

First I would like to acknowledge the land we are meeting on today is Gadigal land and pay my respects to elders past and present. I also would like to acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

My name is Ryan and I am currently the elected secretary at Scarlet Alliance, the Australian Sex Workers Association. Like everyone who is involved at Scarlet Alliance- I am a sex worker. I am also a drug user.

Its great that a sex worker run organisation has been invited to speak here tonight and that sex workers are being more included at recent reclaim the nights around Australia.

About 5 years ago I was sitting in a friend's gender studies lecture in Melbourne and the lecturer told the class about when she went to Reclaim the Night in the 90s. how it was so great and feminist and they marched down the street to some 'direct action' in a small strip club venue. This "direct action" to end violence against women involved yelling at all the "Johns" until they left and taking over the work place. I asked this lecturer- wasn't that a form of violence, invading women's workplaces, making **women lose income** and disrespecting women's decisions. But she couldn't really give me a straight answer.

This has never made sense to me- that actions which intend to and succeed in preventing women from earning money while we are at work, that are focussed on undermining women's choice to work how we want are hailed as feminist or even as examples of working towards ending violence against women. As if they are not acts of violence themselves. When feminist movements exclude sex workers and trans women as they often have and continue to do, they don't only miss out on the knowledge and experience from women who could contribute much to ending violence against women, they are also committing further acts of violence against women who are marginalised and stigmatised already in multiple ways.

When it comes to sex worker safety many people believe we need protection from our clients or employers but around the world sex workers are fighting for protection from the police and laws that make us vulnerable. The criminalisation of any aspect of our work, our clients, our employers or our workplaces makes us have to choose between police evasion strategies and safety practices and leaves sex workers without basic human rights and protections. Decriminalisation hasn't solved all our problems In NSW but it does mean we legally have the same rights as other workers and citizens. It means we can work in ways we are comfortable with. We can work together or in collectives, we can openly negotiate with our clients before we decide to accept the booking, we can expect safe work places and industrial protections from our employers, We have reduced barriers to accessing police if we are in trouble, we can carry condoms and safe sex tools, and It sends a message that theoretically everyone deserves to be safe. However the stigma and discrimination that supports violence against sex workers isn't restricted to just the legal sphere and decriminalisation is only one part of the solution.

While decriminalisation is successful in lessening our fear of police and making us safer at work, It doesn't change the violence sex workers experience that comes from other institutions and from the way others in our community stereotype their understandings of us and our lives.

When sex workers are pressured or forced into having unwanted medical testing this is a form of violence. When sex workers are threatened with losing or actually lose custody of their children this is violence. When a dr told me i should be on more kinds of contraceptive or when sex workers are sterilised because we are seen as unfit parents this is violence. when you tell me that I'm damaged from sex work that is violence. when you call us pimps or not real sex workers if we don't give you pity porn about our lives, this is violence. when you theorise about the reasons why i use drugs and do sex work as if I can't talk for myself and explain how my different choices are and are not connected, that is violence. So I am glad that by inviting a speaker from a sex workers rights organisation, sex worker organising is being rightfully recognised as a key part of organising towards ending violence against women and respecting our right to have autonomy over our bodies.