosecutions. The Act passed by a very slim margin at 60 to 59, with one MP abstaining from the vote. New Zealand's legislation is sometimes inaccurately described as 'full decriminalisation', but migrant sex workers are not granted the same protections as domestic sex workers, as Section 19 of the PRA restricts anyone on a temporary visa from working or investing in the sex industry¹⁰.

New Zealand's approach to prostitution law – decriminalisation on a national level – is unusual, shared only with Belgium at the time of writing. Sex work has been decriminalised in other locations, but mostly on a state-by-state basis (parts of Australia, for example). Other approaches to regulating sex work include legalisation, full or partial criminalisation, and the criminalisation of buying sex but not selling it, sometimes called the 'Swedish' or 'Nordic' model¹¹. Legalisation places additional regulatory burdens on the sex industry, over and above those which apply to other comparable businesses. This can create a two-tier system, in which some people can comply with the relevant regulations, and others continue to be

criminalized¹². Criminalising the purchase but not the sale of sex aims to stop the exploitation of sex workers in theory, but in practice it makes them more vulnerable, and in some instances, it has been found to have ‘shifted the power relationship in favour of clients’¹³. Furthermore, the enforcement of the law is often very similar under criminalisation and legalisation, with the most visible and frequently most vulnerable parts of the industry targeted by policing¹⁴. These models treat sex work, variously, as exploitation, crime, or a moral or public health threat. The PRA, in contrast, treats sex work mostly as a job, and New Zealand’s legislation was developed in consultation with local sex worker advocacy group the New Zealand Prostitutes’ Collective (NZPC)¹⁵. The NZPC had been lobbying for decriminalisation since the late 1980s, shortly after they secured government funding for health promotion activities¹⁶. Abel describes the PRA’s movement from criminalization to decriminalisation as ‘a shift in policy attitude from a moralistic to a public health and human rights approach’¹⁷.

As the first country in the world to decriminalise both indoor and street-based sex work on a national level, New Zealand frequently attracts attention as a case study, often being studied or cited in international comparative research¹⁸. As part of the enactment of the PRA, it was agreed an assessment of its operation and the effects on the health and safety of sex workers would be carried out within five years of it passing into law. A study from the University of

¹ The NZPC were founded in 1987 and for several decades were known as the New Zealand Prostitutes’ Collective. At their 2020 AGM a name change to ‘NZPC: Aotearoa New Zealand Sex Workers’ Collective’ was approved (Personal correspondence, August 2022). While most of the texts analysed in this book used ‘NZPC’ or ‘New Zealand Prostitutes’ Collective’ throughout 2021 the new name began to appear in media texts. In general, unless quoting from a source, I use ‘NZPC’ to refer to the organisation.

Otago's Christchurch School of Medicine found that conditions generally had improved for workers under decriminalisation, and the total number of sex workers had remained steady¹⁹. Sex work stigma persists despite decriminalisation, but there are suggestions that this too is slowly shifting: sex workers themselves sometimes actively challenge stereotypes and stigmatizing narratives about their work²⁰.

<2> Sex work and Public Health

Sex work is framed and understood through a variety of lenses: as a moral issue, as criminality, as exploitation, through a lens of public health, and as a legitimate form of labour. Frequently these lenses or frames may overlap, with the same discourse drawing on multiple extant narratives about the industry. When analysing discourses about sex work during the Covid-19 pandemic, arguably the most obvious framework utilised is public health. In chapters two and three, I am interested in exploring how this framework interacts with other ways sex work has historically been, and is presently, understood. In this section, I give a brief overview of how sex work has been discussed, constructed, and managed in relation to public health. This is done with some reference to the ways it overlaps and interacts with other discourses about sex work, to illustrate the way that the analysed texts from 2020 – 2021 operate intertextually, drawing on existing narratives to lend weight and complexity to their meaning²¹. New Zealand's prostitution law explicitly highlights that one purpose of the PRA is to create a framework which is conducive to public health. The PRA takes a pragmatic approach, prioritising public health, as well as the human rights and workplace health and safety of sex workers²². However, in some instances public health has been used as the lens through which to perpetuate more stigmatizing and moralising discourses about the industry, notably ideas about the sex worker as a vector of contagion²³.

The sex worker as a vector of disease is a stigmatizing stereotype with a long history.

Walkowitz has described its impact in Victorian Britain²⁴, and it persists in contemporary times, with sex work as a source of contagion identified as one of the most persistent themes in an analysis of news media coverage from 1980 through until 2005 in Canada²⁵. O'Neill et al. argue that the belief that sex workers are 'a key vector in the transmission of sexually transmitted infections' (STIs) is among the dominant myths which shape legal responses to the industry, noting the blame for failing to practice safer sex tends to fall on the sex worker, not her client²⁶. Media coverage in Birmingham, UK, also reflects that 'the identities of sex workers are constructed through discourses of pollution and defilement'²⁷, and this narrative theme is evident in news media coverage under New Zealand's decriminalisation model, too²⁸. In some cases, there is a kind of discursive slippage here, where literal and moral contagion is collapsed together, with one standing in for the other. In these instances the sex worker is seen to pose a risk to the reputation of a neighbourhood or area (a 'stigma nuisance'²⁹), and to public health³⁰. Accusations of being a vector of contagion or a threat to public health are frequently levelled at sex workers who are marginalised along multiple axes – migrant workers, transgender workers, or those working in more visible and typically more stigmatized ways, such as street-based sex workers³¹.

These stereotypes persist despite the fact that sex workers have been found to have rates of STI infection comparable to or lower than the general population, and to be receptive to health and safety messages³². A UK study using data collected from 1985 to 2002 found that at the same time as the proportion of migrant sex workers increased, rates of STI among sex workers decreased, noting this undermines 'assumptions that migrant sex workers are central to the ongoing STI epidemic'³³. Sex workers have a history of effective organizing and peer education campaigns and strategies, with many sex-worker advocacy groups forming partially in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s, or expanding their focus to address

its impact on sex work communities³⁴. Locally, condom usage rates are very high among sex workers³⁵.

As O'Neill et al. point out, the idea that sex workers are a key vector for the transmission of STIs shapes the kind of legal frameworks which direct and control the industry. When sex work is legalised and regulated for example, it is common for the regulation to either directly mandate sex workers to receive sexual health testing or make it an offense to work while infected with an STI³⁶. Mandatory testing has been criticised by researchers and sex work advocacy organizations alike, on the basis that: it is invasive; it is 'questionable from a human rights perspective'; it has no impact on the health of sex workers who do not have symptoms of an STI and negatively impacts the health of those who do by consuming scarce health resources; and that it is an inefficient use of funds³⁷. In Australia, where states have a mixture of legal models, detected rates of STIs³⁸ were 'uniformly low' across Melbourne, Sydney, and Perth, despite testing being mandatory in Melbourne, but not in the other two cities³⁹. Rates of voluntary testing in New Zealand are very high, with 96.3% of respondents indicating they attended sexual health check-ups in a survey conducted three years post-decriminalisation, and similar patterns have been identified in NSW, Australia⁴⁰.

In New Zealand Section 8 of the PRA requires operators of brothels to take all reasonable steps to minimise the likelihood of sex workers or clients transmitting or acquiring an STI within their business, while section 9 requires sex workers and clients to do the same⁴¹. In contrast to jurisdictions where sex workers are required to undergo regular testing and receive documentation confirming this, the PRA stipulates that sex workers, brothel operators and clients must not 'state or imply that a medical examination of that person means that he or she is not infected, or likely to be infected, with a sexually transmissible infection'. This is in recognition of the fact that STI test results only reflect what was detectable at the time of testing, as well as aiming to combat discourses about sex workers as 'dirty' vectors of

disease, and reduce the pressure sex workers come under from clients to provide unprotected services⁴².

While sexual health is perhaps the most attention-grabbing element of occupational health and safety for sex workers, there are many other considerations, most of which are shared with at least some other kinds of businesses. A handbook produced by New Zealand's occupational health and safety regulatory body outlines considerations to minimise the risk of transmitting STIs, as well as requirements for heating and cooling the workplace; ensuring adequate lighting is provided, particularly in stairwells; managing the risk of aggression or violence from customers; and providing a smokefree workplace environment, among other requirements⁴³. Some of the obligations outlined in this handbook reflect that occupational safety and health has impacts for the customers who enter the workplace as well as the employees or contractors. These include having appropriate first aid training and a first aid kit; maintaining an appropriate fire safety plan and adequate exits; and many points concerning basic sanitation, like hand soap and hand towels at basins throughout the business⁴⁴. There is overlap, then, between occupational health and safety, and public health⁴⁵.

In the context of a commercial sex premises, managing and minimizing the risk of disease transmission is part of occupational health and safety. It is addressed as one of the considerations which should be taken into account when considering sex work as a legitimate form of labour, and sex workers as people who have a right to be safe in their workplace.

Where more stigmatizing discourses tend to view the sex worker themselves as the site and source of contagion and threat, a pragmatic workplace safety approach instead highlights that appropriate and reasonable precautions vary depending on the exact activities being undertaken, with each having different risks and mitigation procedures. Addressing safety in the workplace through a dominant frame of work and labour avoids reinforcing stigmatizing

ideas about sex work as a vector of disease transmission and aligns with the framing preferred by sex worker rights movements⁴⁶.

Sex worker rights movements have also historically been instrumental in facilitating effective health promotion campaigns by and for sex workers. As mentioned earlier, many organisations were either established in response to, or pivoted their focus to respond to, the HIV/AIDS crisis beginning in the 1980s. Sex workers have identified the necessity of ‘access to quality, non-judgmental services’ for many decades now⁴⁷. When sex worker organisations receive funding, it is typically for health education and promotion activities⁴⁸ – locally, the NZPC receive funding from the Ministry of Health, and have done since 1988⁴⁹. Sex workers have argued that they occupy a position as de facto sexual health educators and experts. The NZPC for example, have been described as consciously curating a ‘knowledge agenda’ which aimed to ‘craft an image of sex workers as professionals who practice safe sex’⁵⁰. Research into the operation of the PRA has found sex workers report educating their clients about the transmission of STIs when clients ask for unprotected services⁵¹. In Australia, the national sex worker advocacy body Scarlet Alliance created an STI handbook (often called ‘The Red Book’) which has been reprinted multiple times and adapted for online access, due to the demand from sex workers for convenient reference material⁵². Bates and Berg argue that sex workers’ ability to act as peer educators and ‘safe sex advocates’, supported by health professionals, was key to limiting the spread of HIV among the sex working population⁵³. As I explore in chapter two, some responses by sex workers during Covid-19 demonstrated a continuation of this history of acting as public health educators and advocates.

<2> Sex work and Covid-19

This book forms part of the emergent body of work addressing the impacts on sex workers of Covid-19 and the resultant cultural, social, and economic changes. In the early stages of the pandemic, sex work researchers called attention to the multiple ways that sex workers were an especially vulnerable group with particular needs produced by combinations of stigma, discrimination, criminalisation, economic precarity, and other complicating factors⁵⁴.

Sex workers' jobs typically require extremely close and intimate contact with their clients, with the associated heightened risk of acquiring or transmitting Covid-19⁵⁵. Accordingly, a combination of state- and self-imposed lockdown and isolation measures had a drastic impact on sex workers' incomes. This was reported as a significant issue in NSWP reports from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America, North America, and the Caribbean, based on their surveys of sex workers and sex work advocacy bodies⁵⁶. Other quantitative research reinforces this, with Callander et al. finding a marked reduction in activity on an international sex work website from January to May 2020, followed by an increase from May to August 2020⁵⁷. A survey of review boards from the Netherlands and Belgium similarly reported a significant drop in activity from February to March 2020, followed by an even steeper decline in April⁵⁸. In Atlanta, USA, there was a decline in the number of male sex workers advertising once Covid-19 entered the community, and through the early parts of 2021⁵⁹. A study of men who are clients of sex workers found that for most of them the pandemic 'prevented or hindered them from paying for sex'⁶⁰. The effects of economic slowdowns were not felt equally as governments imposed lockdowns and movement restrictions of varying lengths and stringency, but the experience of a reduction or complete loss of income for a period was all-but universal⁶¹.

In many cases, sex workers were more heavily affected than other bodyworkers or entertainment industries, as they were often unable to access financial support packages offered to other businesses, or unwilling to try to access them because of stigma⁶². In Britain

sex workers, particularly migrant workers, were ‘neglected by government support schemes’, and in Canada a fear of further stigmatization or police harassment meant few sex workers accessed the relief benefits available to other workers⁶³. Similar reports emerged from NSW’s surveys, with some sex workers afraid of the tax implications or potential for being outed if they tried to access support payments, workers denied because utility bills were not in their name, or excluded because they were migrants⁶⁴. In contexts where economic support was available, the division of who could and could not access it often saw sex workers who were marginalised along other axis excluded⁶⁵. In New Zealand, sex workers were technically eligible for government assistance⁶⁶, but some were declined because their record of earnings were not in a recognised format, or could not apply because they used sex work to supplement unliveably low benefits and did not declare it as income⁶⁷. Researchers, sex workers, and advocacy organisations alike pointed out that not treating sex work as work, the criminalisation of the work, and the stigma attached to it, typically underpinned the exclusion of sex workers from these safety nets⁶⁸.

Faced with exclusion from support packages, many sex workers had no real choice but to continue working, attempting to balance economic risk with the risk of contracting Covid-19⁶⁹. In some instances, sex workers were part of groups at higher risk if they did contract Covid-19, such as workers who are HIV-positive, or those at risk due to structural factors such as being unhoused or in overcrowded living situations⁷⁰. The closure or limiting of support services during Covid-19 had flow-on effects too, with sex workers sometimes unable to access PPE, both to protect themselves from Covid-19, and condoms and other safer-sex PPE⁷¹. Access to sexual and reproductive health services was also affected⁷². Sex workers who use drugs, are HIV-positive, or experience domestic violence were also affected by restricted access to specialist health and support services⁷³. Sex workers who were unhoused or experiencing housing insecurity were affected by a shortage of short-term

housing, lack of access to support services, and the closure of workplaces which sometimes provided temporary housing options⁷⁴. In some cases, workplaces were raided by police, and their closure represented both a loss of income and a loss of housing for workers⁷⁵. When police were charged with enforcing public health orders, this frequently resulted in increased surveillance of sex workers, with migrant sex workers often additionally targeted by these measures⁷⁶. Police harassment prevented or deterred some workers from accessing healthcare and forced workers to take more risks in how they worked to avoid detection, arrests and fines⁷⁷. In Kenya, police contributed to the lack of safety for sex workers during periods of lockdown and curfews, assaulting them and exploiting them for bribes⁷⁸. In Norway, police drew on the stigmatizing idea that sex workers are disease vectors, calling them ‘contagion bombs’ on television⁷⁹. The stigmatization of sex workers as a vector of contagion, discussed in the previous section, was reinvigorated elsewhere too⁸⁰.

Sex worker advocacy organisations started to produce guidelines, based on information available at the time⁸¹, and some organisations by and for migrant sex workers translated health information⁸². Some sex workers implemented their own Covid-19 risk reduction protocols throughout the pandemic period, making strategic choices about which clients they would see, switching to virtual or digital services, enforcing enhanced hygiene protocols, and cancelling tours and travel⁸³. These options were not available to all workers, particularly those in more economically precarious situations, who sometimes found their ability to decline or screen clients was reduced during the pandemic⁸⁴. For some workers, enforcing consistent usage of condoms was more difficult, owing to a combination of factors, including reduced client numbers, or the threat of reporting sex workers for breaching lockdown rules, which some clients used to coerce workers⁸⁵. In other cases, workers were forced to accept lower rates than prior to the pandemic⁸⁶.

Advocacy and activist organisations provided support for sex workers: sex worker led initiatives provided delivery of supplies and set up fundraisers then disbursed emergency funds⁸⁷. Sex work organisations were well placed to identify the depth of need within the community and predict that it was unlikely government support would be available, or if it was, that it would be accessible to all who needed it – ‘we have taken over the obligations of the state... our community is completely abandoned by all institutions’ commented one of the organisers of an emergency fund in Poland⁸⁸. NSWHP created and maintained a list of community resources and mutual aid funds and pointed out that despite the critical work they were carrying out, sex worker-led organisations often faced funding cuts during Covid-19⁸⁹. Sex worker led organisations are well placed to support their own communities, already having established networks and trust, and have been highlighted as key to effective vaccination campaigns targeting sex workers as a priority group⁹⁰. There have been calls from some researchers for sex workers to be prioritised for vaccination, given they are frequently part of especially vulnerable groups, and for an approach to be taken which explicitly includes more marginalised groups within the community, by not requiring ID or documentation to access vaccinations⁹¹.

One other notable shift which occurred during the pandemic period was an increased focus on online sex work, concurrent with an observed trend in media discourse about digitally mediated sexual activity⁹². Platforms such as the ubiquitous OnlyFans saw a dramatic increase in traffic during the second quarter of 2020, assisted partly by an increased visibility in popular culture⁹³. As well as people who found themselves un- or under-employed because of the pandemic signing up to sell erotic digital content via platforms⁹⁴, some sex workers who usually offered face-to-face appointments switched to digital services – a point explored in chapters two and three⁹⁵. Offering digital services was not equally feasible for all sex workers. Some workers reported they were not confident with the skills which digital work

required⁹⁶, people of colour frequently find that the structural discriminations they experience in face-to-face work also affect their earning ability on online platforms⁹⁷, and online platforms were sometimes difficult to access for migrant sex workers⁹⁸. Creating content for sale was also difficult for workers in shared living situations who lacked privacy⁹⁹. Online sex work brings with it different privacy implications, too. Some workers experienced clients attempting to blackmail or extort them with explicit footage they had provided for sale, and migrant workers expressed concerns their digital footprint could impact their ability to apply for citizenship or a green card¹⁰⁰. Other sex workers reported the blurring of boundaries between work and home life was mentally taxing, on top of the strain of the pandemic itself, and they felt a pressure to be constantly productive¹⁰¹. In this respect, the movement to online work resembles some experiences of people in other industries who shifted to remote work¹⁰².

<2> Sex Work, Media and Stigma

This book has a narrow focus: limited both by topic (media texts on sex work and Covid-19) and period (from 2020 and 2021 only). Through this, it aims to both identify the dominant narratives from this period and consider how they build on or can be distinguished from prior discourses. Media texts are a useful object of study when considering the stigmatization of sex work, and consequently the experiences and material conditions of sex workers. Many people do not know a sex worker personally, so media texts can form an outsize role in shaping their ideas about the industry¹⁰³. Media texts do not just describe a reality or report it, they also play a constitutive role, helping to shape and determine it, influencing people's perceptions of others and themselves¹⁰⁴. Media narratives about sex work, specifically, can serve a function of situating it as a 'problem' in need of particular kinds of 'solutions' or

interventions¹⁰⁵. The media has been identified both as one of the contributors to sex work stigma on a macro level, and also as a site where that stigma can be challenged and negotiated¹⁰⁶. Within the context of Covid-19 specifically, the media played a key role in both disseminating and framing information¹⁰⁷. Examining media texts, then, is useful because the types of discourses which circulate about sex workers have repercussions for if and how the work continues to be stigmatized.

The stigmatization of sex work can be reinforced through some media discourses. Stigma is one type of ‘normative knowledge that emerges out of and is reinforced by media practices that are aimed at making the news “resonant”’¹⁰⁸. Here the concept of resonance describes the effective use of framing devices. Media frames draw attention to some pieces of information in a story over others, making them more salient to the audience¹⁰⁹. In constructing a text, the author makes journalistic decisions about what information to include, and what to exclude. A journalist can elevate the salience of a piece of information through techniques such as repetition and through the practice of locating the information in relation to culturally familiar symbols, scripts or stereotypes¹¹⁰. A resonant text is one which is intelligible to the intended audience, presumed to have access to a particular set of cultural knowledges and familiarity with existing stereotypes and tropes about the sex industry. A reliance on stereotypes as a framing device or anchor point can result in stigma forming part of a feedback loop. Stories about sex work are most intelligible if framed with reference to existing stereotypes, repeating those stereotypes ensures they remain culturally intelligible and familiar, making it more likely they will continue to be employed.

The use of frames in news media is not necessarily something done deliberately, and their use is often ‘unspoken and unacknowledged’, one of several methods of organizing information¹¹¹. An ability to locate a story within familiar frames may also help to add to its sense of ‘news value’, a way of describing the constellation of attributes which makes a

specific event worth reporting¹¹². News values are, again, not necessarily employed consciously, and journalists sometimes describe the ability to determine if something is newsworthy in relation to a ‘gut feeling’, judgements which are ‘self-evident and self-explaining to the practitioners’¹¹³. Stories about sex work are likely to fulfil multiple news values. They will have qualities such as surprise; being entertaining or offering what Schultz calls ‘sensation’; being relevant or culturally familiar to the anticipated audience; possessing shareability; and offering the potential to include attention-grabbing audio-visual elements, with the last two points especially important in attracting attention on social media¹¹⁴.

Stigma describes the process of attaching negative judgements and stereotypes to members of a particular group, producing them as socially undesirable, which leads to them being subject to discrimination, and accordingly reduces their life chances¹¹⁵. In Goffman’s influential account of stigma, he identified some of the ways stigmatized individuals manage and mitigate the impact of stigma, including information management – an approach frequently used by sex workers¹¹⁶. Goffman’s description of stigma has been criticised for the way that it fails to adequately describe and consider the influence of power¹¹⁷, and contemporary theories of stigma have attempted to address the central role which power plays in its production. Link and Phelan point out that ‘it takes power to stigmatize’ and propose stigma can be understood as having four interlocking parts: the labelling of difference; linking difference to negative characteristics; creating an ‘us and them’ division that demarcates the stigmatized as the Other; and a loss of status for the stigmatized, along with experiences of discrimination¹¹⁸.

Stigma’s links to experiences of discrimination and reduced life chances means it is increasingly considered a key determinant of social inequalities and health outcomes¹¹⁹. A limitation of much research into stigma is that it has often focused on stigma experienced on the basis of one quality or identity, and impacts in one area, which does not accurately reflect

the actual experiences of stigmatized populations¹²⁰. In the case of sex workers, they may experience stigma or discrimination on multiple levels: someone may experience the stigma of being a sex worker and being transgender simultaneously, for example, or of doing sex work and having a disability¹²¹. Grittner and Walsh, in a scoping review of literature addressing social stigma and its impacts on female sex workers, argue for the importance of an intersectional lens on stigma in order ‘to understand how the experience and manifestations of stigma impact sex workers with various subjectivities’¹²². Stigma’s impacts on sex workers is wide-ranging: from social stigma or alienation from personal relationships, to poor treatment in healthcare settings, and consequently avoiding accessing care because of the fear of stigma¹²³. Stigma can make it more difficult for sex workers to find housing, secure employment in other fields, and further their education¹²⁴. It is linked to sex workers being victims of violence¹²⁵. During the pandemic, some sex work advocacy organisations identified stigma as the root cause of their inadequate and inconsistent funding¹²⁶. It is a near-universal feature of the sex industry internationally, although decriminalising sex work – as New Zealand has – has been identified as a crucial step towards the reduction of stigma¹²⁷.

Media contribute to sex work stigma in several ways. Returning to Link and Phelan, the stigmatized ‘other’ must be labelled and have negative characteristics associated with them as part of the stigma production process¹²⁸. In media, this can take the form of using loaded language or slurs to describe sex workers: texts which talk about ‘prostitutes’ or ‘hookers’ for example, and words which co-occur with these labels, modifying them, contribute to the association of negative characteristics¹²⁹. The stigmatized group are labelled as the ‘them’, distinct from ‘us’, which in the case of media texts typically includes the presumed audience: again, this has been identified many times in media coverage of the sex industry¹³⁰. Finally, the stigmatized group are subject to discrimination: this may be social ill-treatment, informed by ideas about who the sex worker is, drawn in part from media, or it may be structural, with

media ‘asserting public pressure on police to check the behavior of “unruly” workers’¹³¹. In the New Zealand context, which sex workers are permitted to speak for themselves, and which are spoken about as a ‘problem’ varies according to where and how they work; street-based sex workers are seldom interviewed or considered as equal stakeholders in decisions about their workplaces¹³². Being a speaking subject grants sex workers some ability to dictate how they will be presented and understood, and in this imbalance media coverage may contribute to the continued production of a hierarchy or ‘whorearchy’ between different sectors of the sex industry, too. It is in this context that media texts have been selected as the object of analysis for this book, because of their influence on the stigmatisation and potential to contribute to the *destigmatisation* of the industry.

<2> Methodological Approach

In analysing the texts collected here, I take a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. In the previous section, I explained the rationale for studying media texts: they are productive sites where the stigma against sex work can be constructed, negotiated, or resisted. CDA explicitly aims to address and unpick the operations of power within discourse, and van Dijk has argued that when possible ‘it does so from a perspective that is consistent with the best interests of dominated groups’¹³³. Wodak points out that CDA not only explores how power and social domination are reproduced within discourse, but also how marginalised groups may discursively resist the positions they are cast in or resist the existing dynamics of power¹³⁴. Lazar writes that a feminist CDA aims to untangle the more subtle operations and manifestations of hegemonic power, and how it is sustained through discourse, and highlights that patriarchal ideologies interact in complex ways with capitalist interests¹³⁵. The effects of structural power on subjects on the basis of gender cannot usefully be considered without also taking into account the interactional effects of other social identities such as sexuality, race, class, and (dis)ability status¹³⁶ – without using an intersectional lens¹³⁷.

CDA's focus on power makes it suitable for analysing discourses about marginalised groups, and in the case of this book, of groups where marginalisation may be experienced along multiple axis. In treating discourse as socially constitutive, here in the form of news texts, this book articulates and explores one of the factors contributing to the ways that sex workers experience the world. The experiences of sex workers, their access to or exclusion from economic support packages, for example, are shaped most obviously by policy and mechanisms of governmentality. As explored in the 'sex work and Covid-19' section, however, who can access 'business support' depends in part on what is understood as a business. The ways that sex work is framed, understood, and produced within discourse has implications for the ways that it is treated as an occupation or activity, and discourses, including those developed and reinforced through news media, are socially constitutive, contributing to these understandings¹³⁸.

The texts selected for analysis here were collected in the first instance from the Newztext database. Date parameters were set from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021, and the following combinations of search terms were used:

- "Sex work" OR "sex worker" OR brothel OR prostitut* AND COVID OR pandemic OR coronavirus OR COVID-19
- Blenheim AND COVID-19 AND "sex workers"

Further hand searches were carried out of outlets less reliably indexed by Newztext, including the *Otago Daily Times*, *Newshub*, *Newsroom*, *TVNZ*, *Re:News*, and *RNZ*. Texts were excluded from analysis if the mention of sex work was made only in passing. Sometimes a text would be re-printed across multiple outlets. If the text was in all elements identical the duplicates were excluded, if the text was edited, abridged, or expanded from one outlet to another, I considered these as separate texts. Some texts included in the analysis do include

discussions of strip-clubs, presented alongside discussions of full-service sex work, however I did not search for texts which only discussed strip-clubs, in order to keep the focus of this research reasonably narrow. In total 28 texts from 2020 were analysed, and 42 texts from 2021. The collection of texts for analysis is not exhaustive but represents the major narrative events around which reporting on sex work in the context of Covid-19 clustered.

The texts were first collated into a single document, with radio texts transcribed, then read and analysed to establish the broad narrative categories they fell into. This approach is consistent with the approach used in much prior work on media discourses and sex work¹³⁹. From here, sub-themes were identified within these narratives, and examined with an eye both to existing discourses about sex work, and discourses about sex work specifically in a New Zealand context – addressing both locally specific manifestations of power and a broader, global, context¹⁴⁰. Attention was also paid to who was conferred ‘expert’ status by being presented as an interviewee, and if their words were quoted or paraphrased¹⁴¹, and to patterns in how information was presented or framed¹⁴². To supplement and support the analysis of media texts, I also drew on some policy documents and communications – particularly around the enforcement and interpretation of Covid-19 occupational safety rules for the sex industry. These included Covid-19 Alert Level rules issued by the New Zealand government, interpretations of these provided by the NZPC via their website and social media, and some internal documents from WorkSafe and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet obtained under the Official Information Act (OIA).

The analytic approach is modelled after Fairclough, specifically his ‘three dimensional’ approach to the analysis of discourse¹⁴³. ‘Discourse events’ are understood to function in multiple ways simultaneously: as texts, as discourse practices, and as social practices¹⁴⁴. Texts are first examined to establish their function as discourse practices, within larger narrative themes, then examined on an individual or micro level, to consider lexical choices

and structure, and then recontextualised as social practices, to determine if they can be understood within extant ideologies of sex work. Van Dijk points out that contextualizing fragments of text within the discourse event or larger text they exist within is important for considering how they structure ideological meaning, and this is taken into account in my analysis too¹⁴⁵. The specific terminologies and turns of phrase used are examined, as one of the levels of discourse where ideologies may manifest, helping to shape ‘shared social representations’¹⁴⁶. Sometimes ideologies may become disconnected from the specific interests of power or politics which they serve. Here they become ‘naturalized’, viewed as ‘common sense’, rather than as a way to arrange ‘clusters of socially shared opinion-schemata about social issues’ which continue to reproduce existing hegemonic arrangements¹⁴⁷.

<2> Researcher Positionality

As I indicate in the opening comments of this book, I write from a position of having done – of doing – sex work myself. Previously when acknowledging this experience in my research I have been opaque about when exactly I did sex work, in an attempt to navigate the stigma of the work, and the way that ‘sex worker’ and ‘academic’ are often considered to be identities which cannot co-exist, and certainly not at the same time¹⁴⁸. Work addressing sex work research design has identified that a researcher’s own positionality will inevitably influence the way a project is conceived and carried out¹⁴⁹. In this instance, noting when I did sex work is relevant, as the idea for this book arose while I was navigating the work during the Covid-19 era. Many of the texts included for analysis here first came to my attention when a colleague or friend sent me a link as we collectively watched the narratives I examine here unfolding in real-time.

I write from a perspective of viewing sex work as a form of work, and with the knowledge that there are significant disparities in people's experiences in this work. My experiences in sex work have been shaped by other elements of my positionality; I am pākehā (white), and middle class, and I have worked indoors, a mixture of independent and managed work. I have a first-hand knowledge of some of the impacts which the stigma of sex work can have, but my experiences there have not been complicated by the intersection of stigmas and discrimination such as those experienced by migrant sex workers. Knowledge gained from my personal experiences is partial, although, as other insider researchers suggest¹⁵⁰, I believe it sometimes assists in offering me insights that are perhaps more apparent from this vantage point. Academic research into sex work can form part of the project of destigmatization¹⁵¹. This book is written and offered in the hope that it might contribute to that, and that capturing where decriminalisation has offered gains, and where its implementation might have offered uneven protections, will be useful to other sex workers fighting for the rights and protection of our community.

The texts in this book are also examined for how they function within the broader narrative themes – frequently stories or topics would develop or be revisited. As well as this more obvious intertextuality, texts are considered with regard to the implied dimensions of the narratives as well. The technique of media framing makes use of intertextuality and identifying and exploring the frames being employed recognises that texts do not function on only one single level and that they do not truly stand alone. Sometimes this intertextuality is explicit, where the frame or assumed cultural knowledge is referenced directly in the text. Often though it is 'manifest intertextuality', where the earlier texts, discourses or cultural schema which shape the meaning of the text are assumed to be part of a 'culturally shared knowledge'¹⁵².

This process is iterative and circular: the texts analysed here will themselves contribute to the production of these knowledges, eventually becoming part of the corpus of former texts to be drawn upon. One of the key themes which emerges across the data from both years is sex workers using media coverage productively, to start to redirect social sentiment and construct new figurations of the sex worker in the popular consciousness. The stigma which sex workers are subject to is sometimes considered to be intractable, and as Weitzer points out, a limitation of some early theorisations of stigma more generally was a tendency to document how stigmatised parties could manage stigma, with little attention paid to how it might be resisted¹⁵³. While, as I explore in detail in chapters two and three, the representations of sex work in media still leave much to be desired in some instances, there is evidence of an improvement in some areas. This, I think, is encouraging for what it suggests about the results of sex workers' efforts to resist the stigma they are subject to, indicating the potential for change.

<1> Chapter 2: Sex Work and Covid-19 in 2020

Media coverage of sex work historically has been uneven and has often reproduced stigmatizing narratives – even when a particular text hopes to dismantle them, they are often invoked once again as a foil to play against. In this chapter and the next, I am interested in examining how New Zealand’s model of decriminalisation was *perceived* to function under stress. Some New Zealand media conveys a sense of pride at our progressive legislation through references to being one of only a few places to have enacted decriminalisation¹⁵⁴. Local sex work activist Catherine Healy has been granted a Damehood, which, in her words, ‘shows the acceptance of this industry’¹⁵⁵ and its conditional incorporation into more traditional institutions. The baseline from which discourses are operating may therefore be different to that at play internationally. Here, I consider which discourses were most prominent during the first year of the pandemic: where and how do they link to existing narratives, and where do they diverge?

New Zealand’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic began with enacting border restrictions on 2 February 2020: foreign travellers who had travelled from or through mainland China would be denied entry; citizens and permanent residents could enter but had to self-isolate for 14 days on arrival¹⁵⁶. Later in February, in a speech to the Auckland Chamber of Commerce, Finance Minister Grant Robertson opened with remarks about the government’s preparation for the potential arrival of the virus. The public health response which had been mobilized included stockpiles of masks, testing facilities which could provide same-day results located in three of New Zealand’s largest cities, a dedicated information line, and public health staff stationed at airports¹⁵⁷. Robertson acknowledged the immediate impacts of the restrictions already in place on the country’s tourism industry, who were affected by a loss of visitors

from China. The following day, 28 February, New Zealand confirmed its first case of Covid-19¹⁵⁸. Further travel restrictions followed, on arrivals from Iran, South Korea and Italy¹⁵⁹.

Border restrictions tightened: on 14 March it was announced that international travellers (aside from those arriving from the Pacific Islands) would have to isolate for 14 days, and on 19 March the border was closed to foreign travellers, with only citizens and permanent residents permitted entry¹⁶⁰.

Economic support packages began to be announced shortly after border restrictions came into force. In early March there were announcements that the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) (the agency who manage social security benefits) would receive additional funding, anticipating the need to support people newly un- or under-employed. This was followed by a business continuity package, and the introduction of the wage subsidy scheme¹⁶¹. The wage subsidy scheme was intended to allow businesses experiencing a decline in profits to be able to continue to pay their staff, with the intention of preserving jobs during the projected disruptions of the pandemic. It was also made available to sole traders or self-employed people whose business had been affected by Covid-19¹⁶² – a group which included sex workers. On 23 March, expansions were announced to the scheme, expanding eligibility to ‘self-employed people with variable monthly incomes’¹⁶³. The wage subsidy was paid as a lump sum to cover 12 weeks of reduced income, at \$350 per week for part time employees, or \$585.80 per week for full time employees, and was a taxable payment, administered via MSD. The subsidy scheme operated on a ‘high trust’ model where detailed earnings and cashflow documentation was not required to make the application, but instead applicants made a declaration that they met the eligibility criteria. However, MSD compared applicants details to data held by the Inland Revenue Department (IRD) to confirm applicants were genuine businesses or sole traders¹⁶⁴.

New Zealand's approach to managing and containing transmission of the virus in 2020 relied on a four tier 'Alert Level' system, which was first announced and enacted on 21 March¹⁶⁵.

At Level 1, there were minimal restrictions on day-to-day activities, borders remained closed, and contact tracing check-ins were required, either via a QR-code based app or by manual sign-in. At Level 2, large gatherings were restricted, hospitality businesses had some restrictions on how they could serve patrons, and working from home was encouraged. At Level 3, non-essential businesses needed to close, schools closed for all aside from the children of essential workers, and hospitality could offer contactless service only. At Level 4, or lockdown, people were required to stay within their household 'bubble'. Only essential businesses could open, schools were closed, and travel aside from that necessary to collect essential items was restricted. New Zealand moved to Level 2 on 21 March, then Level 3 on 23 March. Two days later, at 11.59 pm on 25 March the entire country moved into Level 4 lockdown and remained in that state until 11.59 pm on 27 April, when it moved back to Level 3. Just over two weeks later, at 11.59 pm on 13 May, New Zealand moved back to Level 2, and by 8 June there were no active cases of Covid-19 in the country.

In August 2020 there was a small outbreak of Covid-19 in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city. The Auckland region was moved to Level 3, and the rest of the country was moved to Level 2. Auckland remained at Level 3 from 12 noon on 12 August until 11.59 pm on 30 August, when it shifted to Level 2. Regions outside Auckland moved to Level 1 on 21 September at 11.59 pm, and Auckland followed on 7 October.

The framing of New Zealand's Covid-19 response in political discourse has received some attention in scholarship. During the initial Level 4 lockdown period, and the following Level 3 period, daily press briefings were held, usually headed by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, and often accompanied by Director General of Health Ashley Bloomfield¹⁶⁶. Frames used here appealed to the idea of a "team of five million" working collectively to "fight" the virus

– some speeches from Ardern also made use of the exhortation to “go hard and go early”, as well as to “be kind”¹⁶⁷. The use of sporting metaphors here, as well as the colloquialism ‘go hard’, taps into the part of New Zealand’s national identity which values sporting prowess, and locates ‘team’ within a sporting rather than corporate realm¹⁶⁸. In government communication, the New Zealand population were encouraged to view staying home, isolating, and adhering to the restrictions as doing their part in the ‘fight’ and this narrative of community informs some of the discourses analysed later in this chapter¹⁶⁹.

My prior work has considered the development of news media discourses about sex work in New Zealand following the passing of our decriminalisation legislation. While the pandemic was, as we were reminded many times throughout the early months of 2020, an unprecedented event, the narratives which sprung up were of course not created out of whole cloth. The norms, stereotypes, and familiar framing devices used when talking about sex work in Covid-19 times were adapted and drawn from those which already existed. As part of the process of addressing and examining media texts in context¹⁷⁰, I consider here the ways that the dominant narrative themes and discursive turns align with or depart from what had been observed in previously published and aired media texts.

Earlier work, looking at a selection of media texts from 2010 – 2018 found that the sex workers most likely to be interviewed in media were those who worked indoors, either for brothels or agencies who charged higher than average rates, or who worked independently, booking their own clients. In contrast, street-based sex workers and migrant sex workers were much more likely to be spoken about than spoken to¹⁷¹. Choices about who to interview for a story communicates who is viewed as an ‘expert’ or as a particularly informed and affected party – when sex workers are permitted to speak for themselves, it allows them input into how their work is understood. Sources and interviewees are ‘the voice of authority’ who ‘have the power to construct, reinforce, or potentially challenge normative discourses’¹⁷². In

the 28 texts analysed for this chapter, 15 used at least one sex worker as a source. In one instance these workers worked for an agency, in three cases their working situation was not specified, and in the remainder the sex workers were independent. None of the sex workers interviewed were identified as street-based or migrant workers. Six texts used the owners of brothels or clubs as sources. The sample size of texts is too small to make conclusive claims, but this shows the possibility of a shift from the earlier texts – previously, managers and owners were more likely to be positioned as experts than sex workers themselves.

Representatives from the NZPC were interviewed in 18 of the texts, and six texts quoted from the NZPC's website or the guidelines they published for sex workers about how to work under Level 2 restrictions. Nine of the texts included interviewees from other agencies or organisations. In some instances, this was because sex work was being discussed alongside other kinds of businesses, and interviewees from those fields were included, sometimes this was because public health experts were also used as sources, which is unsurprising given the topic.

<2> The Physicality of Sex Work

In the first year of the pandemic, and particularly during New Zealand's initial wave of infections and the lifting of the lockdown, one key theme within news media texts was a focus on the specific physical acts which make up sex work. This was typically framed around their potential to contribute to infection, or the way that the job was being adapted to accommodate the necessity of managing and reducing the risk of Covid-19 transmission. A focus on the more titillating and salacious elements of sex workers' jobs is a trend which has been noted in other work. Scambler and Scambler call this the 'paradox of attention' with a fascination with sex work relating less to what sex workers actually *do* and more to the way their job has been a site of scrutiny and speculation¹⁷³.

A focus on the sexual labour carried out by sex workers was a feature of some earlier media texts from New Zealand. Some emphasised the erotic enjoyment which some workers found in their work, as part of a broader project of framing doing sex work as an empowered choice and, on the part of brothel owners and sex workers, of utilizing media texts for their advertorial potential¹⁷⁴. Some texts would also outline activities, especially BDSM related ones, offered at specific brothels. This could be understood as situating the activities there as unusual and fascinating for the non-sex working public. Coverage of migrant sex workers would sometimes mention the number of clients workers did or could see, and in at least one case built a news report around misreading a handbook produced by the NZPC and claiming it taught migrant workers how to perform ‘sex tricks’¹⁷⁵. The degree to which media texts in New Zealand focused on specific sexual acts carried out by sex workers has been uneven and influenced by which group of sex workers are being discussed.

New Zealand’s Covid-19 management system used the terminology of ‘bubbles’ to refer to the group of people an individual was in contact with during the lockdown. Questions about how many clients a sex worker might see could conceivably be framed around concern for how many ‘bubbles’ might be popped. One text included commentary from Hannah Tamaki, the wife of a fundamentalist mega-church Minister, speculating that ‘a sex worker turns 10 tricks a day minimum’ adding this represented at least 10 different ‘bubbles’ and arguing that by this logic large church gatherings should also be allowed¹⁷⁶. Potentially worthy of note is that despite being critical and stigmatizing of sex workers – drawing on the notion of the indiscriminate sex worker – Tamaki still uses the term ‘sex worker’ rather than more overtly stigmatizing language. In a separate text, Catherine Healy, from the NZPC, mentioned that the usual complaint from sex workers was that they didn’t have enough work¹⁷⁷, which is a point she has made in texts from earlier periods too¹⁷⁸. While this statement is not made directly in response to claims like those of Tamaki, it functions to offer an intertextual

counter-narrative, and serves partly to challenge assumptions about how many clients sex workers actually see.

Some texts focused on the practical steps which brothels and sex workers were taking to manage transmission risk. This focus overlaps with the point addressed in the next subsection, about sex workers as public health advocates, but some examples are presented here as illustration of their relevance to this theme, too. In one case, a text noted that a safety precaution used by many street-based sex workers, of noting down the number plates of cars their colleagues got into, could double as a means of keeping details for contact-tracing¹⁷⁹.

Two other texts focused on the operation of strip-clubs under Level 2 restrictions. Both mentioned how different clubs had adapted to manage the tipping of dancers. One owner said he had been putting the house money used for tipping through a dryer each evening to sterilize it¹⁸⁰, another had introduced a digital tipping system, while a third invited customers to put tips into a champagne bucket on stage rather than tipping the workers directly¹⁸¹. Texts about strip clubs would sometimes use suggestive language or highlight particular activities in their headlines: one mentioned there would be ‘no lap dances’ while another said clubs would re-open with ‘a bang’¹⁸². The texts situate the managers of the clubs as being interested in operating within the constraints of Level 2 and detail the creative solutions they have come up with – although the texts do not interview any dancers, instead allowing the managers to speak on their behalf. Articles which mention a strip-club owner putting tipping money through a dryer emerged in a broader mediascape which reported on creative adjustments to services in response to Covid-19 – a fish and chip shop that delivered orders via slide, for example¹⁸³. In this respect, the coverage of sex industry businesses was not wholly divergent from some coverage of other businesses and their response to the pandemic.

Other coverage of specific sexual acts tended to use guidance issued by the NZPC as the basis for discussion and information – six of the analysed texts featured this¹⁸⁴. Most

commonly these texts would report that sex workers had been told not to kiss their clients, and to ‘avoid the moist breath zone’ or try to avoid other people’s breath¹⁸⁵. Several also mentioned that sex workers had been told they should change what services they provided, or how they offered them, with suggestions to offer ‘fantasy sessions’¹⁸⁶, to consider ‘diversifying services’¹⁸⁷, or to be ‘creative’¹⁸⁸. The NZPC’s national coordinator and Auckland regional coordinator mentioned in three texts that some workers innovated by setting up peep shows for clients¹⁸⁹. Other points mentioned in this context included the use of masks and gloves when needed, including by clients, and changes to the practical operation of brothels to avoid workers sharing rooms during a shift¹⁹⁰. Texts which mentioned specific sexual acts, or which used phrasing which might in other circumstances viewed as salacious (‘creative’ and ‘fantasy’) tended to do this through quotation or paraphrasing of the NZPC.

The guidelines which were reported on were issued by the NZPC on 27 May 2020. In relation to precautions and changes during the provision of physical services, the guidelines say that sex workers should avoid offering GFE services, kissing, ‘avoid the moist breath zone’, consider offering sexual positions like doggystyle or reverse cowgirl, that dancers should avoid ‘motor-boating’, and suggest alternative activities like voyeurism or a ‘quarantine/medical mask fantasy’¹⁹¹. In context, it becomes apparent that offering ‘fantasy’ services is markedly less salacious (aside, possibly, for medical fetishists) than is implied by the partial quotation in some news texts. Omitting the ‘quarantine/medical mask’ portion of the suggestion – as both texts which quoted this section did – substantially changes the implication here. The omission of some information has the potential to make the story more ‘newsworthy’, through the value of surprise – allowing the reader to draw their own conclusions about what kind of ‘fantasy’ could be alluded to here¹⁹². Within the context of public health guidance, the NZPC’s suggestion to make prophylactic equipment part of erotic

play can be linked to similar suggestions which exist in many safer sex guides, to make putting on a condom part of the flow of a sexual encounter, and not an interruption to it. The bulk of the NZPC's guide deals with more prosaic topics. It gives information about cleaning surfaces – including some specific to sex workplaces, like cash, spas, and poles; how to set up contact tracing systems; and suggestions such as reducing the volume of music in clubs to avoid people needing to speak as loudly, addressing the transmission risk associated with shouting.

<2> Sex Work and the 'Team of Five Million'

Much of the public health messaging in New Zealand around the pandemic drew on ideas about collective responsibility, being a 'kind' and considerate community member, and not letting down the 'team of five million'¹⁹³. Sex workers are sometimes constructed as figures outside of their own community, particularly those workers subjected to additional scrutiny and stigma because of their visibility – such as street-based sex workers¹⁹⁴. This is often linked to narratives which position the sex worker as a vector of disease, and consequently as a threat. Sometimes this construction hinges on suggestions that sex worker will infect morally 'pure' women or that migrant workers constitute a threat to the health of 'the nation'¹⁹⁵. During the pandemic adult service websites (ASWs) in the UK, which offer an advertising platform, treated workers and clients differently, with the 'responsibility for public health as well as economic risks being transferred from ASWs to sex workers, and completely circumventing clients'¹⁹⁶. There is historical precedent for sex workers being held responsible for the behaviour of their clients too¹⁹⁷. One of the most prevalent themes in news media texts about sex work during the first year of the pandemic in New Zealand concerned the interaction between sex work and community health, evident within 17 of the analysed texts. Frequent focuses were clients attempting to book face-to-face appointments during lockdown and concerns clients would not accurately report their activities to contact tracers.

Two texts reported on sex workers found working during the lockdown, a small proportion of the overall corpus¹⁹⁸. An additional sub-theme, analysed below, was of sex workers as public-health minded community members, a point introduced by NZPC representatives, sex workers themselves, and in some instances by journalists.

<3> The misbehaviour of clients and sex workers as public health advocates

The actions of clients were identified as a source of concern in a number of texts, with texts that raised the possibility clients may not accurately report their movements to contact tracers starting to appear during March and April 2020. Contact tracing was identified as a topic of concern during discussions about return-to-work guidelines for the sex industry prior to the move to Level 2¹⁹⁹. Concerns about the reliability of contact tracing data was highlighted quite early in New Zealand's pandemic response, then, and continued to be a focus as it progressed.

Some texts from 2020 reported that sex workers themselves were either dubious about clients' reliability or had found they didn't take contact tracing seriously. One reported that she had taken 'one booking out of maybe 50 calls' but reiterated that 'I am not going to be getting as much business but at the end of the day people's health and safety comes first'²⁰⁰. In a separate text, another sex worker suggested that Covid Tracer App locations could be registered under unassuming names which would not arouse suspicion to allay clients' fears about signing in²⁰¹. The same worker pointed out that while she was in a position to return to work slowly, only seeing regular clients who she trusted to get in touch, if necessary, 'for some sex workers there's going to be a hard choice between seeing a client, and maybe not being able to get proper contact information, versus turning down that client and probably much needed funds'. These comments underscore the unequal experience of the pandemic and indicate a keen awareness of this from within the sex working community. Healy, from

the NZPC, was also interviewed in this text, and was paraphrased as saying it should be ‘a firm “no” to anyone who was refusing to provide contact information’. Elsewhere, Healy noted that she was confident in sex workers’ abilities to comply with the contact tracing requirements, but clients were ‘an unknown’²⁰².

The image of sex workers as experienced in managing their responsibilities to public health as community members is subtly reinforced here, both by sex workers themselves and by the NZPC. The sex work community’s response to the HIV/AIDS crisis and to managing the risk of STI transmission was also highlighted as a strength – both by Healy and by journalists – in multiple texts²⁰³. This approach directly addresses the stigma of the sex worker as a vector of disease, and suggests that sex workers’ potential for occupational exposure to infection means they may be well placed to enact new hygiene and public health protocols, already having experience in this.

Another key narrative within this group of texts is of clients trying to book during the lockdown period. Some reports of this came from the NZPC – who accused clients of displaying ‘impatience’ and ‘stupidity’²⁰⁴ – but emphasised it was a small number of clients trying to break the rules. Other reports came from individual sex workers. Texts tended to frame this in relation to the risk which breaking lockdown posed to broader community health, but the ire here was directed towards clients. However, two texts, from separate outlets, framed the concern as being for the health of sex workers themselves, and the families of the sex workers. Both instances occurred in reportage, not in quotes from interviewees²⁰⁵. Historically, sex workers have been viewed as vectors, not as equal members of the public and they have often been cast as a threat to normative, non-sex working, members of the community. The concern expressed here is in marked contrast to how the relationship between sex workers and infectious diseases has been framed in many earlier texts.

The inclusion of sex workers' families here – and in a further text where a brothel owner mentions a worker with an immunocompromised family member was waiting to return to work²⁰⁶ – situates them as part of familial units. Narratives about sex workers' relationships with their family can be complex, and the acknowledgement of their family ties are not necessarily an unproblematic good. In New Zealand, for example, sex workers' childhoods or relationships with their parents have been reported on as part of establishing them as 'undamaged'²⁰⁷. Elsewhere sex workers have been rendered into sympathetic figures on the basis of being 'someone's daughter', rather than being acknowledged as whole and valuable people in their own right²⁰⁸. While not entirely removed from this vein of discourse, these examples grant the sex workers a degree of control and make them active participants – one reports sex workers 'were furious that... clients would dare put them and their families at risk'²⁰⁹. Within New Zealand's pandemic response, this frame also locates sex workers as comparable to the rest of the population. The collective responsibility to keep each other safe was a significant discursive thread within the public health messaging from the New Zealand Government and public health officials²¹⁰, and the risk of a chain of transmission from client to worker to family member can be understood within this context.

While condemnation or characterisation of clients as being dangerous and exploitative is not a new phenomenon²¹¹, the examples in which they were criticised for attempting to book during the lockdown typically didn't frame the sex workers being approached during lockdown as passive victims, being taken advantage of. Indeed, in many instances it was sex workers themselves who complained about the approaches, becoming speaking subjects in the narrative²¹². Two of the texts reported extensively on the tactics which sex workers were using when clients contacted them asking about bookings during the lockdown period, with both using screenshots of the sex workers' text message conversations with clients to illustrate

the pieces. The responses from sex workers ranged from directly calling out the clients' disregard for the public health orders, to using humour to get their point across.

One reads:

Client: Hey u seeing any1?

Worker: Please tell me why this is any of your business? This is not Tinder

Client: I ment [sic] while on lockdown

Worker: Yes, I have a note from Jacinda that says fucking is an essential service. You will just have to move in and join my bubble until the end of lockdown. Could be romantic [heart emoji]

Worker: Don't worry if my kids start calling you Daddy... their [sic] very needy

In another exchange the worker agreed to see a client and gave him the address of the local police station as the location to meet at. In a third, in response to a client asking for an in-person meeting the worker said 'we will have to stay 2 meters apart. How long is your cock babe?', with the client unhappily asking 'are you having fun with me?' The worker then added 'here is some afternoon reading for you. Please scurry off back under your rock and educate yourself. www.covid19.govt.nz'²¹³. Another sex worker reprimanded a client asking for services during lockdown saying 'just cause its level 3 doesn't mean its "all ok". A second wave of covid could happen if people get complacent about it'²¹⁴. In one text, a screenshot of the following exchange was shared:

Client: Hi are you meeting for sex at the moment?

Worker: Only with people who already have the virus. What about you?

Client: I don't have the virus but I want to have sex

Worker: If I give you a discount what about both?

Client: Do you have the virus?

Worker: Do you have cash?

Client: Yes, I do

Worker: Perfect I can probably find the virus for you then²¹⁵

The worker from this screencap was also interviewed and expressed that she was 'really frustrated people aren't taking it seriously' adding clients needed to 'behave yourselves'²¹⁶. Another sex worker's response was shown alongside her Twitter caption when she shared a screenshot of one of the conversations, reading 'in today's edition of horny mouth breathers'²¹⁷, indicating a palpable frustration and disdain for irresponsible clients. While these examples are obviously curated and selected to display the most interesting, newsworthy, and entertaining exchanges, they are also an unusual example of sex workers' actual and unedited interactions with clients being displayed in media, as they are direct screencaps of exchanges, not retellings or dramatizations. This is reasonably unusual and offers a counternarrative to ideas of the relationship between worker and client which is produced in other media, where the degree of active customer management may be deemphasised²¹⁸. Sex workers and brothel owners have long been aware of the impact of media coverage of their industry and have used the media to manage and advance their public image, and for advertorial ends²¹⁹. In reportage, one text adds that the exchanges show sex workers 'provided critical public health education responses'²²⁰. These conversations allow

sex workers to present themselves as community-minded, aware of the public health order rules, and also quick-witted and funny.

One further text where sex workers presented themselves as concerned with public health reported on a dispute between sex worker Lisa Lewis and Hannah Tamaki, whose husband heads a fundamentalist mega-church. Tamaki objected to sex workers being permitted to return to work when large indoor gatherings, like church services, had not yet been allowed to resume. Lewis expressed concern at Tamaki's urgent desire to resume face-to-face services, saying 'I know a lot of elderly that go to church and I just feel that it's selfish... You have to ask yourself why it's so urgent that they're all in the same room' adding 'if I ran a church I would never put my congregation at risk of something so dangerous'²²¹. She went on to suggest Tamaki's desire for in-person services might have been driven by a lack of tithing donations from the congregation during the lockdown period. This text draws much of its news value from the unexpected inversion of roles at play: the sex worker in this instance is the figure concerned with public health, while the institution accused of being driven by greed and disregard for the health of others is the church.

These narratives do not, of course, counteract much longer-standing stigmas about the sex worker as a vector of disease, but they present some evidence of an emergent counter-narrative which challenges this. Often, these are supported by appeals to the history of the sex worker rights movement as evidence, and sex workers' effective responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic as an example of their credentials in this space. Reasonably often sex workers were permitted to speak for themselves, or the NZPC were contacted for comment, signalling an acknowledgement that sex workers themselves held expert status on this topic. The possibility that clients might not report their movements was a concern expressed in many texts, and to a degree this was turned into a problem for sex workers to solve with the behaviour, or anticipated behaviour, of their clients made into their responsibility. However,

as discussed earlier in this chapter, sex work was to an extent treated in a way consistent with other close-contact businesses, with a degree of trust extended to clients to conduct themselves responsibly.

<2> The Turn to Online Content

A third key narrative within the analysed texts was sex workers who had previously done forms of face-to-face sex work, like prostitution and stripping, shifting to working online. While ‘online sex work’ is used to refer to many different things in existing literature, including advertising for clients online, in this chapter I use it to refer to offering erotic or sexual services, or depictions of these, via mediated digital technologies. Marketing online sexual services may also contribute to the kind of personal brand creation and maintenance carried out by some private or agency-based sex workers, with potential crossover benefits in terms of attracting clientele more generally.

Sixteen of the 28 texts, over half, mentioned online sex work in some way²²². Online work would often be discussed alongside other forms of non-contact sex work, like phone sex or pre-digital forms of work like peepshows. Sex work was far from the only industry which needed to shift to models of online work during the pandemic, and the move to mediated forms of sex work as a temporary measure was highlighted in many studies internationally²²³. Although it was a topic covered frequently in the analysed texts, it was not generally discussed in depth, sometimes only featuring as a single sentence in an article. There was sometimes a tendency to assume experience in one part of the sector would translate to others. One text reflected concerns particular to online sex work, interviewing Healy, several workers, a sex therapist who discussed the client-side experience, and a Netsafe representative who discussed issues of piracy²²⁴, but this was an outlier. The specific challenges which a move to remote work presented for sex workers were seldom explained,

beyond an acknowledgement that their jobs usually took physical contact as a central component. Issues with needing privacy to create images and videos, the privacy concerns produced by posting explicit content, the practicalities of receiving payments, and technological challenges made a shift to online work difficult or impossible for many sex workers²²⁵, but these points were rarely addressed.

Where online sex work was considered in more depth, opinions varied about how viable it was as an alternative income stream. Healy, from the NZPC, was generally unconvinced by its potential, saying of sex workers who offered webcam performances that ‘it was fun but it wasn't going to keep them in income’²²⁶ and, in the early stages of the pandemic, that “people are talking about cam-cording... but you know, I don’t think income streams from that are going to sustain everyone”²²⁷. Her comments in other texts are very similar, that online work is ‘not a big money earner generally’²²⁸, and adding that the NZPC were encouraging sex workers to find other employment or to contact WINZ² about accessing a benefit. Healy was also sceptical of the potential for movements towards online sex work or content production changing the operation of the sex industry in any meaningful way. One article paraphrased her comments thus: ‘Healy says while the innovations were helping escorts during lockdown she didn't believe it would change the way the industry operated’²²⁹. Current sex workers tended to frame online sex work as a way to support themselves financially during the lockdown period, sometimes concurrent with the wage subsidy; to give them greater latitude to decline clients who refused contact tracing protocols; or to avoid face-to-face contact as they were themselves immunocompromised²³⁰. One sex worker also highlighted that online content offered a way to keep in touch with regular clients and maintain a relationship during

² WINZ is an acronym for Work and Income New Zealand. WINZ is the direct-client arm of MSD, and is often used as a catch-all term to refer to MSD’s activities.

the lockdown period²³¹. Some reported the earnings from online work were significant, and they intended to continue doing it even after they were able to return to face-to-face work, but added the effort required to sustain a paid following was considerable²³².

Although comments from Healy and comments from sex workers engaged in online sex work approach the topic in different ways, they are not necessarily talking at cross-purposes, but may instead be addressing different audiences. The NZPC were highly concerned with encouraging sex workers to access financial assistance, either in the form of the wage subsidy or through applying for a social security benefit. As well as stressing in texts that they recommended sex workers access their entitlements, or contact the NZPC for assistance²³³, the NZPC also highlighted their facilitation of contact between sex workers and MSD as one of their notable activities in their regular reports to the Ministry of Health (their primary funder)²³⁴. This point was also reiterated on their social media accounts, where they mentioned multiple times throughout March and April 2020 that sex workers should 'have alternative income' and contact WINZ²³⁵. Unlike the situation in many other countries, there was no aid fund set up for sex workers in 2020, although in response to questions from people who asked how they could donate the NZPC indicated they could facilitate passing some funds to people who needed them²³⁶. Simultaneously, though, in at least one text and in their reports to the Ministry, Healy and the NZPC pointed out that many sex workers were already receiving a benefit and used sex work to supplement unliveably low benefit levels and needed more financial assistance than MSD could provide²³⁷. Comments from Healy which dismissed the possibility of earning significant income from online sex work are potentially aimed at sex workers who were not yet receiving a benefit, to encourage them to apply rather than hoping to achieve an effective shift to online sex work.

Comments from sex workers which were more optimistic about the possibilities offered by online sex work can be read as being made with the knowledge that clients are likely among

the audience. Some sex workers who commented did so while face-out or gave enough detail about themselves that clients could reasonably infer who they were. Sex workers are aware of the potential which media coverage holds as a medium to address clients, with some reporting they have found its advertorial potential useful²³⁸, and comments made to the media are presented with a keen knowledge of the potential make-up of the audience. Discussing a move to online sex work which has been reasonably successful may serve some advertorial purposes, but within this context stressing that it made them financially secure enough to decline clients can also make it a mechanism to improve safety.

The financial precarity and reduction in client numbers during the pandemic made it more difficult for sex workers to decline clients and/or to dictate safer sex precautions they preferred²³⁹. When sex workers are under greater financial stress, the balance of power shifts more heavily in favour of clients, some of whom will use this imbalance to manipulate the situation even further. Controlling and managing the information which clients have, including information which comes from sources with relatively more authority than an individual worker speaking with her client – such as the news media – is one mechanism by which this tendency might be limited or defused. An impression that sex workers are financially secure enough to decline clients who ignore or disregard health and safety measures helps to discursively produce an environment in which clients may be less inclined to try to push for services not on offer or refuse to provide contact tracing details.

<2> Sex workers as Self-Employed and Sex Work as a Business

Finally, sex work and sex workers were often discussed in relation to the economic impacts of the pandemic, in ways which sometimes understood their work as work, and them as self-employed businesspeople. These narratives cohered around two key topics: the ability to access economic support in the form of the wage subsidy, and confusion about if sex work

would be allowed to resume at Alert Level 2 on 14 May, along with other ‘close contact’ businesses. Texts which contained elements of this discourse were concentrated in mid-May, with 12 of the texts published between May 10 and 23. This was around the time of the shift to Level 2, when people were adapting to the ‘new normal’ for the very first time since the initial lockdown.

<3> Access to the wage subsidy

Unlike in many other countries, in New Zealand, sex workers qualified for Government economic support packages. The benefits of this – and our decriminalisation model – were highlighted, including in some international media²⁴⁰. Three individual sex workers who claimed the subsidy were interviewed within the corpus of texts²⁴¹, and other texts contained reference to the fact sex workers had claimed or could claim it. One noted that ‘some escorts have been able to claim government subsidies for lost income’²⁴² and another said sex workers ‘are eligible for the wage subsidy scheme. Anecdotally, many have claimed it’²⁴³. In many instances, though, an acknowledgement that sex workers *in general* were eligible was followed immediately by the point that this option wasn’t available to all:

‘...some sex workers applied for assistance under the wage subsidy scheme but there is a wariness about declaring being a sex worker inside a Government system, in cases of issues arising such as custody of children and tax.’²⁴⁴

‘Some workers were able to apply for the Government wage subsidy, but that option wasn’t available to workers who may not have been compliant with taxes, the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective said.’²⁴⁵

Seven more texts followed a similar discursive pattern: introducing the topic of the wage subsidy primarily to highlight that it was inaccessible to many workers. The reasons given for this varied. In some instances, the stigma associated with the profession was given as a

reason, with sex workers fearful of having to declare their occupation to the government²⁴⁶. A few mentioned sex workers who were unable or unwilling to claim the subsidy because they had not been compliant with their tax obligations²⁴⁷. One text acknowledged some sex workers were already receiving a benefit, which rendered them ineligible for further support, and added that lack of access to banking facilities was a problem for some sex workers, although the NZPC could assist with this²⁴⁸. Another text pointed out the experience of being able to claim the subsidy ‘won’t be universal’²⁴⁹. In one text Healy commented that some sex workers were concerned about accessing the subsidy, adding many were aged between 20 and 30 and didn’t have much experience in being self-employed, a comment which potentially encompasses several of these reasons²⁵⁰. In interviews, NZPC representatives would frequently stress that sex workers should contact MSD to arrange to receive a benefit or contact the NZPC if they needed help with applying for assistance.

Absent from these discourses were sex workers who did not qualify for social security benefits from MSD, *or* for the wage subsidy: migrant workers. One text mentioned migrant sex workers as part of the larger New Zealand sex work community, but characterised them as ‘migrant sex workers who move from town to town’ in what appears to be a conflation of migrant workers and touring sex workers²⁵¹. Another text referred to migrant workers when reporting on an alleged breach of the lockdown restrictions, but with no mention of their ineligibility for any kind of financial support²⁵². Migrant sex workers are excluded from the protections of New Zealand’s decriminalisation framework, and even if their visa conditions permit them to work in other industries, they are specifically excluded from doing sex work, placing them in a more precarious position than the rest of the industry. Temporary migrants are also ineligible for social security benefits, although from 1 July 2020 – well after the lockdown – the Government introduced a temporary emergency benefit for migrants²⁵³.

While a few sex workers who did claim the subsidy were interviewed, those who didn't or couldn't were not rendered as speaking subjects here – they were spoken for. Migrants, arguably among those in the most economically disastrous position, were not acknowledged at all. The framing of the wage subsidy for sex workers overall tended to identify it was an imperfect solution and not universally accessible, but the sex workers who could not access it were rendered into a general category of 'sex worker' rather than featuring as specific individuals. As I explore in the next chapter, this shifted somewhat in 2021, and as I discuss in chapter four, this indicates that while decriminalisation opens up the possibility for treating sex work as a 'business like any other'²⁵⁴, the stigma which still affects the industry can prevent workers from accessing all their rights and entitlements.

<3> Return to work narratives and industry lobbies

New Zealand moved to Level 2 restrictions on 13 May at 11.59 pm. A topic of some interest was if sex workers would be allowed to return to work alongside other 'close contact' occupations, such as hairdressers, massage therapists, and beauticians, whose work required physical contact with their customers and could not be performed while socially distanced. Sex work had been discussed in media alongside industries of this sort prior to the initial lockdown – one text profiled sex work alongside a massage therapist, hairdresser, nail technician, and make-up artist, to look at how each profession was handling the pandemic in the early stages²⁵⁵. In late May, as on-site hospitality prepared to re-open, strip clubs were profiled alongside bars and other entertainment venues in one text²⁵⁶, and a brothel owner made the comparison between bars and hairdressers when expressing her frustration with the unclear rules²⁵⁷. While sex work differed from other businesses in terms of workers' ability to access financial support, its similarity in other respects was highlighted in texts, suggesting in some instances it was understood through a lens of work.

The NZPC's initial messaging had been that they did not expect sex work to be permitted to resume until Level 1, well after other close contact work was allowed. One text paraphrases Healy, saying that 'it's likely meetings won't resume as normal until alert level 1'²⁵⁸ and a text from 10 May reads:

...the alert level was lowered to 3 at 11.59pm on April 27, and may shift to level 2 this week, sex workers would be one of the last groups able to return to normal service, Dame Catherine Healy, of the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective, says.

"I think we are in for a longer haul than most occupations".²⁵⁹

In early April, in a tweet replying to a sex worker asking people's opinions on if there would be an uptick in bookings once work could resume, the NZPC wrote 'Sex workers should not be working until Alert Level 1, and even then the rules still may change.'²⁶⁰ This point was reiterated throughout April, with the NZPC cautioning that 'we expect in-person sex work won't be permitted until Alert Level 1' in tweets from April 12 and 28²⁶¹. Sex workers expressed dissatisfaction with this in response, arguing that if sex work was restricted for longer than comparable close-contact professions it could indicate a return to stigmatizing notions of the sex worker as disease vector.

Sex workers were proactive about getting certainty of how the published Level 2 rules would apply to their jobs. In a now-deleted tweet thread on 8 May, one worker published a video recording of her conversation with helplines set up by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment where she was informed that sensual massage – the form of sex work she was enquiring about – was permitted at Level 2. The NZPC responded to this tweet saying the information she had received from both helplines was incorrect, saying that 'our info may be different to those from customer service lines as our discussions

are at high level with MBIE, MoH, MoJ & NCMC. We haven't yet had a green light for sensual massage or sex work in Level 2'²⁶².

By 12 May the story had reached the news media. *The Spinoff* and *I News* both ran stories outlining sex workers' frustration with the lack of clarity, and the NZPC's engagement in a multi-agency meeting to develop guidelines on if sex work could resume at Level 2'²⁶³. On 13 May, the day the restrictions were due to change, the *Waikato Times* similarly reported on the confusion and frustration about the rules for sex workers and strip clubs²⁶⁴. That evening, a few hours before the shift to Level 2, the NZPC confirmed via their social media that sex work would be allowed to resume²⁶⁵.

While, based on their replies on Twitter, the NZPC seemingly found sex workers' direct approaches to helplines to get clarity about the rules frustrating, this, combined with vocal complaints to media about the industry not being given sufficient consideration, seems to indicate that workers were comfortable advocating for themselves. Indeed, they expected the apparatus set up for businesses in general – such as helplines – to be able to assist with their queries. While reluctance to access the wage subsidy indicates ways the industry is still impacted by stigma, a willingness to engage with official bodies with an expectation of being treated like any other business conversely suggests some of the anticipated benefits of decriminalisation being realised. That sex workers were permitted to return to work at the same time as comparable industries – seemingly in a better outcome than the one the NZPC feared – signals a pragmatic approach to regulation of the sex industry, which does not treat it as uniquely dangerous and in need of excessive controls.

<2> Conclusion:

Media coverage considering sex work and Covid-19 throughout 2020 contained elements of stigmatizing narratives and stereotypes, such as the sex worker as a vector of disease.

Additionally, the continuing role of stigma informed concerns that clients might not report their activities to contact tracers. However, effective uses of the media by sex workers helped to circulate a counter-narrative which drew attention to their experience in enacting public health protocols and acting as de-facto health educators. In a few instances, sex work was considered alongside comparable industries, suggesting a discursive shift where it is sometimes discussed in the register of work, without its status *as* work first having to be stressed in-text. This is perhaps the most subtle of the shifts which can be identified, characterised by an absence. Media frames operate from a position of assuming particular knowledge is a given, and the information necessary to interpret a story is widely held. Presenting sex work as a type of business, with similarities to other businesses, absent an explicatory note justifying its presence indicates it is well established enough as a form of legitimate labour for this to (sometimes) go unremarked. Clearly this is not universal, though: the inconsistent and inequitable access to financial assistance is an obvious example of the way that many sex workers – often those who are also marginalised along other axes - do not enjoy the protections which other workers are entitled to.

<1> Chapter 3: Sex work and Covid-19 in 2021

New Zealand entered 2021 with the entire country at Alert Level 1, and no community cases of Covid-19, having mounted a response to the pandemic which drew international attention²⁶⁶. Throughout 2021 keeping Covid-19 out of the community became more challenging. New Zealand's borders remained mostly closed, although a limited number of arrivals were permitted, who had to spend two weeks in government-managed isolation facilities. Most of these facilities were in Auckland, in temporarily repurposed hotels. At two points in February 2021 the country was briefly placed in higher Alert Levels, with Auckland moved to Level 3, and the rest of the country moved to Level 2 to contain the emergence of Covid-19 community cases²⁶⁷. Mid-year, the borders briefly opened to arrivals from Australia as part of the 'trans-Tasman bubble'. In June, Wellington moved to a higher Alert Level when it emerged that a visitor from Sydney had tested positive for Covid-19 shortly after arriving home and was likely infectious during their time in the city²⁶⁸.

Then, in August, a community case of Covid-19 was detected with no clear link to the border²⁶⁹, sparking concerns the first case detected might have been part of a longer chain of transmission. The case was a man who lived in Auckland, but had travelled out of the region over the previous days, and in response the entire country moved back to Level 4, or a lockdown, on 17 August. On 31 August all areas south of Auckland moved to Level 3, and on 2 September, Northland, in the upper North Island, also moved to Level 3. Areas outside of Auckland moved back to Level 2 from 7 September. Auckland moved to Level 3 on 21 September and remained there for a prolonged period, with some slow easing of restrictions, until 2 December, when the entire country moved to a new Covid-19 restriction framework known as the traffic light system. In total, Auckland remained either locked down, or under significant restrictions at Level 3 or 4 for over three months.

As Auckland's lockdown progressed, the Government extended more financial support to affected businesses. As well as being available to businesses and sole traders in Auckland, this was accessible for people outside the region who saw a downturn in revenue as a result of the lockdown, and the associated reduction in customers. As with the financial assistance from 2020, access relied on having declared income with the IRD, a barrier for many sex workers, which created an extended period of no or reduced income with no assistance. Migrants on temporary visas could access an emergency benefit until 31 August 2021 – this support ended during the early stages of the prolonged Level 3 and 4 restrictions²⁷⁰.

As in the previous chapter, who appears as a source gives some indication of who is considered an expert on this topic. Despite there being a greater number of texts analysed here – 41 in total – sex workers were interviewed in fewer texts than in 2020. Fourteen of the analysed texts quoted or paraphrased at least one sex worker, however eight of these texts used the same person – Lisa Lewis – as a source. Repeatedly drawing on just one source limits the ability of these texts to represent more diversity in perspectives from the community. Representatives from the NZPC were quoted or paraphrased in 21 of the texts, and their website was used as a source in four texts. Brothel owners or managers were used as a source in four texts. As in 2020, this seems to indicate a shift away from the tendency in earlier media to treat brothel owners as experts and to elevate their voices above those of workers, but still suggests sex workers themselves are inconsistently permitted to discuss their own jobs, used as sources in less than half the texts.

Sex work in relation to Covid-19 received very little media coverage in the first seven months of the year. In January a story reported that some brothels and agencies felt the border closures were impacting their revenue, due to the loss of international visitors²⁷¹. Focused on brothels in tourist destination Queenstown, this story was thematically similar to a number of other reports on the hospitality and tourism industry in Queenstown more broadly: a further

example of sex work being discussed within frames used for other businesses. An isolated story in March raised concerns about clients not reporting their movements to contact tracers, similar to texts from 2020²⁷². Titled ‘Sex workers and strip clubs: Concerns public may not reveal 'sensitive locations' in Covid tracing’²⁷³, in it an NZPC spokesperson, Cherida Fraser, said they were requesting clients at a minimum contact sex workers or brothels directly even if they didn’t want to disclose their activities to contact tracers. Fraser pointed out trading names for brothels tended to be discreet, which would likely carry over to location names used on the Covid Tracer app. She continued the discursive theme from prior texts, highlighting the health-literacy of sex workers and noting ‘sex workers take their health responsibilities quite seriously... the big question has always been to do with the clients’. The existing stigmas which were at play were directly identified here, with Fraser noting that if Covid-19 cases were traced to a brothel there was the potential for it to negatively impact the industry’s reputation, given ‘this idea that sex workers have been harbingers of disease’²⁷⁴.

After this, there was a gap of several months before the topic of sex work in relation to Covid-19 was addressed again. The remainder of this chapter therefore analyses texts which were published from late August 2021 onwards, shortly after New Zealand’s move back to lockdown. In late August news broke of what was popularly termed a ‘porn ban’ by OnlyFans, bringing renewed attention to the shift to online work by some sex workers. Throughout September and October, three threads of discussion emerged, relating to the changes to close contact business rules under ‘Delta Level 2’; reports of sex workers breaching the lockdown or crossing the Auckland border to work; and increased attention on the economically precarious situation which many Aucklanders – including sex workers – were placed in.

<2> Online Work and the ‘Porn Ban’

A shift among sex workers to offer online services during lockdowns, as a way of diversifying income streams, was evident in 2020. Online work was mentioned frequently in the analysed texts, but usually not in any great depth. The specific terrain of online sex work was rarely explored, and a kind of collapsing together of the expertise relating to full-service and online sex work sometimes took place. In late August 2021, very shortly after New Zealand’s move back to Level 4, OnlyFans announced they would be banning ‘sexually explicit’ content from October onwards, to comply with the requirements of banks and payment processors²⁷⁵. By that point OnlyFans had become all but synonymous with pornographic and erotic content, but the platform distanced themselves from the sector²⁷⁶. The decision to ban explicit content was walked back following significant global outcry from sex workers and their supporters, but the threat of losing access to the platform rattled workers who were reliant on it for income²⁷⁷.

Three texts published in late August or early September addressed this issue directly²⁷⁸. Two of these framed the narrative predominantly around the compounding economic hit which sex workers had suffered through the combination of the lockdown and the sudden threat of losing an additional revenue stream²⁷⁹, while the third focused on the perceived betrayal of sex workers who had helped to build OnlyFans’ brand, and workers’ anger about this²⁸⁰.

While paying closer attention to the practicalities of engaging in online content production, these texts also made lexical choices which located sex work within the realms of business. One talks about a worker managing her ‘client base’²⁸¹, and another quotes a worker who explains suggestions to move to another site are impractical, saying ‘you have to understand that we can’t move all of our paying customers, it’s like moving your entire office’²⁸². The strategies used to maximise earnings on OnlyFans are also explored, with workers treated as experts – and their claims illustrated and supported by financial data²⁸³.

Each of the texts also outlined the role which stigma played in producing the economic conditions affecting sex workers, usually by quoting a sex worker or a representative from the NZPC. ‘People love sex work but they hate sex workers’ said one sex worker, pointing out the way that despite the fact ‘most adults’ use or consume pornographic content the creators of it are vilified – in the same text, another argued the continued discrimination which workers faced was linked to attempts to control women’s expressions of sexuality²⁸⁴. In one text, Healy, from the NZPC, noted the pressure from banks and investors likely came from a fear of sex trafficking allegations, adding that the ‘consequences are dire’ for sex workers affected by the policy changes²⁸⁵. The third text also quoted Healy, who highlighted that stigma deterred people from accessing government support packages²⁸⁶. The way that stigma contributed to the continued marginalisation of sex workers on macro and micro levels was acknowledged in these texts, to put the decision to ban explicit content into perspective as part of the broader operations of stigma which sex workers had to negotiate. The texts also began to signal concerns that a lack of access to financial assistance – or the loss of income from online content sales – would lead to workers breaching lockdown rules to survive. One sex worker pointed out that ‘if you lose your opportunities to work online, you’re forced into other situations’, and Healy is quoted saying lockdowns mean ‘fear, poverty and hunger’ for many sex workers²⁸⁷. The journalist in one text writes that ‘desperation is at odds with lockdown compliance’ and Healy adds that ‘compliance just can’t be a hundred percent when you’re hungry.’²⁸⁸ NZPC representatives again urged sex workers to contact WINZ to access their entitlements, in one case noting decriminalisation meant this was vastly more possible than it would have been previously²⁸⁹. However, in 2021 more texts acknowledged in detail the reasons why people might not be willing or able to gain access to additional support.

<2> Exclusion from Economic Support

Throughout 2020 texts which mentioned that sex workers could claim the wage subsidy would frequently pair this with a note that this was not feasible for all workers, owing to concerns about stigma, or not having been compliant with taxes. One text acknowledged that some workers already claimed a benefit and used sex work to supplement unliveably low benefit levels, but no texts explained the situation faced by migrant workers. In 2021, this had shifted, with more attention paid to who was excluded from the wage subsidy either explicitly, or implicitly through the conditions produced by the stigmatization of sex work.

Two texts focused entirely on the barriers to claiming the wage subsidy for sex workers. One interviewed a sex worker from Auckland whose application for the wage subsidy and a separate payment – the leave support scheme – was declined. She explained she had been able to access previous payments, but the information she provided as a self-employed person was rejected by MSD, although her record-keeping had been considered sufficient by IRD²⁹⁰. A second text – titled ‘Sex workers can claim the wage subsidy in New Zealand but stigma means that many are too afraid to do so’ - interviewed three sex workers about their experiences with claiming or not being able to claim the wage subsidy²⁹¹. This text outlined the concerns about stigma which sex workers had, contextualising these concerns with specific detail about discrimination workers had faced as a consequence of having their identity as a sex worker known or recorded, including from healthcare professionals, and separately, in a custody case. The text also explained how this linked to concerns about declaring income and paying tax. New Zealand’s taxation system requires all workers to nominate a Business Industry Code or BIC which is used to calculate their levies for the nationalised workers compensation scheme known as ACC. Two workers interviewed for the story said they and their colleagues misclassify themselves to avoid being outed, and therefore avoid facing the kind of discrimination outlined in the text. One of the workers

added that she had paid tax in the past but was currently receiving a benefit owing to chronic health conditions which stopped her from working full time. She explained she did sex work under the table to supplement the benefit which was ‘not enough for me to live on with additional expenses that my health condition incurs’. The same text goes on to point out the wage subsidy for full time workers was \$600 a week, while the average benefit was \$300. As one of the workers interviewed points out, in practice the wage subsidy created a ‘two-tiered system’. In this, workers who were in relatively more secure positions, able to declare income and pay tax, and not already receiving a benefit, could claim the subsidy, while those who were more precarious were further marginalised and economically penalised. One further text also noted there was a community of sex workers who already received a benefit and did sex work to supplement it, ‘especially in cities with high costs of living’²⁹².

In 2021 the exclusion of migrant workers from the wage subsidy and other support schemes was sometimes directly acknowledged. One text from early September reported:

For migrant sex workers, many of whom are in New Zealand on student visas, accessing subsidies is entirely impossible. Migrant sex work in New Zealand is illegal, and migrants subsidising their university accommodation through sex work may find themselves in a difficult position, says Healy.²⁹³

In mid-October a story broke which received significant coverage about two women who were arrested in Blenheim (a town in the upper South Island) after breaching the Auckland border. The women’s full names were published or aired by seven outlets, and images of their faces were shown in television broadcasts, making it clear that they were both Asian. Healy was interviewed in two radio broadcasts that afternoon, and in both interviews she mentioned the exclusion of migrant workers from financial support, saying “we have a population of

migrant sex workers who are here and they don't have access to support systems in the same way"²⁹⁴ in one. In another interview she said:

'We have a population of sex workers who aren't engaged with formal systems. And they can be engaged, we've got decriminalised sex work, but for various reasons relating to stigma and so on, there are people who... aren't engaging with the wage subsidy or with the Jobseekers which they're all entitled to do so, providing they're not migrant sex workers. So, the migrant population isn't allowed to work in this country and of course we do have people in these situations.'²⁹⁵

Healy's comments here were selectively quoted in a written-text item from the same network, as: '[f]or various reasons related to stigma and so on, there are people who aren't engaging with the wage subsidy or with the Jobseeker which they're all entitled to do so.'²⁹⁶ This edit changes the meaning of Healy's comments significantly and, in light of the specific story which she was addressing, the omission of the point that migrants were excluded from economic assistance removes important context for their actions in breaching the border.

Two distinct narratives emerged concerning access to the wage subsidy in relation to reports of sex workers breaking lockdown to work in Auckland (mostly during September) and breaching the border to work elsewhere in the country (in October). The first can be observed in three separate radio texts, with the hosts talking about what motivated sex workers to breach the lockdown or the Auckland border. In one, the host characterises sex workers leaving Auckland as doing this because they "might feel that they can't get the wage subsidy or shouldn't get the wage subsidy or whatever. They're running out of cash. So they're busting through the border essentially to make a living."²⁹⁷ In a second broadcast, the host noted that while sex work was permitted at Level 2, "we're finding these workers coming from Level 3, obviously, so it's all to do with money and keeping yourself alive"²⁹⁸. In a third

panel discussion, following an interview with Healy one panellist said “I really think the work that the collective is putting in is really important and I hope that the workers are able to get access to wage subsidies, and keeping themselves as safe as possible”²⁹⁹. These comments indicate a degree of sympathy towards the decisions made by sex workers, and acknowledge the stakes of such economic decisions, which are premised on “keeping yourself alive”. They echo points made by NZPC representatives including Healy, that ‘if you run out of money, if you have no support... it’s difficult’³⁰⁰. The repetition of this idea from journalists, rather than just reported in quotes, lends additional weight to its establishment as a cohesive narrative in news media discourse.

The second narrative was driven almost entirely by a single sex worker, whose comments were repeated across six different texts. Lisa Lewis has been characterised by other researchers as a ‘vocal sex worker’³⁰¹, and she has previously received media attention for an open letter she helped to write which called for migrant sex workers to be more heavily policed³⁰². In media coverage associated with the open letter, in 2018, Lewis also implied that migrant sex workers posed a threat to the health of New Zealand residents and citizens³⁰³. In October 2021 Lewis spoke with media to express that she was ‘angry’ that ‘sex workers had been selfishly breaking Covid-19 borders’, when ‘sex workers are entitled to the wage subsidy, and if they need it they should apply’³⁰⁴. Her comments were reported several times across different outlets³⁰⁵. A few days later she expanded on them to add that she thought a vaccine mandate should be introduced for sex workers, as well as regular Covid-19 tests, which she claimed she was already voluntarily getting³⁰⁶. Lewis’s comments explicitly place herself in comparison with other sex workers, and in arguing for tighter restrictions and claiming she is adhering to more stringent health protocols she produces herself as more responsible and respectable. In two texts later in the year, she alleges that other workers had

poor hygiene, and were removing their masks during bookings, but describes her own behaviour as ‘ultra cautious’³⁰⁷.

Sourcing decisions within news texts are driven by a range of factors, with one of these being time constraints³⁰⁸. The ability to contact a source (or, potentially, be contacted by a source) who is willing to speak on record when working to a deadline can contribute to the preponderance of sources who may reoccur again and again. Lewis’s comments here function to produce distinct classes of sex workers: one group who are responsible, pay taxes, and claim the wage subsidy, as well as submitting to even more medical testing than is required; and another group who do not claim the subsidy, and breach lockdown regulations. The way Lewis’ comments are reported constructs sex workers who did not receive financial support as *choosing* to cross borders or breach lockdown rather than applying for the wage subsidy, as though these were equally available options. While the first narrative frames sex workers’ choices as being made under significant economic strain and with few other reasonable options, this second narrative instead positions sex workers who worked during the lockdown as being wilfully defiant or irresponsible, and in doing so taps into larger and longer-established ideas which associate sex work with criminality or disorder.

<2> Lockdown Work and Border Breaches

On 15 September, reports emerged that some sex workers in Auckland were still seeing clients face-to-face, breaching the lockdown rules. This was initially reported by *Stuff*³⁰⁹, and subsequently covered by *RNZ* and *NewsHub*³¹⁰. The initial story reported the journalists had seen text message conversations between workers and clients, which showed workers confirming they were available, giving booking times and outlining prices³¹¹. The second half of this text included comments from Healy, who said some workers had complained clients

were pressuring them to work and noted that the NZPC were being notified of any lockdown breaches by the police – although the article added that police refused to comment on the compliance of particular industries. Healy emphasised that the lockdown was difficult economically, and encouraged anyone affected to contact them, but added the available support ‘might not be to the level you need to keep everything afloat’. Healy also commented that the NZPC had a staff member who was monitoring advertisements to check if sex workers were seeing clients, and contacting them if they suspected this was occurring, to offer additional support.

The other two texts were structured predominantly around comments from Healy, and the repetition of the original reporting from *Stuff*, with no additional interviewees or sources contacted for comment. In both, Healy explains that when NZPC contacted sex workers they suspected were working, the workers usually explained they were preparing for lower Alert Levels, ‘tinkering’ with their ads, or updating their photos in preparation for returning to work, rather than currently seeing clients³¹². She adds that there have been “situations where sex workers have been... quite pissed off, to be approached by us, and accused of working”³¹³. While not acknowledged in any of the texts, at least one of the major advertising platforms in New Zealand does not allow workers to ‘edit’ an advertisement which is not active or live. While clearly some workers did work during the lockdown, the rationales which workers gave to the NZPC for why their ad might be live despite not working are also consistent with the policies and functioning of the advertising platforms available to them.

In mid-September a 24-year-old woman and a 41-year-old man were arrested after allegedly travelling from Auckland to Wellington, breaching the Covid-19 restrictions. On 11 October, Healy, of the NZPC, was quoted saying that the accused ‘hasn’t approached NZPC for assistance, not to my knowledge’ adding ‘but the woman is widely known to be a sex worker’³¹⁴. The confirmation that the woman was a sex worker was also reported by a

number of other outlets on October 11 and 12³¹⁵. Simultaneously, a story was being reported on of two women who had left Auckland, travelled to Northland, and subsequently tested positive for Covid-19, but were not ‘forthcoming’ with information about their movements and contacts, leading to Northland being put back into Level 3 to reduce the chance of community transmission being re-established³¹⁶.

There had been speculation that one of the women who travelled to Northland was a sex worker, with a member of the media, from *NewsHub*, putting the question to Covid-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins in the press conference where the shift back to Level 3 was announced. In response, Hipkins said “no, I have not had that information” adding “we generally don’t get people’s occupational information unless it is directly relevant to the investigation. And at this point I haven’t got any information to make a judgment either way on whether it’s directly relevant to the investigation or not”³¹⁷. This case was frequently reported on in conjunction with the case of the woman who travelled to Wellington, with the confirmation that the Wellington case was a sex worker used to lend legitimacy to the speculation that the Northland case was too.

Sometimes this pattern would occur more than once in a single text, being granted salience through its repetition. One article, from the *Marlborough Express*, opened by reporting that the woman who travelled to Wellington had been confirmed as a sex worker, then continued ‘The confirmation comes as another woman, thought to be a sex worker, allegedly falsified documents to travel from Auckland to Northland then tested positive for Covid-19 on her return to Auckland’. The text followed this with comments from Healy and Lewis, and then again made the link between the Auckland and Northland cases, writing ‘Confirmation that the woman who came to Wellington was a sex worker comes after it was reported that two women – understood to be sex workers – had travelled from Auckland to Northland’³¹⁸. A separate article, from *Stuff*, opened with a comment from Lewis about sex workers claiming

the wage subsidy. The second sentence then referred to the Northland case thus: ‘This comes after a woman, understood to be a sex worker...’, and this was followed by: ‘...in Wellington, a 24-year-old sex worker has been charged with breaching the Auckland boundary’³¹⁹. Speculation about the Northland case’s occupation is here given additional weight by presenting it sandwiched between two pieces of information which are confirmed to be about sex work. The text from *Stuff* went on to discuss wage subsidy options for sex workers, quoting Lewis and an NZPC representative, who noted that the reporting around the Wellington and speculation about the Northland cases ‘was harmful to the sex industry’. After reporting these comments from the NZPC, article nonetheless concluded the final paragraph by repeating the speculation about the Northland case: ‘Both are understood to be sex workers, and it is likely the second woman has the virus too. A third woman, who travelled from Auckland to Wellington, was charged with travelling from a level 4 area and with failing to assist in a search. The woman was widely known as a sex worker, the NZ Prostitutes Collective said’. Once again, the Northland case’s presumed occupation is mentioned, and then followed immediately by reporting on a woman confirmed to be a sex worker, lending rhetorical credibility to the speculation. An edited version of this article (missing the comment from the NZPC, but with other elements of the text nearly identical) was published in the *Waikato Times*, with the same structure – mentioning the Northland and Wellington cases together both in the introduction and again in the final paragraph – evident³²⁰. It was eventually revealed that the Northland case was not a sex worker³²¹, but the structure of these texts – presenting the two stories in concert – added plausibility to speculation that she was, allowing for the production of a narrative in which sex workers were habitually crossing the borders in order to work.

Three days after this story broke, on 14 October, two women were arrested in Blenheim, a town in the South Island, after travelling from Auckland without an exemption to cross the

border. The women were identified as sex workers, with this often used to lead the story – eight of the twelve texts published or aired on 14 October mentioned sex work either in the headline or in the opening paragraph of the text. Six outlets made the decision to publish the women's full names and identify them as sex workers. A seventh, *TVNZ*, did not identify them as sex workers, but did televise footage of the women's faces and repeated both of their names. *TVNZ* identified one of the women as a laundry worker, and another text, from *The Northern Advocate* identified her simultaneously as a laundry worker and a sex worker. The woman who travelled to Wellington, and the pair who travelled to Northland were not named, and the media and legal treatment of the two women arrested in Blenheim was quite different. The Blenheim pair applied for interim name suppression, but it was rejected by the Judge as being 'not in the public interest'³²². The woman who travelled to Wellington was granted name suppression³²³, and the Ministry of Health refused to release the names of the women who travelled to Northland³²⁴.

The names and the images of the women who travelled to Blenheim which were broadcast made it clear they were Asian. Details about their comments during their initial court appearance suggested at least one of them was a migrant worker: 'the pair only spoke to confirm their names, with one of the women adding she has been in New Zealand for 11 years and that her English is not very good'³²⁵. Several of the texts also noted that all police who had dealt with the women had been wearing full PPE³²⁶. This was markedly different from the reportage about the woman who travelled to Wellington, where specific detail about her arrest – and the danger she might have posed to police – was not provided. It was subsequently reported that the Blenheim pair returned negative Covid-19 tests. The same day the story broke, another local sex worker advocacy organisation, SWAN, made social media posts criticising the decision by media outlets to reveal the women's names, and asking supporters to write to the editors to complain³²⁷. The following day, SWAN pointed out that

East Asian migrant workers in New Zealand are subject to discriminatory treatment by clients and managers, as well as negative stereotyping, addressing two of the outlets who named them and asking ‘do you fully understand the implications of outing these women?’³²⁸

Most of the reportage about this case relayed some combination of statements from police spokespeople, comments made by the Judge, and the details about the women’s charges, appearance in court, and bail conditions. One text closed with comments from an epidemiologist saying that ‘the time has come to stop being soft on people breaking Covid-19 rules’, but later clarifies his comments were in relation to a different border breach³²⁹. In one instance the breach by the two women was reported in tandem with information about other breaches – but the occupations of other people arrested were not provided, even when they had previously been widely reported in media³³⁰. Some other texts did list the full name and occupation of another woman charged around the same time for travelling to the South Island without an exemption, however, so this was not a universal feature of the texts³³¹. While comments from NZPC representatives figured prominently in much of the other coverage from this year, they were quoted far less frequently in relation to this story. Lisa Lewis featured in three texts, a continuation of her comments earlier in the month, and Healy was interviewed twice, appearing across three texts: two radio interviews, and an associated short written text.

Both radio texts discuss the three distinct lockdown breaches (to Wellington, Northland, and Blenheim) collectively³³². In both instances, Healy mentions that migrant sex workers don’t have access to support systems, and that some sex workers may not be “engaged in formal systems” because of concerns about the repercussions for outing themselves to government organisations. In doing so, she provides an indication of the economic strain which some workers were under, after the lockdown which had by this point extended for almost two months. Healy also mentions in both interviews that the NZPC were contacting anyone who

appeared to be working, but that people tend to deny that is what they're doing: "and they've said, oh no no no, the adverts just there, it's not that I'm working"³³³. Towards the end of this interview Healy expands on this:

Healy: ...on occasion the authorities have reached out and said look, we've got a sense that somebody's working, can you do something about it. One of our workers has gone around and banged on the door and said, you know, stop it.

Interviewer: Hahaha. Did that that work? Haha.

Healy: Well, it's...

Interviewer: I think you mean figuratively, obviously...

Healy: Well, yes, yes yes.

Interviewer: Didn't literally say those words...

Healy: Well that's right, we try and be diplomatic. But there's a point in time where you can talk the same language and that can be quite peer to peer, you can say things like that.

Here, we see Healy positioning the NZPC as occupying a kind of informal regulatory function, taking over from other governmental organisations to intervene in situations where people are suspected of working.

One of the radio interviews also highlighted the decision by some media outlets to name the women, outing them. The interviewer says: "yeah, I just got a couple of texts through. Um, this is an interesting one... 'I wonder why the two sex workers who went to Blenheim had their names published, while the two who went to Northland are still anonymous. On the surface it looks like anti-Asian racism, very concerning'"³³⁴. The comment from a listener here echoes the points made by SWAN – that the women's race may have contributed to the decision to name them, when other workers in similar situations were not named. Selecting this specific text to be read out (the only one read aloud during the segment) also gives the

journalist an opportunity to introduce this topic through re-voicing. Quotation during live radio clearly involves less pre-meditation than in news texts which are composed and published in written form, but nonetheless is a ‘highly interpretive compositional activity’, as Harry puts it, and offers an opportunity to introduce particular points as more salient to the discussion³³⁵. In response, Healy agrees that the outing of the workers “bothered us as well” but pushes back against the potential that the women’s treatment was influenced by anti-Asian racism, saying “I don’t think it’s racism, I think it’s to do with people not really knowing their rights. I mean, if you land in the court and you’re not very familiar with it, you wouldn’t know to ask for name suppression”³³⁶.

The inconsistent treatment of sex workers or potential sex workers who crossed borders did not go unnoticed by other members of the public. However, it appears in some cases that their outing was used as an argument that others should also be named, distinct from the concern which Healy and the radio listener expressed: ‘frustrated readers contacted the *Advocate* to state how it was unfair it seemed for the two women [who travelled to Northland] to stay anonymous while a second pair were identified’³³⁷. By 26 October the two women who travelled to Blenheim had appealed the initial decision by a Judge to deny them name suppression, and were granted interim name suppression, pending the outcome of that appeal³³⁸. They also received offers of pro-bono legal representation. Two days after the story broke, an opinion piece by one of the NZPC’s representatives was published on *Stuff*, pointing out that naming the two women was ‘the worst outcome possible’, and highlighting that migrant sex workers are particularly marginalised by their exclusion from the PRA³³⁹. In this text, Fraser, the NZPC representative, also argues that reporting on the occupations of sex workers who crossed the borders increases stigma, and makes people more reluctant to access help, worsening the situation for sex workers. She concludes by noting sex workers had a very high rate of vaccination uptake – New Zealand was then engaged in a large-scale

vaccination campaign – returning to the point which had been drawn upon during 2020, of sex workers as a public health-conscious community.

Media coverage of Asian women in the sex industry in New Zealand has often seen them placed at the intersection of an existing vein of anti-Asian racism, and the stigma which affects sex workers more generally. While migrant workers travel from many different countries to work in New Zealand, Asian migrant workers are disproportionately represented in news media coverage and in practice Section 19, prohibiting migrant workers, is enforced in a way which is racialised³⁴⁰. As of November 2019, the majority of people declined entry to New Zealand on suspicion of intending to do sex work, as well as those deported for doing sex work, were Asian³⁴¹. In practice, ‘migrant workers’ is often used to refer predominantly to Asian workers, and similarly, it is sometimes assumed that all Asian workers in New Zealand are migrants, although this is plainly not the case³⁴². Exploring the differences between how the Blenheim pair were discussed within the news media and how other border breaches were discussed necessitates addressing the broader context of how migrant sex workers were produced within media prior to the pandemic, as well as the specific ways that anti-Asian racism increased during the pandemic. In chapter four I address this issue in detail, as one of the central themes of media coverage of sex work during the pandemic.

<2> Masks and Risk Mitigation

The final key theme which was evident in news media coverage during 2021 relates to changes to the Level 2 rules for close-contact businesses. The revised restrictions, dubbed ‘Delta Level 2’ were reported on, and some elements of the risk mitigation undertaken by sex workers were highlighted by NZPC representatives and sex workers in interviews.

Two texts, published on September 8 and 9, focused entirely on the new rules for sex workers returning to work at Level 2. Comparable texts in 2020 often interviewed NZPC representatives, sex workers, or brothel operators, while the texts from 2021 relied primarily on the guidelines published on the NZPC's website for sourcing. One reprinted Healy's comments from 2020, and the other repeated comments she made in August 2021, shortly after the lockdown began. One ran with the headline 'Sex workers, clients urged to 'be inventive' as face masks mandatory during COVID-19 alert level 2' and the other as 'Covid 19 coronavirus Delta outbreak: New rules for sex workers under level 2'³⁴³.

Both texts touched on similar points: each one made a comparison between condoms and other forms of PPE which were now mandated under the updated Level 2 guidelines. Both quoted the following excerpts from the NZPC's guidelines, with each text drawing particular attention to the requirement to wear masks, one pointing out this applied to both staff/sex workers and clients:

'While sex work can occur at level 2, venues are limited to no more than 50 people indoors, and all people, staff and clients, must wear a mask.' [On the NZPC's website 'must' is bolded and in italics]

'This means you may have to be inventive for what positions and activities you undertake as you will not be able to kiss or be within the moist breath zone.'

'If you are working from home, or going on outcalls, you must keep a record of who you see (and their address if it is an outcall), and you must wear a mask at all times.'

Each text then gave an explanation of what the phrase 'moist breath zone' meant, with one saying it is 'referring to the particularly contagious area in which you can feel or smell someone else's breath'³⁴⁴ while the other notes the term 'has been floating around since last year, when it hit the headlines after a New Zealand primary school teacher penned a catchy

tune to help children learn correct physical distancing’³⁴⁵. One text returned to the idea of the ‘moist breath zone’ a second time, re-quoting a section of the guidelines which mentioned this phrase. Both texts also noted that staff and customers were required to scan in using a QR code to assist with contact tracing, or otherwise keep a record of their movements, but this received less attention than updates related to the physical changes to services and bookings. In a social media post about returning to work, the NZPC drew attention specifically to contact tracing and mask wearing³⁴⁶.

The guidelines from the NZPC were also quoted or referred to in other texts. A text reporting on allegations some sex workers were working during the lockdown closed with a comment that sex workers could return to work at Level 2, with ‘newly enforced safety regulations’ and that the NZPC ‘urged both clients and workers to "be inventive" and don their face masks during sessions, which is one of the rules of COVID-19 alert level Delta-2’³⁴⁷. Another text described the situation at Level 2 as being ‘where it’s technically legal to work, but logistically complicated’ adding:

...both worker and client need to keep masks on the entire time, which as the website of the sex worker’s collective NZPC points out, “means you may have to be inventive for what positions and activities you undertake as you will not be able to kiss or be within the moist breath zone”³⁴⁸.

In two texts, Lisa Lewis explained customers had to wear a mask to see her at Level 2 and needed to scan a QR code³⁴⁹.

Some sex workers expressed in interviews that the requirement to wear masks, specifically, made doing their jobs difficult. In one text a worker was described as being ‘stressed about making ends meet, particularly because she could not work properly until Level 1. The requirements of Level 2, including having to wear a mask during bookings, make it “very

hard” to work’³⁵⁰. In another, a sex worker argues that ‘for a lot of men, intimacy is what they are there for... not being able to kiss is quite uncomfortable for them’ and that, combined with client wariness, meant ‘the money is crap’ at Level 2³⁵¹. Another sex worker raised questions about the practicality of only seeing vaccinated clients, pointing out the unequal ability to enforce rules like this, saying ‘that doesn’t take into consideration sex workers who can’t afford to not see clients, or migrant sex workers who legally can’t work in New Zealand, or folks who work in brothels or agencies who can’t vet their own clients’³⁵².

Healy, from the NZPC, addressed some of these concerns in two separate radio interviews. In one, in response to a question about accessing the wage subsidy, she says:

‘...there’s a bit of a split here with a population of sex workers who say that because of the nature of their activities they don’t want to go back, they don’t feel safe going back to sex work until alert level 1, and they’re concerned that the wage subsidy won’t be extended to them. There’s another group of sex workers who are in the majority who do say look, we can work with masks, we can you know, do the best to our ability to prevent the transmission of Covid. It’s, yeah, it’s quite complex, the whole ground in respect to sex work.’³⁵³

In another, the journalist asks what safety measure sex workers are employing to keep themselves safe, and Healy responds:

‘It’s interesting, sex workers are allowed to go back into contact sex work at alert level 2 and there has been some anxiety around this from a group of sex workers who think that... they don’t feel safe about going back at this time and they’re talking about the impracticability of wearing masks and all of us can relate to that. But other sex workers are saying, no, no, I feel

quite comfortable, my clients wear masks, I wear masks, I can manage it. So, you know, there are lots of variables, I should say.’³⁵⁴

In these two statements, Healy situates workers who felt it was impractical to do sex work while wearing a mask as being in the minority, arguing that most sex workers felt they were able to work while masked, and while their clients were masked. Masks are highlighted as the primary mechanism by which people could keep themselves safe, a focus over other elements like contact tracing. Healy also notes workers were concerned about “safety” – in the context of a discussion about Covid-19, it seems likely that this refers to the risk of infection but could also indicate workers’ concerns about their physical safety if they tried to enforce the regulations with clients. When interviewed about allegations that sex workers were working during the lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, Healy would often comment that most sex workers were compliant with lockdown rules. Here her comments follow a similar pattern: emphasising that the majority of sex workers would abide by mask regulations, placing the two behaviours as comparable.

Later in 2021, the NZPC’s guidance was amended, initially to remove the clause which indicated clients needed to wear masks. Clients were not required to be masked at other kinds of close-contact businesses, so this regulation treated sex work as needing more stringent regulation than comparable industries. Throughout October 2021, NZPC’s communications via their website began to note that masks needed to be worn except where it was unsafe to do so, and that they could be removed for identification purposes. By November the wording of the mask requirement was updated to wearing one ‘as far as reasonably practicable’³⁵⁵.

In early December, shortly before the entire country moved to the ‘traffic light system’, a brothel in the South Island town of Nelson was listed as a ‘location of interest’ after being visited by someone with Covid-19. Here it was evident that, in some instances and contrary

to earlier fears, people would be honest about their movements with contact tracers³⁵⁶. Lewis was again used as a source here and commented that masks weren't sufficient to protect workers and clients, but also alleged that some local workers' 'approach to Covid-19 hygiene was lacking' and that some did not wear masks³⁵⁷.

In many of these discourses, the mask is used as a proxy for conscientiousness and responsibility. The specific activities which sex workers can reasonably undertake in a mask are not expanded upon, but cultural narratives – and prior media discourses³⁵⁸ – sometimes imply sex workers participate in exotic and unusual sexual practices. In these texts the instruction to workers to 'be inventive' seems to occupy a similar discursive function as the mention of 'fantasies' did in 2020: through failing to elaborate, it leaves the specifics of what the sex worker does in appointments up to the imagination of the reader. While previously media discourses in New Zealand have established the respectability of some sex workers by presenting their relationships and encounters with clients as akin to personal life dating³⁵⁹, emphasising that sex workers were carrying out bookings while wearing masks attempts to secure respectability via a different route. Respectability is often negotiated by demonstrating the sex worker's proximity to knowable, legible, normative structures. In some instances, a comparison between personal sexual behaviour and work-sex can be used to dismiss allegations that sex workers are cold and impersonal with clients, but in this instance the boundary provided by the mask draws a crisp line of professionalism. In the following chapter, I consider the communication of this policy, as well as some of the shifts in how masking during bookings was explained and expressed by the NZPC.

<2> Conclusion:

New Zealand finished 2021 with all parts of the country in the 'red' traffic light setting, and a degree of community transmission of Covid-19 occurring. The narratives from this year

indicate a fracturing of experiences, and an increased acknowledgement that the ‘team of 5 million’ were experiencing very different pandemics, depending on their social and economic situation – not just within the sex working community, but with sex workers as one especially visible face of this. The challenges which sex workers faced – in the form of precarity manufactured by banking discrimination, and in being effectively barred from financial aid by stigma – were partially considered, and with more affected sex workers permitted to speak directly than in the previous year. The perhaps inevitable outcome of failing to adequately support all people to isolate – workers needing to see clients during the lockdown or crossing borders to make a living – also figured prominently. Exactly which sex workers received the most attention here is revealing of ongoing issues with how New Zealand treats migrants and migrant sex workers in particular. Throughout, sex workers continued to be effective advocates and organizers, and to show a keen awareness of the ways that media discourses help to shape the social environment and the material conditions of their lives.

<1> Chapter 4: Implications and Developments

<2> Sex Work and Public Health During a Crisis

Media coverage around sex work in New Zealand during the initial two years of the Covid-19 pandemic cohered around a few key themes. Online work emerged as a focus during both years, but with a different inflection as time went on, discussed in terms of its exposure to banking discrimination, and the resultant economic precarity this contributed to. In both years, the way that Covid-19 restrictions might impact on what sex workers could do with their clients and how they would adapt were discussed, alongside reports of sex workers and clients sometimes breaching the restrictions. Access to financial support was also a topic which spanned both years, but discussions became more nuanced. In this chapter, I am interested in using media texts to consider how sex workers were made vulnerable, which groups of sex workers were most exposed to this vulnerability, and how they responded. In addition, I look at what strengths of decriminalisation are evident, and if and how the aims of the PRA were supported or affirmed by policy approaches during the pandemic.

Sex workers have previously been characterised in stigmatizing ways as vectors of disease, and more than one of my friends observed that it was interesting to see how ‘civvies’ reacted when they were treated as potentially infectious and contagious, for a change. At a time when all face-to-face work carried with it the threat of infection, sex work was no longer uniquely risky or set apart from other kinds of work because of this. Sex work organisations and many workers were operating from the potentially advantageous position of already considering public health in regard to their work. Threaded through many of the discourses throughout 2020 and 2021 is the idea of sex work as work. This framing of the industry was apparent in many places – in how online work was discussed, in reporting of calls for certainty about returning to work from the sector, in acknowledgements that people broke lockdowns under

economic duress – and I think this is worth noting. A shift towards seeing sex work as work, and not as a moral or criminal issue, changes the register in which it is discussed. This frame has been inconsistent in prior media about sex work, and while it is still not applied evenly the repetition of this frame by workers, activists, allies, and academics appears to be gaining a greater foothold.

<2> Economic Precarity

Unlike in many other countries³⁶⁰, in New Zealand, sex workers were technically able to access the financial support packages offered by the Government. Particularly in 2020, this point was often repeated in media discourse, and some sex workers who had accessed the subsidy were interviewed. The unequal access to financial support was also highlighted, pointing out that stigma, not being compliant with taxes, and already receiving a benefit were barriers to people getting help. People who could not access the subsidies tended to be figured as theoretical figures in these texts, not present as speaking subjects. This tendency shifted in 2021, when sex workers who had been rejected from or unable to apply for financial support began to be interviewed³⁶¹.

In some of these texts, the specific contours of ‘stigma’ were articulated and made real; concrete examples of what it is that workers fear might happen if their job is recorded in government systems. Workers speak of facing discrimination from healthcare professionals, and of friends who have lost custody of their children. Sex workers are keenly aware of the occupational stigma³⁶² which they face, and ‘information control’ or managing who they tell about their jobs, and how much they disclose, is a common response³⁶³. Allowing sex workers to explain their own decisions here shifts the sex worker who doesn’t access the wage subsidy from a rhetorical figure concerned about the amorphous concept of ‘stigma’, to a specific individual making reasoned judgement calls. When sex workers become speaking

subjects in media about the sex industry, these texts add depth to discourses about them. Sex workers were often the ones who most clearly articulated the community's inconsistent experiences of the pandemic. They pointed out that not all sex workers had the economic latitude to decline clients who wouldn't give contact tracing information³⁶⁴; and that the effect of the wage subsidies was to produce a 'two-tiered system, where those who were already relatively financially secure... have been financially protected'³⁶⁵. Their comments sometimes illustrated the additional burdens of precarity which the lockdowns brought for sex workers, such as being evicted by a landlord who previously took a portion of the fee for each booking³⁶⁶. However, comments from Lisa Lewis – who figured prominently in coverage in both years – tended to downplay the difficulties which some workers faced in accessing economic support, recreating discourses of comparison which have been identified in prior media coverage³⁶⁷. These contrasting strands of commentary from different workers emphasises the importance of diverse sourcing routines, and that imbalanced sourcing can result in 'further entrenched normative discourses and silenced marginalized social groups'³⁶⁸.

Migrant workers were absent from discussions of economic precarity in 2020, despite being in an especially fraught position, unable to qualify for benefits, and unable to claim financial assistance. Migrant workers are specifically excluded by New Zealand's PRA, and this exclusion has been criticised for the way that it makes migrant workers more vulnerable, and functions to mark them as the 'other' within the already stigmatised category of sex worker³⁶⁹. The impacts of this exclusion began to be acknowledged in 2021, and New Zealand's sex work community here experienced the pandemic in ways reflective of patterns internationally: the impacts were felt unequally, falling especially heavily on sex workers who were marginalised along multiple axes³⁷⁰. New Zealand's economic aid during the pandemic response was not always sufficient, and language barriers sometimes meant it was

inaccessible to migrants more generally³⁷¹. Migrant workers in other industries could claim the wage subsidy, but sex workers – excluded from the PRA and still criminalised – were not eligible for this, or other benefits, here doubly disadvantaged, with stigma compounding the difficulties. As Healy points out, the sudden loss of income may be difficult to explain for workers who have been engaging in information management: ‘they may well have been pretending that they’ve been working in a situation where they’re an employee. And so now they’re out of money and they may not be able to disclose it’³⁷².

As I have suggested, there is a trend within the analysed texts to use lenses of work and labour more frequently when discussing sex work. While in theory New Zealand’s legislation aims to treat sex work as a ‘business like any other’³⁷³, in practice brothels and sex workers continue to be affected by the stigmatisation of the industry. Weitzer points out that decriminalisation is ‘vitally important but hardly sufficient for normalization’³⁷⁴, and it is apparent that enduring (although not intractable) stigma can make sex workers wary of accessing all of the rights and entitlements they are nominally guaranteed.

<2> Nexus of Multiple Marginalizations

One of the most significant media events encompassing sex work and Covid-19 during the surveyed period was the story about the Blenheim pair, which broke on 14 October 2021. Eighteen texts discussed this story across two days, a significant proportion of the total coverage from that year. This story was one of three about sex workers or alleged sex workers who crossed the border, but it received a disproportionate amount of attention, and it was the only instance in which the names and face of the accused – both Asian women – were made public. While the story about the women who travelled to Northland was the subject of extensive speculation during October 2021, the allegation that they were sex

workers was not highlighted in headlines in the same way. Prior to this story breaking, the situation which migrant workers were in, unable to access financial assistance, had begun to be noted in a few texts. A dearth of mainstream attention to the experiences of migrants during Covid-19 is not unique to sex workers. A scoping review in mid-2022 found that over two years into the pandemic, research into the experiences of broader migrant communities was sparse, and often driven by organisations founded to serve these communities³⁷⁵.

Migrant sex workers are often singled out for particular vilification, treated as either naïve and childlike, passive subjects in need of paternalistic protection and rescue, or as shrewd, cunning, and a threat whose movements must be controlled to prevent them from ‘infecting the nation’³⁷⁶. In both instances, these characterisations are used as justification to enact border controls, which are often based on ‘on highly gendered and racialized assumptions about trafficking victims’³⁷⁷. Which sex workers fall into which category is very frequently related to their race³⁷⁸, and sometimes to their age, perceived degree of professionalism, or agency³⁷⁹. Interviews with border officials in Australia about how they profiled and identified potential trafficking victims found that women identified as ‘victims’ tended to be those perceived to fit ‘the ‘ideal’ image of innocent and passive victims’ unlike ‘proactive, independent, experienced sex workers’³⁸⁰. Within the reporting about the Blenheim pair, their ages (in their late 40s) were given in several reports. While this is fairly standard court reporting practice, in this specific context it also locates them within a broader discourse where their age places them as devious or duplicitous; a few years prior, older Chinese sex workers had been accused of ‘luring’ younger international students into sex work³⁸¹.

While any migrant on a temporary visa is excluded from working legally in the sex industry by Section 19 of the PRA, in practice the application of the legislation is highly racialised and gendered³⁸², placing Asian women under particular scrutiny. Sex workers are more vulnerable to surveillance as they need to advertise for clients – Immigration officials have

compared online advertisements for sexual services to social media profiles³⁸³, and media reports during the pandemic sometimes took advertisements as ‘proof’ that sex workers were actively seeing clients. Advertising platforms in New Zealand often offer search filters which distinguish between ‘Asian’ and ‘non-Asian’ workers, and in media discourse the categories of Asian sex worker and migrant sex worker are often rhetorically collapsed onto one another³⁸⁴. New Zealand’s news media has at least one journalist who frequently writes about Asian migrant sex workers, and these texts will often draw on existing discourses of contagion associated with sex work, but link them more closely with migrant workers than with the sex working population as a whole³⁸⁵. It is within this broader context, of surveillance of and reporting on Asian migrant sex workers, and identifying them as a specific vector of contagion who pose a threat to resident New Zealanders, that the reporting on the Blenheim pair took place.

Migrant sex workers internationally were identified as a population whose experience of the pandemic was often worsened by the combination of sex work stigma and racism³⁸⁶. In North America, Asian migrant massage workers found their work dried up even before formal stay-at-home orders were enacted, owing to ‘widespread xenophobic fears that the virus was concentrated in Chinese diasporic communities’³⁸⁷. In New Zealand, migrants similarly reported that they were accused of spreading Covid-19, which sometimes further discouraged them from seeking assistance or asking for help³⁸⁸. As Lam points out, migrant sex workers ‘face multiple layers of exclusion, including sexism, racism, xenophobia, language barriers, and precarious immigration status’³⁸⁹. Prior to the pandemic, and dating back to the 1990s and earlier 2000s, there was an identified trend within New Zealand media discourses of situating Asian migrants as the ‘other’, associated with crime, and perceived as being an economic threat to other New Zealanders³⁹⁰. As I have argued elsewhere, media discourses about migrant sex workers persisted in using the kind of highly charged language which had

been roundly condemned when directed towards migrants more generally³⁹¹. These anti-immigration frames have a long tail and continue to be deployed towards groups with relatively less social power, like sex workers.

Following their first appearance in the Blenheim District Court a number of texts reported the workers had been bailed back to their home addresses in Auckland. ‘Two sex workers arrested in Blenheim have until five o’clock tomorrow to get back to Auckland where they belong’, reported one, with the headline ‘sex workers told to go back to Auckland’, while another headline read ‘Sex workers arrested in Blenheim have until 5pm Friday to get back to Auckland’³⁹², with the phrasing here uncomfortably recalling the aggressive suggestion sometimes levelled at migrants to ‘go back where you came from’. New Zealand does not have land borders with any other countries, so local discourses about border crossing and migrant entry are shaped by this geographic specificity. However, throughout most of 2020 and 2021, anyone entering the country had to spend two weeks in a quarantine facility, and in a few instances people escaped, receiving extensive media attention, and a significant degree of public condemnation³⁹³. There was a burgeoning public discourse about crossing Covid-19 borders at the time the women travelled to Blenheim, then. While discourses about border control and protection often draw on ideas about protecting the health or body of the nation, in this instance, internal borders were more explicitly linked with protection from a specific health threat. The reports that the two women had been ordered back to Auckland can be viewed as a multi-layered discourse, most obviously and evidently pertaining to the immediate concerns about Covid-19, but potentially additionally undergirded by existing ideas which view migrant women who cross borders with suspicion³⁹⁴.

One minor improvement from media coverage in previous years is that – while the women’s migrant status was suggested via some journalistic decisions – they were usually referred to as ‘Auckland sex workers’ or ‘two sex workers’. Earlier work, investigating the nomination

strategies used to identify migrant sex workers, found that they were often identified in ways which emphasised illegality, un-belonging, or that they were Asian, as well as frequently referring to them as ‘prostitutes’ instead of ‘sex workers’³⁹⁵. ‘Prostitute’ is frequently understood to be a more stigmatizing term, associated with criminality and dishonour³⁹⁶ – however, in the analysed texts on the Blenheim pair from 2021, they were consistently identified as ‘sex workers’, indicating some improvements in lexical decisions made in reporting.

These women were the only sex workers who were named in reporting about border breaches. Any analysis here is necessarily dealing with incomplete information – because the other workers, and alleged workers, were granted name suppression and had minimal details about them released, it is impossible to tell if the two women who travelled to Blenheim were the only Asian women among this small group. That the only sex workers who were named were identifiably Asian, though, was considered unusual enough to be highlighted in one media text as possibly motivated by anti-Asian racism³⁹⁷, as well as this point being raised by advocacy group SWAN, who were highly critical of the decision by media outlets to name the women.

Although other sex workers were granted name suppression, the Blenheim pair were not the only border breachers to be named or identified in the media. In at least one other instance, people who had been apprehended and charged after crossing the border made significant attempts to suppress their names³⁹⁸, evidently anticipating the social cost of being identified as having broken the rules. In mid-October 2021, images of a party which took place in Auckland during Level 3 were circulated online, and identifiable attendees issued public apologies, adding they had received harassment and death threats³⁹⁹. The public climate was extremely hostile to anyone who was seen to be breaking the lockdown restrictions, in other

words, even before accounting for the additional marginalisation the Blenheim pair would face, driven by anti-Asian racism and sex work stigma.

As I noted in chapter 3, there was a narrative trend from multiple journalists to characterise the decision to cross borders as being linked with a need to “make a living”, driven by “keeping yourself alive”⁴⁰⁰, indicating a sympathy for the choices and a framing which did not straightforwardly vilify the women. Despite this, and the modicum of acknowledgement that what they were doing is a form of work implied by calling them ‘sex workers’ rather than ‘prostitutes’, naming them as sex workers still has repercussions which simply do not exist for people in other industries. Sex workers who have been outed, or fear being outed, express that it impacts their relationships, affects future employment prospects, and limits their ability to secure housing⁴⁰¹.

Sex workers in New Zealand, especially those who occupy an additionally marginalised position because of their race or migration status, are positioned in a liminal space where the project of destigmatization is still very much a work in progress. While there have been some gains, they do not yet counterbalance the stigma of the industry, especially for people who are not protected by the PRA. I was among the people who contacted outlets who named the women. I pointed out in my correspondence that naming sex workers has repercussions which do not exist in other industries, and that claims naming them would be in the public interest were spurious because virtually all sex workers use pseudonyms. If the intention was to alert clients who had been in contact with them, reporting their legal names would not be helpful in this endeavour. The response I received – nearly identical to that sent to members of SWAN⁴⁰² – justified the decision to publish their names and occupations by saying it was standard court reporting process, that the names and occupations of other people who crossed borders had been reported, and that it was in the public interest because identifying the women as sex workers would help to indicate who they had been associating with⁴⁰³. My

point that sex workers typically use pseudonyms, and therefore publishing their legal names would not help contacts to identify themselves, was not addressed.

In analysis of mass media in New Zealand, Spoonley and Butcher argue that the criticism of minority groups (specifically racialised groups) can be carried out in such a way that some parties within the media ‘continue to reproduce racist arguments within more carefully articulated discourses’⁴⁰⁴. Liu and Mills label this ‘plausible deniability’, explaining that it is ‘a communication tactic that is used to warrant or defend public discourse about minority groups against accusations of racism by constructing statements in such a way that the speaker can convincingly disavow any racist intent’⁴⁰⁵. This model, I think, can be fruitfully applied to the decision to out the Blenheim pair. The points raised in response to the complaints – that naming the accused is standard in court reporting, that other non-sex workers had their names and occupations published – are not untrue. However, presenting them as though naming someone as a lawyer and naming someone as a sex worker is equivalent is disingenuous. Per Liu and Mills, core to ‘plausible deniability’ is the idea that something other than racism, or in this case, sex work stigma, could be motivating specific public discourses. The justifications given here *are* plausible, but they also steadfastly ignore that while other occupations explain what someone does, they are not to the same degree understood as a signifier of what someone *is*⁴⁰⁶.

It seems possible (or *plausible*) that this is at least partly a bad-faith rearticulation of the persistent push from sex work activists to understand that sex work is work. It is treated as work insofar as this is helpful for one particular purpose – justifying its inclusion in reporting on the basis of it being akin to other occupations – while simultaneously treated as unusual and salacious, adding to the news value of the story.

<2> Uses of Media by Sex Workers

Sex workers are well aware of the impact of media representations on their lived experiences, and the potential for media coverage to contribute to reducing the stigma they are subjected to. Locally, sex workers' perception of media coverage around the passing of the PRA was that much of it 'perpetuated stereotypes of sex workers, sensationalised the industry, often misrepresented the realities of the industry and ignored broader social issues'⁴⁰⁷. In research, informants from the NZPC have reflected on the potential of media representations to change the attitudes of the non-sex working public, and the NZPC effectively used media coverage from the very early days of the organisation as part of their tactics to build support⁴⁰⁸.

In some instances during 2020 and 2021 sex workers and the NZPC used media coverage to their advantage, challenging negative stereotypes, or propagating narratives which offered alternative framings of their place in the community. This is most evident in coverage which discursively rendered sex workers as part of the 'team of 5 million' and as public health advocates, mostly during 2020, but also evident in texts such as the op-ed written by an NZPC representative in 2021. These two characterisations sit in explicit opposition to two stigmatizing and intertwined stereotypes and discourses about sex workers: of sex workers as the intruding 'other', outside of their own communities, and as harbingers of disease.

Elevating the voices of sex workers and sex worker organisations allows their own characterisations a greater prominence. Especially interesting in light of this were the texts from 2020 which included screenshots of workers' text messages with their clients. The texts sometimes showed workers outlining key public health messages to clients: the danger of a second wave if people became complacent; the importance of keeping to 'bubbles'; the impacts of an individual client's behaviour on the broader community⁴⁰⁹. They were also extremely funny.

The prevalence of humour in the text message conversations with clients is a point I would like to return to and highlight here. Sex work is often the subject of cruel jokes in media. Less frequently studied in academic literature is the use of humour by sex workers. Downe has documented the use of humour as a mechanism of resistance, and as a way of cementing peer relations, arguing that among sex workers ‘collusive comedy creates a sense of community’⁴¹⁰. Güler identified that humour was an ‘integral aspect’ of the sociality among a group of sex workers in Turkey, and suggests the lack of research into this topic may be ‘because this population has not been imagined to be the agents of humour’⁴¹¹. In an ethnographic study of sex workers in the UK, Sanders notes that ‘the most frequently observed form of humour in the sex industry was jokes told in private that mocked the client’⁴¹². In the text message conversations accompanying these articles, the target of the joke is clearly the client, however in a shift away from what Sanders observed within sex workplaces, these jokes were shared publicly, deliberately, and sometimes on the workers’ client-facing social media. Sex workers’ social media has an audience primarily of other sex workers – it is common for workers to follow each other and interact to boost the algorithmic visibility of both parties – and of clients. Many sex workers use social media to curate an ‘authentic’ persona, a marketing tactic documented within higher priced and/or girlfriend experience-style branding for well over a decade⁴¹³. There are varied approaches to demonstrating this authenticity: for some, the authenticity may be posting selfies rather than images from a professional photoshoot, for others it might be displaying their interests or hobbies, or performing a persona which is congruent with their marketing and brand. Social media postings are, obviously, curated and considered – posting exchanges which make fun of clients or would-be-clients on social media is done with the intention that the posts will be seen by one’s peers and colleagues, as well as other clientele.

While research which focuses primarily on humour within sex work and by sex workers is relatively rare, documentation of sex workers' uses of humour exists tangentially. The Exotic Dancers Union in San Francisco, for example, encouraged prospective members to unionize with posters reading 'like an orgy, it only works if there's a lot of us' and 'united we stand - divided we bend over'⁴¹⁴. Jeffreys addresses the use of humour in protest, specifically concerning a protest by sex worker rights groups about funding, where humour 'made the message less didactic and confrontational but without softening it'⁴¹⁵. Brewis and Linstead found 'the use of humour as a method of identity management is also evident among prostitutes' and that such deployment of humour, often at the expense of clients, serves to remind the client of the worker's intelligence and subjectivity⁴¹⁶. By posting their exchanges with clients to their own social media, sex workers can both build community with their peers, but also present themselves to clients as health-conscious, and give a demonstration of behaviour which they will not tolerate, setting expectations for how clients should treat them. However, screening in this manner is not an option for all sex workers, and under economic pressure sex workers' ability to decline clients or demand adherence to safety protocols can be severely curtailed⁴¹⁷.

Sharing these exchanges with a broader audience, who may otherwise have little to no interaction with the sex industry, however, offers them a window into how some sex workers engage with their clients. While not wishing to fall back on unnuanced ideas about 'empowerment', the responses from the sex workers complicate and challenge ideas about the roles they play. In these instances the workers are neither vulnerable and victimised, at the mercy of dangerous clients, nor are they interacting only with the 'respectful gentlemen' who sometimes populate the discourses about independent and agency sex work in New Zealand⁴¹⁸. The clients in these exchanges are on the back foot, and while they hold

economic power in the exchange, the responses and dismissals from the sex workers show how this power is not necessarily totalizing.

<2> What Were Decriminalisation's Strengths?

The PRA aims to protect the human rights of sex workers, to promote their occupational safety and health, and be conducive to public health. New Zealand's decriminalisation legislation has improved working conditions for sex workers, giving them more power to decline clients, and enforce workplace safety policies such as condom usage⁴¹⁹. How effectively did it function under stress, during the quickly changing context of a pandemic, and in the midst of a public health-turned-economic crisis?

One of the central principles of decriminalisation, when compared to models of legalisation or regulation, is that the sex industry should not be subject to unduly heavy regulation relative to comparable businesses⁴²⁰. In the first year of the pandemic, the government and policy responses were generally aligned with this. Sex workers could return to work at the same time as other close contact businesses. There was some frustration from workers about a lack of clarity – not giving guidance that specified how sex work as a distinct industry would be treated – but in this instance not singling out sex work for a specific approval or decline meant it was being treated like similar businesses. The information issued for close contact businesses was intended to cover multiple industries, and sector-specific guidance was provided by organisational or governing bodies⁴²¹. Sex workers could access the business information lines set up by governmental bodies, and the NZPC issued industry-specific guidelines, assisting sex workers and brothel management in creating environments which supported occupational safety and health. As discussed in chapter two, the NZPC frequently aired concern or speculation that sex work might not be permitted to resume until Level 1,

after other close contact businesses, so the eventual outcome was seemingly better than they had anticipated or feared. They noted in their report on activities in the relevant period that sex workers not being permitted to operate during Level 2 was considered a risk, as prohibiting sex work ‘can lead to unsafe practices’⁴²².

Research into the experiences of sex workers during the pandemic internationally found exclusion, whether explicitly or implicitly, from financial aid was a recurring theme and major contributor to vulnerability for sex workers. In New Zealand, sex workers could access the wage subsidy, and some did. However, access was uneven and far from universal.

Functional exclusion from the subsidy scheme was sometimes a direct outcome of sex worker status (reluctance due to stigma, and migrant workers barred from legally doing sex work), and sometimes related to issues which affected larger groups which included sex workers (beneficiaries). The treatment of other marginalised groups, whose members include sex workers, impacted on the outcomes of financial assistance policies for sex workers.

Decriminalisation in this instance was helpful – understanding sex work as a form of labour and treating it accordingly relieved pressure on some parts of the industry – but the distribution of financial relief in practice highlights that sex workers’ rights and protections are often bound up in the needs of other marginalised groups.

In 2021, the interpretation of the updated Level 2 guidelines also had implications for sex workers, specifically the clause requiring workers to wear a mask. In their six-monthly report for that period, NZPC noted some sex workers felt this regulation was unsafe, and that there was anxiety clients could report workers to police if they did not wear a mask throughout the service⁴²³. NZPC reported they negotiated with Government bodies to arrange for masks to be required when ‘reasonably practicable’ – documents obtained under OIA indicate these negotiations occurred in late October. This is a positive outcome, but it came after two months of sex workers contending with the initial version of the guidelines. Additionally, the

NZPC's initial advice to sex workers was that both worker and client were required to wear a mask⁴²⁴, although the Level 2 regulations only required this for workers in close contact businesses⁴²⁵.

Emerging research indicates sex workers internationally sometimes found it challenging to get clients to wear a mask – one study found that 27% of sex workers had seen a client who refused to wear a mask during sex⁴²⁶. Other research indicates that workers were forced not to wear them to avoid harassment⁴²⁷, or that workers found the idea of wearing a mask unrealistic, with one saying 'what face mask? If we want to eat we have to work'⁴²⁸. Wearing a mask for the entire duration of providing a sex work service is not practical and suggestions that it is do not acknowledge that to provide oral sex – typically included in the 'standard' service in New Zealand brothels⁴²⁹ – the worker must remove their mask. Wearing a mask also obscures facial expressions, which may make managing and monitoring clients more difficult, reducing safety.

Initial advice that workers and clients must wear masks for the duration of a booking, and the reporting of this requirement in media texts, left sex workers in a position where they had a number of equally unenviable options. They could either adhere to the public health order and its interpretation by the NZPC, wear a mask, and very possibly face hostility and aggression from clients as they offered a service which did not include oral sex, and obscured their facial expressions. They could attempt to work while masked while reducing their prices to account for the lesser number of services on offer, potentially therefore increasing their exposure risk through having to see more clients to make the same amount of money. Or they could remove their masks in appointments to give oral sex to the client, risking prosecution under the public health order, and entrapment via phone enquiry. In some ways, this appeared to be a tacit recriminalisation of sex work by public health order: sex work was allowed, but only if carried out in a manner that was functionally unattainable for many.

One of the issues with legalisation of sex work, as opposed to decriminalisation, is that it often creates a two-tier system, where a small number of workers can operate within the law, adhering to regulations and licences, while many others remain criminalised. As a worker interviewed in one of the analysed texts pointed out, migrant workers and workers in managed brothels would likely have a lessened ability to dictate which health and safety standards would be adhered to⁴³⁰. In New Zealand, brothel owners sometimes exert pressure on workers to accept bookings with clients they don't want to see, or on receptionists to allow clients into the establishment, and it seems plausible that versions of this would occur under Covid-19 conditions as well⁴³¹. The NZPC initially opposed the clause in the PRA which makes using condoms a legal requirement, saying it 'allows for the entrapment and recriminalising of sex workers'⁴³², and there are reports of clients using the threat of reporting a worker to immigration to coerce services from migrant workers⁴³³. Clients will employ threats of this sort against workers, and potentially would use similar tactics if they believed reporting non-compliance with mask usage could be an effective threat. This risk is, arguably, heightened when clients are made more aware of the requirement for workers to wear masks, as they may have been by the repeated mentions of this point in media.

Documents obtained from WorkSafe indicate that in fact a complaint was made about a sex worker allegedly working without a mask during October 2021, indicating the concerns from sex workers that they would be at risk of reporting were justified. The complaint appears to have come from another sex worker or brothel owner, as the complainant indicates they were tipped off by a client, allege the worker is offering services which could not be provided while masked, and add 'everyone in our industry must wear a mask by law'. WorkSafe responded by contacting the worker in question, ascertaining she was following the relevant Covid-19 Alert Level guidelines, and providing her with information about the requirements. In correspondence with me, WorkSafe advised their approach to complaints was to take 'an

education-first approach' and escalate only if businesses refused to comply. Two days after the complaint was laid with WorkSafe, a representative from the NZPC contacted the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), asking for assurance that sex workers would not be prosecuted if they were reported for removing face masks. A DPMC staff member indicated that Government could not direct Police on matters of enforcement, but agreed the existing guidelines could create a 'difficult and potentially unsafe situation'. A week later DPMC staff followed up to confirm the Alert Level Requirements Order was being amended to require masks 'as far as is reasonably practicable'.

Financial support in the form of the wage subsidy was extended during the period that parts of New Zealand outside of Auckland were at Level 2, during the later months of 2021. However, the wage subsidy was not available for sole traders or businesses who saw their earnings drop as a result of the Level 2 restrictions. The subsidy could only be accessed if the claimant could prove they had seen a reduction in earnings of 40% or more as a direct result of the Level 3 restrictions in Auckland⁴³⁴. Embedded in this is the assumption that the restrictions at Level 2 would allow businesses to operate in a manner close-enough to normal that financial support was no longer necessary. I am reluctant to criticise the NZPC, who have a decades long history of effective advocacy for sex workers in New Zealand, most notably in lobbying for and securing decriminalisation. However, some of their tactics during the latter half of 2021 seemed questionable. I am referring here to decisions to highlight mask wearing as one of the primary risk reduction actions available during Delta Level 2, and to request an amendment of rules only after the report to WorkSafe, despite workers voicing concerns weeks earlier. Asserting, as NZPC representatives did in multiple interviews, that sex workers could do their jobs while wearing masks and could therefore return to work undermined any ability to lobby persuasively for more economic assistance, which in any case was not available to all sex workers. Masks were also far from the only Covid-19 related

precaution which sex workers were taking. The choice to highlight masks rather than other, more feasible, options risked drawing attention to a precaution which would be unattainable for many workers, undermining the credibility which sex workers had built as public health advocates.

The NZPC's emphasis on masking was also out of step with guidance from other sex work advocacy organisations internationally. In Australia, Scarlet Alliance's guidelines, for example, mention hand washing, gloves, the use of dams or condoms during oral sex, but do not mention masks⁴³⁵. A joint release from Butterfly and Maggie's in Canada, mentions masks only in the context of wearing one when symptomatic and seeking medical attention⁴³⁶. The NZPC's 2020 guidelines mentioned mask wearing, so this difference predated the Delta Level 2 updates. My intention is not to dismiss mask wearing as an important public health intervention, but instead to highlight that it is not one which is compatible with the physical activities which take place during the provision of usual sex work services.

An expectation that sex workers would wear masks throughout the provision of services was, for the period it was in effect, perhaps the policy decision least aligned with some of the understandings that underpin decriminalisation. However, policy documents and internal communications suggest this may simply have been an oversight. The close contact business regulations specified workers but not clients needed to wear a mask, which appears to anticipate and respond to the need for client's faces to be exposed for services from, e.g., beauticians and barbers. The sex industry in New Zealand is small, and during the lockdown periods policy needed to be issued with haste. The NZPC have effective relationships with Government agencies and were able to utilise these. Given the fairly quick action on the issue once it was raised, with the regulations being amended within eight days, it seems likely that activities unique to sex work were simply overlooked. Although the cause does not necessarily change the effect for workers during the period the guidelines were in effect,

willingness from Government to respond to concerns potentially meant the amendment occurred faster than might have been the case under other circumstances.

One of the key objectives of the PRA is to protect the occupational health and safety of sex workers, and be conducive to public health. Decriminalisation as a model recognises that the prohibition of sex work does not work and does not stop it from occurring. Instructing sex workers to comply with guidelines which some will find difficult or impossible to uphold does not mean they will either comply, or cease working. Instead, as occurs when sex work in general is criminalised, some will work contrary to the law and be placed in a position where they are more reluctant to seek help if they need it. Communications from official bodies does seem to indicate these principles were understood and that concern for the safety of sex workers was one of the motivating principles behind policy adjustments. For the period the initial guidelines were in effect a situation was created where sex workers were made additionally and unnecessarily vulnerable, however.

<2> Conclusion:

Writing about the experiences of sex workers in Poland during the pandemic, Dziuban et al noted that ‘sex workers are the last when it comes to rights and the first when it comes to disciplining.’⁴³⁷ When placed against experiences like this, it is apparent that New Zealand’s decriminalisation framework did produce improved outcomes. Sex workers were not systematically excluded from relief policies, and their policing was sometimes handled via referral to support services, but their exclusion and precarity occurred through the other marginalised groups which many sex workers belong to being neglected. After almost twenty years of decriminalisation, there is evidence to suggest that ‘sex worker’ is not in and of itself an inherently totalizing identity, and the stigma which is still associated with the work can be

partially mitigated through belonging to other relatively more respectable or privileged groups. Evident from reporting about sex workers during Covid-19, though, are the ways that sex workers with relatively less social power and access to structural supports – sex workers who are unhoused, migrants, beneficiaries – are faced with fewer choices. In some reporting, especially from the latter part of 2021, this was acknowledged in media, although typically in a reactive manner, after stories emerged about sex workers breaking lockdown or crossing borders. There has been a shift in public opinion in the USA and UK which trends towards supporting decriminalisation⁴³⁸, and in New Zealand I would argue that the discourses evident in news – while far from perfect – show a development from those which existed ten years ago. They are more likely to use frames of work to understand the industry, less likely to call workers ‘prostitutes’, and in some cases acknowledge the experiences of more marginal members of the sex work community. The discourses suggest slow but detectable improvements in the perception of sex workers, and underscore the potential for even further change.

<1> Chapter 5: Conclusion

Locally and internationally experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic were mediated and influenced by socio-economic position, with those who already had the least access to resources, and were most shut out from support systems worst affected⁴³⁹. This encompassed not just greater exposure and susceptibility to severe disease, but also worse economic outcomes as a result of lockdowns⁴⁴⁰. A microcosm of this can be seen within the sex work community, where sex workers in more precarious positions were more exposed to health risks through being less able to stop in-person work, and to economic risks and hardships through being unable to access financial support.

In some earlier media discourses from New Zealand, a distinction is drawn between the more and less acceptable or respectable ways of doing sex work. The functional effect of this is that sex workers deemed less acceptable become the ‘even more marginalised “other other”’⁴⁴¹, serving a rhetorical purpose of shoring up the highly conditional and contingent respectability of a smaller group of sex workers, closer to inclusion. The stigma of sex work is mutable and unevenly distributed. In the experiences of the pandemic the material effects of this stigma are clearly shown, with the stigma of sex work interacting with the discrimination faced by, for example, migrants, to produce additional hardship. The reporting on the Blenheim pair, which outed them and implicitly signalled that they were likely migrant workers, for example, has the potential to re-entrench stigma against this group. The actions taken by some workers in response to severely limited options are then used to fuel discourses which continue producing that group as marginal. Noting that groups such as migrants experienced a heavier burden is not to dismiss the experiences and difficulties faced by all sex workers in New Zealand during the pandemic, but rather to highlight that the variations in sex workers’ experiences offer an especially sharp example of how stigma functions as a structural determinant of health and other life chances.

Stigma is intrinsically linked to a relative lack of social, economic and political power, and results in a stigmatized group being labelled, perceived negatively and Othered, and consequently experiencing reduced access to core needs such as income, education, psychological well-being, housing and healthcare⁴⁴². Two macro-level influences on sex work stigma are the media, and policy⁴⁴³. Policy which related to sex work in general – apart from the two-month period where masking during bookings was expected – tended not to reproduce negative stereotypes and stigmas, rejecting ideas about sex workers as irresponsible, in need of paternalistic supervision and control, and as vectors of disease. However, sex workers who experienced stigma on the basis of multiple characteristics, not just their work, were impacted by policy inadequacies along other lines. Media coverage which neglected these intersections – the repeated stories which quoted calls for workers to claim the wage subsidy, without also highlighting this was not universally accessible – does have the potential to reproduce existing stigmas about sex work.

This book is based on an analysis of news media discourses, considered in concert with existing work on the varied experiences of sex workers who work in different ways, and of course there are limits to what can be reasonably discerned from media texts. I document the dominant narratives and contextualise them within the broader history of such discourses, and one of the themes evident throughout is that the pandemic was experienced very differently by diverse groups of sex workers, but fuller descriptions of these experiences are incomplete. Some of the points I raise here highlight areas for future study, to identify areas of congruence and difference between media reports and lived experiences. Sex workers' comments in the texts can be examined as forms of evidence, but there will be gaps where media reporting ignores some experiences and emphasises others. Street-based sex workers, for example, were mentioned in a few texts, but were not the subject of a sustained narrative.

Their experiences are among those which remained largely invisible in media during this period.

In addition to what I have discussed in the preceding chapters, two groups of sex workers were affected by the pandemic, exposed to additional vulnerabilities on both an economic and a health level, but were rarely or incompletely discussed in news media. The first were sex workers who were doing sex work while also receiving a benefit, and the second were sex workers who live with a disability or chronic illness. There is some overlap between these groups, namely sex workers who receive a benefit because their health prevents them from taking on other work. Sex workers who receive a benefit were acknowledged in a few media texts, and in 2021 at least one sex worker in this position was interviewed. The additional difficulties faced by sex workers who were at a higher risk of severe illness or death if they contracted Covid-19 were less frequently commented on, only mentioned in passing in two of the analysed texts⁴⁴⁴.

Comments from the NZPC would frequently highlight that they could offer sex workers assistance with applying for benefits and ensuring they were receiving their full entitlements. Advocacy group Auckland Action Against Poverty also offer support to beneficiaries – in one significant intervention they assisted approximately 700 people to claim an additional \$850,000 in benefits, indicative of the gap which can exist between what someone might receive and what they are entitled to⁴⁴⁵. Research into the experiences of low-income communities in New Zealand during the lockdowns found that it was not always clear how to access assistance, that participants found moving from employment income to benefits stressful, and that benefit payments were often insufficient to meet basic needs, especially in Auckland, a city with a high cost of living⁴⁴⁶. The NZPC's assistance here serves a useful intermediary function for sex workers – which they highlighted in media, and in reports to their primary funder⁴⁴⁷. However, even when someone is receiving their maximum

entitlements this is often not enough to meet their living costs – especially if they have additional costs relating to a health condition or disability⁴⁴⁸. Consequently, some sex workers do sex work to supplement their benefit payments⁴⁴⁹.

The interests of sex workers often overlap with the interests of other marginalised groups, and the ongoing issue with benefit rates which place recipients in poverty appears to be a clear instance of this. Beneficiaries are often stigmatized and recent research from New Zealand has found that people who receive a benefit are frequently ashamed of this fact, and may hide it from their family⁴⁵⁰. Some of the ways that sex workers are accused of being unproductive, and have their work constructed as ‘not work’, resemble the ways beneficiaries are stigmatized⁴⁵¹. In some instances, when it has been acknowledged in media that some sex workers receive a benefit, this is done to further discredit them, an amplification of both stigmas⁴⁵². In this social climate, there may be an understandable reluctance to acknowledge the proportion of sex workers who also receive a benefit – particularly as investigations by WINZ for undeclared income are frequently a source of significant anxiety⁴⁵³. Despite this, failing to acknowledge this intersection paints an incomplete picture, especially relating to why some workers might have needed to work during lockdowns – obfuscating the financial need at play risks rendering them irresponsible or reckless, rather than driven by untenable financial circumstances.

The experiences of sex workers with a disability or chronic illness are similarly absent from most narratives, and this is a gap which would benefit from additional empirical research, to ascertain the experiences of this group. Research into the intersection between sex work and disability more commonly considers the experiences and needs of clients with disabilities⁴⁵⁴, and in some instances highlights the interaction and commonalities between these two advocacy movements⁴⁵⁵. In a few instances, comments on the demographic make-up of

participants in research with other foci suggests that an appreciable proportion of sex workers live with a long-term disability⁴⁵⁶.

As the pandemic has progressed and public health mitigation efforts have been dropped, disability advocacy groups have pointed out the repercussions of this for people who are at higher risk of complications if they contract Covid-19⁴⁵⁷. For sex workers, whose work requires them to be in close proximity with their clients, where distancing is impossible and many other mitigation tactics are impractical, this threat is likely to be further heightened. Within a New Zealand context, financial support was withdrawn at the Alert Level when someone was permitted to return to work, regardless of if their own health needs made this more dangerous than it might be for others. This point went unremarked in news media coverage of the interactions between sex work and Covid-19, again obscuring the way that existing at the intersection of multiple marginalisations can create specific and compounding challenges.

Media coverage of sex work in relation to Covid-19 during the 2020–2021 period showed some improvements from the situation in previous years, especially when compared to texts from the earlier parts of the 2010s. The terminology used tended to be ‘sex workers’, rather than more stigmatizing labels. While groups such as migrant workers were singled out for scrutiny, indicating enduring issues in how this group are treated in media, the language used to describe them was marginally improved from the situation in earlier reporting, too. Sex work was more frequently understood through the lens of work, suggesting the ongoing efforts by sex workers, the NZPC, allies, and academics on this point is bearing fruit. Sex work was still sometimes used as a salacious or titillating point of speculation, notably in discussions about the unnamed women who travelled to Wellington and Northland in late 2021. Here we see indications that the treatment of the industry in media is still sometimes

premised on it being understood as bizarre and fascinating, an angle which heightens the ‘shareability’ of a piece of news⁴⁵⁸.

It is still true, as it was throughout the 2010s, that migrant workers and street-based sex workers are less likely to have their voices heard in media texts. Although, given the negative experiences some street-based sex workers report after being approached media clearly representation here is not a wholesale or uncomplicated good. As the pandemic progressed, there were some instances where sex workers with relatively less social power were interviewed, such as those who couldn’t access the wage subsidy. The inclusion of their voices added nuance and detail to explanations and understandings of why some workers might not be able to work while masked, or might have crossed borders. A greater breadth of voices being given space within the texts, treated as experts on their own lives and jobs, is helpful, I think, for starting to erode some of the divisions which are created between ways of doing sex work, which sort some people into a space of relative acceptance and shift stigma more heavily onto others. The effective uses of media by sex workers and the NZPC to advance an image of sex workers as community-minded public health advocates shows the power and promise of this kind of coverage, and emphasises its importance as a site from which to help drive social change.

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¹⁹⁹ 1 News, “Lisa Lewis”.

²⁰⁰ Sadler, “Sex Workers”.

²⁰¹ Todd, “Sex Workers Struggle”.

²⁰² Anderson, “Disaster Sex”.

²⁰³ Todd, “Sex Workers Struggle”; Fraser, “Keeping Clients in Line”; Doyle, “Sex Workers”.

²⁰⁴ RNZ, “Green Light”; Connor, “Kiwi Sex Worker”; RNZ, “Approaches to Sex Workers”; Anderson, “Disaster Sex”; Keith, “Sex Workers”.

²⁰⁵ Fraser, “Keeping Clients in Line”; RNZ. “Approaches to Sex Workers”.

²⁰⁶ Templeton, “Kissing Is Out”.

²⁰⁷ Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*.

²⁰⁸ Jiwani and Young. “Reproducing Marginality”; Wattis, “Analysing Local Newspaper Coverage”.

²⁰⁹ Fraser, “Keeping Clients in Line”.

²¹⁰ Hafner and Sun, “Leadership Discourse”; Beattie and Priestley, “Team of 5 Million”.

²¹¹ Sanders, *Paying*; Easterbrook-Smith, “Advertorial”; Farvid and Glass, “Media Representations”.

²¹² Anderson, “Disaster Sex”; Fraser, “Keeping Clients in Line”; Templeton, “Kissing Is Out”; Connor, “Kiwi Sex Worker”.

²¹³ Fraser, “Keeping Clients in Line”.

²¹⁴ Fraser, “Keeping Clients in Line”.

²¹⁵ Connor, “Kiwi Sex Worker”.

²¹⁶ Connor, “Kiwi Sex Worker”.

²¹⁷ Fraser, “Keeping Clients in Line”.

²¹⁸ Easterbrook-Smith, “Advertorial”; Easterbrook-Smith, Producing.

²¹⁹ Fitzgerald and Abel, “The Media”; Jenness, “Sex as Work”; Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck, *The State of Sex*, 102, 116.

²²⁰ Fraser, “Keeping Clients in Line”.

²²¹ Burrows, “Lisa Lewis”.

²²² Sussman, “New Zealand Safety Net”; Biddle, “Coronavirus”; Casey, “Touching People”; Fraser, “Keeping Clients in Line”; Bridge, “Lisa Lewis”; Burrows, “Lisa Lewis”; Kronast, “Advocacy Group”; Sadler, “Sex Workers”; *The Project*, “Sex Workers Say”; Connor, “Kiwi Sex Worker”; Templeton, “Kissing Is Out”; Doyle, “Sex Workers”; McKenzie-McLean, “Green Light”; Harris, “Homemade”; Keith, “Sex Workers”; NZ Herald, “Hellhole”.

²²³ Berg, *Porn Work*; Brouwers and Herrmann, “The Response”; Callander et al, “What Will We Do”; Rogers et al., “Sex Workers”; Nyabeze et al., “The Resilience”; Hamilton et al., “Risk, Resilience”; Callander et al., “Effects of COVID-19”; Wirawan et al. “Behavioral Changes”; Marshall, “LGBTQIA+”; Giametta et al., “Racial Profiling”.

²²⁴ Harris, “Homemade”.

²²⁵ Callander et al, “What Will We Do”; Jones, “For Black Models”; Brouwers and Herrmann, “The Response”; Dziuban, Możdrzeń, and Ratecka. “Solidarity”; Bromfield, Panichelli, and Capous-Desyllas, “COVID-19”; Macharia et al., “Sexual Health”; Hamilton et al., “Risk, Resilience”, Weinhold, “Sex as Work”, 71.

²²⁶ Keith, “Sex Workers”.

²²⁷ Doyle, “Sex Workers”.

²²⁸ Casey, “Touching People”.

²²⁹ Keith, “Sex Workers”.

²³⁰ Sadler, “Sex Workers”; *The Project*, “Sex Workers Say”; Connor, “Kiwi Sex Worker”; Bridge, “Lisa Lewis”; Burrows, “Lisa Lewis”.

²³¹ Sussman, “New Zealand Safety Net”.

²³² Harris, “Homemade”.

²³³ Casey, “Touching People”; Doyle, “Sex Workers”; RNZ. “Approaches to Sex Workers”; “Sussman, “New Zealand Safety Net”; Hendry-Tennent, “Sex Workers”; McAvinue, “More Women Seeking Work”.

²³⁴ Healy, “Services Provided 1 Jan 2020 to 30 June 2020”, 9.

²³⁵ NZPC [@NZPC_]. “@[handle] At This Stage NZPC”; NZPC [@NZPC_]. “@[handle] @[handle] If They Cannot Get on WINZ; NZPC [@NZPC_]. “We’re Really Proud”; NZPC [@NZPC_]. “Please Contact WINZ Asap”.

²³⁶ NZPC [@NZPC_]. “@[handle] NZPC Has Always Accepted Donations”.

²³⁷ Healy, “Services Provided 1 Jan 2020 to 30 June 2020”, 11; Sussman, “New Zealand Safety Net”.

²³⁸ Fitzgerald and Abel, “The Media”.

²³⁹ Pereira, “Male Sex Workers”; Nyabeze et al., “The Resilience”; Macharia et al., “Sexual Health”; Fedorkó et al., “Sex Workers”; Molnar and Ros, “Sex Workers”; Ros and Molnar, “Experiences”; Aantjes et al., “Exposed and Unprotected”; Hassan et al., “Covid-19”; Marshall, “LGBTQIA+”.

²⁴⁰ Sussman, “New Zealand Safety Net”; The Spinoff. “Live Updates, May 1”.

²⁴¹ Sussman, “New Zealand Safety Net”; Connor, “Kiwi Sex Worker”.

²⁴² Keith, “Sex Workers”.

²⁴³ Fraser, “Keeping Clients in Line”.

²⁴⁴ RNZ, “Green Light”.

²⁴⁵ Biddle, “Coronavirus”.

²⁴⁶ Casey, “Touching People”; RNZ. “Approaches to Sex Workers”; Lawrence, “No Lap Dances”; Harris, “Homemade”.

²⁴⁷ Casey, “Touching People”; Harris, “Homemade”.

²⁴⁸ Sussman, “New Zealand Safety Net”.

²⁴⁹ The Spinoff. “Live Updates, May 1”.

²⁵⁰ Anderson, ““Disaster Sex””.

²⁵¹ Sussman, “New Zealand Safety Net”.

²⁵² Tan, “City Sex Workers”.

²⁵³ Sepuloni, “Emergency Benefit”.

²⁵⁴ Abel and Ludeke, “Business like Any Other?”

²⁵⁵ Casey, “Touching People”.

²⁵⁶ McKenzie-McLean, “Green Light”.

²⁵⁷ Sadler, “Sex Workers”.

²⁵⁸ Connor, “Kiwi Sex Worker”.

²⁵⁹ Keith, “Sex Workers”.

²⁶⁰ NZPC [@NZPC_]. “@[handle] @[handle] Sex Workers (and Clients)”.

²⁶¹ NZPC [@NZPC_]. “@[handle] Kia Ora, We Expect”; NZPC [@NZPC_]. “@[handle] @[handle] Hi, Yes, Though It’s Not Explicit”.

²⁶² NZPC [@NZPC_]. “@[handle] Hi, Our Info May Be Different”.

²⁶³ 1 News, “Lisa Lewis”; The Spinoff. “Live Updates, May 12”.

²⁶⁴ Lawrence, “No Lap Dances”.

²⁶⁵ NZPC [@NZPC_]. “BREAKING NEWS”.

²⁶⁶ Beattie and Priestley, “Team of 5 Million”.

²⁶⁷ New Zealand Government. “Timeline”.

²⁶⁸ McClure, “Wellington”.

²⁶⁹ New Zealand Government. “COVID-19 Media Conference — 17 August 2021”.

²⁷⁰ Sepuloni, “Emergency Benefit”; Ministry of Social Development. “Emergency Benefit”.

²⁷¹ Mckew, “Sex Workers”.

²⁷² Barraclough, “Sex Workers”.

²⁷³ Barraclough, “Sex Workers”.

²⁷⁴ Barraclough, “Sex Workers”.

²⁷⁵ Harcourt, “NZ Sex Workers”; Easterbrook-Smith, “OnlyFans”.

²⁷⁶ Harcourt, “NZ Sex Workers”; Shane, “OnlyFans”.

²⁷⁷ Easterbrook-Smith, “OnlyFans”.

²⁷⁸ Harcourt, “NZ Sex Workers”; NZ Herald, “Anxieties”; Rowe, “Uncertain”.

²⁷⁹ NZ Herald, “Anxieties”; Rowe, “Uncertain”.

²⁸⁰ Harcourt, “NZ Sex Workers”.

²⁸¹ Rowe, “Uncertain”.

²⁸² Harcourt, “NZ Sex Workers”.

²⁸³ Harcourt, “NZ Sex Workers”.

²⁸⁴ Harcourt, “NZ Sex Workers”.

²⁸⁵ NZ Herald, “Anxieties”.

²⁸⁶ Rowe, “Uncertain”.

²⁸⁷ Rowe, “Uncertain”.

²⁸⁸ Rowe, “Uncertain”.

²⁸⁹ NZ Herald, “Anxieties”; Rowe, “Uncertain”.

²⁹⁰ Franks, “Auckland Sex Worker”.

²⁹¹ Harcourt, “Sex Workers”.

²⁹² NZ Herald, “Anxieties”.

²⁹³ Rowe, “Uncertain”.

²⁹⁴ Hay, “Sex Workers”.

²⁹⁵ Du Plessis-Allan, “Prostitutes”.

²⁹⁶ Newstalk ZB, “Prostitutes”.

²⁹⁷ Du Plessis-Allan, “Prostitutes”.

²⁹⁸ Hay, “Sex Workers”.

²⁹⁹ Te Pou and Hartley Moore, *The Panel*.

³⁰⁰ Franks and Morton, “Covid-19”.

³⁰¹ Armstrong, Abel and Roguski, “Fear of”, 123.

³⁰² Easterbrook-Smith, “Resisting Division”.

³⁰³ Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*, 68.

³⁰⁴ Moore, “Sex Workers”.

³⁰⁵ Moore, ““Sex Workers”, *The Waikato Times*; Hunt, “Illegal”.

³⁰⁶ Eder, “Women”; Hart and Eder, “Sex Workers”; Eder, “Visiting”.

³⁰⁷ Chin and Gooch, “Covid”; Ridout, “Nelson”.

³⁰⁸ Capuzza, “Who Defines”; Atton and Wickenden, “Sourcing Routines”.

³⁰⁹ Franks and Morton, “Covid-19”.

³¹⁰ Te Pou and Hartley Moore, *The Panel*; Prendergast and Templeton, “Pressure”.

³¹¹ Franks and Morton, “Covid-19”.

³¹² Te Pou and Hartley Moore, *The Panel*; Prendergast and Templeton, “Pressure”.

³¹³ Te Pou and Hartley Moore, *The Panel*.

³¹⁴ Whanganui Chronicle, “Covid”.

³¹⁵ Hunt, “Illegal”; Holland and Tan, “Search”; Moore, “Sex Workers”; Moore, “Sex Workers”, *The Waikato Times*

³¹⁶ Holland and Tan, “Search”.

³¹⁷ New Zealand Government, “COVID-19 Media Conference – October 8.”

³¹⁸ Hunt, “Illegal”.

³¹⁹ Moore, “Sex Workers”.

³²⁰ Moore, “Sex Workers”, *The Waikato Times*.

³²¹ Olley, “Details Revealed”.

³²² Brown, “Duo”.

³²³ Whanganui Chronicle, “Covid”.

³²⁴ Cooper, “No compelling reason”.

³²⁵ Brown, “Duo”.

³²⁶ NZ Herald, “Auckland”; Hart and Eder, “Sex Workers”; Eder, “Women”; Leask, “Auckland Sex Workers”; Brown, “Duo”; Eder, “Sex Workers”.

³²⁷ SWAN - Sex Worker Aotearoa Network [@SwanAotearoa]. “And Today on NZ Media”; ———. “Please Help Us”.

³²⁸ SWAN - Sex Worker Aotearoa Network [@SwanAotearoa]. “1/ @NZStuff and @nzherald”; ———. “2/ to Expose the Real Full Names”; ———. “As It Is”; ———. “Those of You Who”.

³²⁹ NZ Herald, “Auckland”.

³³⁰ Sowman-Lung, “Live Updates, October 14”.

³³¹ Hart and Eder, “Sex Workers”; Eder, “Sex Workers”; Eder, “Visiting”.

³³² Du Plessis-Allan, “Prostitutes”; Hay, “Sex Workers”.

³³³ Hay, “Sex Workers”.

³³⁴ Hay, “Sex Workers”.

³³⁵ Harry, “Journalistic Quotation”, 1042.

³³⁶ Hay, “Sex Workers”.

³³⁷ Cooper, “No compelling reason”.

³³⁸ Hart, “Accused”.

³³⁹ Fraser, “Headline”.

³⁴⁰ Ting, “Understanding”.

³⁴¹ Armstrong, Abel and Roguski, “Fear of”.

³⁴² Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*.

³⁴³ Templeton, “Inventive”; NZ Herald, “New Rules”.

³⁴⁴ Templeton, “Inventive”.

³⁴⁵ NZ Herald, “New Rules”.

³⁴⁶ NZPC [@NZPC_]. “All Businesses and Services”.

³⁴⁷ Prendergast and Templeton, “Pressure”.

³⁴⁸ Harcourt, “Sex Workers”.

³⁴⁹ Moore, “Sex Workers”; Moore, “Sex Workers”, *The Waikato Times*.

³⁵⁰ Franks, “Auckland Sex Worker”.

³⁵¹ Harcourt, “Sex Workers”.

³⁵² Harcourt, “Sex Workers”.

³⁵³ Te Pou and Hartley Moore, *The Panel*.

³⁵⁴ Hay, “Sex Workers”.

³⁵⁵ NZPC, “COVID-19 Information”, [23 November 2021].

³⁵⁶ Although it falls outside of the scope of this study, in early 2022 a series of brothels in Auckland were also listed as having been visited by a Covid-19 case, demonstrating this forthrightness was not a one-off occurrence.

³⁵⁷ Chin and Gooch, “Covid”; Ridout, “Nelson”.

³⁵⁸ Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*, 90.

³⁵⁹ Easterbrook-Smith, “Advertorial News Media”.

³⁶⁰ Platt et al., “Forgotten”; Tan et al., “The Impact”; Reza-Paul et al., “From Vulnerability”; Pereira, “Male Sex Workers”; Kudzai Nyabeze et al., “Resilience”; Nanda, “Inequalities”; Lam et al., “Policing and Exclusion”; Jozaghi, and Bird, “COVID-19”; Janyam et al., “Protecting”; Fedorkó, Stevenson, and Macioti. “Sex Workers”; Dziuban, Moźdrzeń, and Ratecka. “Solidarity”; Cubides Kovacsics, Santos, and Siegmann, “Sex Workers”; Callander et al., “Effects of COVID-19”; Bromfield, Panichelli, and Capous-Desyllas, “COVID-19”; Benoit, and Unsworth, “COVID-19, Stigma”; Adebisi et al., “Sex Workers”.

³⁶¹ Harcourt, “Sex Workers”; Franks, “Auckland Sex Worker”.

³⁶² Lazarus et al., “Occupational Stigma”.

³⁶³ Benoit et al., “Dodged”.

³⁶⁴ Todd, “Sex Workers Struggle”.

³⁶⁵ Harcourt, “Sex Workers”.

³⁶⁶ *The Project*, “Sex Workers Say”.

³⁶⁷ Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*.

³⁶⁸ Capuzza, “Who Defines”, 118; Atton and Wickenden, “Sourcing Routines”.

³⁶⁹ Armstrong “Decriminalisation”.

³⁷⁰ Tan et al., “The Impact”; Lam, “Left Behind”; Aantjes, Muchanga, and Munguambe, “Exposed and Unprotected”.

³⁷¹ Istiko, Durham and Elliott, “Scoping Review”; Jayan and Dutta, “Nobody”; Belong Aotearoa and Lipura, “Migrant”.

³⁷² Rowe, “Uncertain”.

³⁷³ Abel and Ludeke, “Business”.

³⁷⁴ Weitzer, “Resistance”.

³⁷⁵ Istiko, Durham and Elliott, “Scoping Review”.

³⁷⁶ Doezenia, “Loose Women”, 37; Agustín, *Sex*.

³⁷⁷ Pickering and Ham, “Hot Pants”.

³⁷⁸ Doezenia, “Loose Women”.

³⁷⁹ Ham, Segrave and Pickering, “Beholder”; Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*.

³⁸⁰ Ham, Segrave and Pickering, “Beholder”.

³⁸¹ Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*.

³⁸² Armstrong, Abel and Roguski, “Fear of”; Ting, “Understanding the Experiences”.

³⁸³ Armstrong, “New Zealand”.

³⁸⁴ Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*, 94-95.

³⁸⁵ Easterbrook-Smith, “Resisting Division”; Neyland, “Sexual Other”; Neyland, “Villains and Victims”.

³⁸⁶ Giametta et al., “Racial Profiling”.

³⁸⁷ Lam et al., “Policing and Exclusion”.

³⁸⁸ Belong Aotearoa and Lipura, “Migrant”.

³⁸⁹ Lam, “Left Behind”.

³⁹⁰ Spoonley and Butcher, “Reporting Superdiversity”; Baker and Benson, “The Suitcase; Sibley et al., “Ethnic Group Stereotypes”, 25.

³⁹¹ Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*.

³⁹² Hay, “Sex Workers”; Hart and Eder, “Sex Workers”.

³⁹³ Examples can be found in Quinlivan, “Infected Person” and Corlett, “New Zealand Police”, but these are only two among a larger number of texts on this topic.

³⁹⁴ Agustín, *Sex*.

³⁹⁵ Neyland, “Foreign, Illegal”.

³⁹⁶ Pheterson, “Not Repeating”.

³⁹⁷ Hay, “Sex Workers”.

³⁹⁸ Bell, “Couple”.

³⁹⁹ Moore, “Huge Regret”; Templeton, “Attendees”.

⁴⁰⁰ Du Plessis-Allan, “Prostitutes”; Hay, “Sex Workers”.

⁴⁰¹ Bowen, *Work, Money*; 113-129; Sanders et al., *Beyond*; Marshall, “LGBTQIA+”.

⁴⁰² SWAN - Sex Worker Aotearoa Network [@SwanAotearoa]. “Did I Show You”.

⁴⁰³ Personal correspondence, 16 October 2021.

⁴⁰⁴ Spoonley and Butcher, “Reporting Superdiversity”.

⁴⁰⁵ Liu, and Mills, “Plausible Deniability”.

⁴⁰⁶ Sallmann, “Living”.

⁴⁰⁷ Fitzgerald and Abel, “The Media”, 204.

⁴⁰⁸ Armstrong, “Stigma”, 1300; Barnett et al., “Lobbying”.

⁴⁰⁹ Fraser, “Keeping Clients in Line”.

⁴¹⁰ Downe, “Laughing”.

⁴¹¹ Güler, “Defiant Potential”.

⁴¹² Sanders, “Controllable Laughter”.

⁴¹³ Bernstein, *Temporarily*.

⁴¹⁴ Gall, *Union Organizing*, 17.

⁴¹⁵ Jeffreys, “Political Autonomy”, 99.

⁴¹⁶ Brewis and Linstead, “The Worst Thing”.

⁴¹⁷ Pereira, “Male Sex Workers”; Nyabeze et al., “The Resilience”; Macharia et al., “Sexual Health”; Fedorkó et al., “Sex Workers”; Aantjes et al., “Exposed and Unprotected”; Hassan et al., “Covid-19”.

⁴¹⁸ Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*.

⁴¹⁹ Abel, Fitzgerald and Brunton, *The Impact*.

⁴²⁰ Platt et al., “Associations”; Healy, Pickering and Hati, “Stepping Forward”; Mac and Smith, *Revolting Prostitutes*.

⁴²¹ Beauty NZ and Massage New Zealand, for instance, both issued advice specific to their industries at different points during the pandemic (Beauty NZ, “Additional Health”; Massage New Zealand, “MNZ Health”).

⁴²² Healy, “Six Monthly Report -1 Jan 2020 to 30 June 2020.”

⁴²³ Healy, “Six Monthly Report -1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021.”

⁴²⁴ NZPC, “COVID-19 Information [7 September 2021]”.

⁴²⁵ New Zealand Government, “Covid-19 Alert Levels”.

⁴²⁶ Molnar and Ros, “Sex Workers”.

⁴²⁷ Lam et al., “Policing and exclusion”.

⁴²⁸ González and Garrido, “Prostitution”.

⁴²⁹ Abel, Fitzgerald and Brunton, *The Impact*, 118; Zangger, “For Better”, 127.

⁴³⁰ Harcourt, “Sex Workers”.

⁴³¹ Weinhold, Abel, and Thompson. ““They Wouldn’t”; Zangger, “For Better”.

⁴³² Pickering and Hati, “Stepping Forward”, 46.

⁴³³ Armstrong, Abel and Roguski, “Fear of”; Abel and Roguski, “Migrant”.

⁴³⁴ Work and Income, “Declaration”.

⁴³⁵ Scarlet Alliance, “Covid-19”.

⁴³⁶ Butterfly Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network, and Maggie’s Toronto Sex Workers Action Project. “Sex Work Covid-19”.

⁴³⁷ Dziuban, Moźdrzeń, and Ratecka. “Solidarity”, 367.

⁴³⁸ Brooks-Gordon, Morris, and Sanders, “Harm Reduction”, 814.

Chapter 5.

⁴³⁹ Elers et al., “Negotiating Health”; Atuk, and Craddock, “Social Pathologies”; Bamba et al., “Pandemic”.

⁴⁴⁰ Atuk, and Craddock, “Social Pathologies”; Bamba et al., “Pandemic”.

⁴⁴¹ Easterbrook-Smith, “Resisting”.

⁴⁴² Link and Phelan, “Conceptualizing”.

⁴⁴³ Benoit et al., “Prostitution Stigma”.

⁴⁴⁴ Rowe, “Uncertain”; Fraser, “Headline”.

⁴⁴⁵ Baker and Davis, “Everyday Resistance”.

⁴⁴⁶ Elers et al., “Negotiating Health”.

⁴⁴⁷ Du Plessis-Allan, “Prostitutes”; Healy, ““Six Monthly Report - 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021.”

⁴⁴⁸ Humpage and Moore, “Income”.

⁴⁴⁹ Weinhold, “Sex as Work”, 72-3.

⁴⁵⁰ Humpage and Moore, “Income”.

⁴⁵¹ Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*, 112-113.

⁴⁵² Easterbrook-Smith, *Producing*, 120.

⁴⁵³ Humpage and Moore, “Income”.

⁴⁵⁴ Sanders, “Sexual Citizenship”; Wotton, “Paid Sexual Services”.

⁴⁵⁵ Fritsch et al., “Disability”.

⁴⁵⁶ Benoit et al., “Dodged”.

⁴⁵⁷ Hodge, Piatt, and Barraza. “Legal Interventions”.

⁴⁵⁸ Harcup and O’Neill, “Revisited (Again)”.