

Artists In Solidarity With Sex Workers

This is a basic guide that we hope can be a source of critical and further conversations around sex work in the arts. We are providing this as a reference for anyone considering or involved in a project on sex work be that the artist, curator, exhibition space, funding body ect to consider ALL points before and during a project. We have supplied external references for you to make educated decisions and as a starting point to find further information. We acknowledge this is part of a much wider conversation and that the document can be updated as/when needed. When you are going through these points, it may become apparent that the project is not appropriate to continue or it may give you some critical reflection on previous work. Please use this as a guide to help better make those decisions, enter conversations and be more educated. Here we are primarily referring to full service and street sex workers, specifically the Holbeck Managed Zone in Leeds. *This text is written by sex workers, artists and activists in Leeds.*

- **Do you have experience of sex work/are you a sexworker?**

It is important when making work about *any* marginalised community that you consider if you are making work from experience or as part of this community, or if you are outside looking inwards to make work about them. If you do not have experience or are not a part of this community then you need to heavily consider how you will use your platform to raise up the voices of sex workers instead.

- **What are your motives / Why should it be you telling their story?**

Reflect carefully on your motivations for the project. If your work is part of an anti-sex work campaign or affiliated with one, then you are mobilising and politicising your practice to disempower the participants in your project. The work should reflect the community in a considerate and respectful way.

- **What is the community interaction with you before, during and after?**

If you are neither a sex worker or sex workers are not leading the project then you should consider not doing the project. Sex workers need to be leading the project, otherwise you are harming them. All sex workers involved in the project should be paid for their labour and involvement, even in a consultation capacity. If they are not being paid then consider whether the project directly benefits the sex workers involved and their community. You must be positively engaging with the community throughout your work, instead of profiting from it by selling/showing the work to a separate community.

- **Are you in conversation, listening to and taking action on points put forward by groups like SWARM?**

SWARM are a sex worker collective supporting sex workers. They are one of the groups and charities around the country best placed to advise on the ethics of projects around sex work.

- **Are you aware of the history around sex work and sex workers rights?**

If not, we strongly advise you inform yourself and read sites such as Revolting Prostitutes before continuing your project - <https://genderate.wordpress.com/2015/09/29/researching-marginalised-groups/>

- **Are you allowing room for/ actively seeking critique and acknowledging that this is a sensitive subject where people could be harmed?**

It is essential to any project relating to sex work that it is carefully planned and reviewed regularly to check that sex workers are being safeguarded. You must respect the privacy of sex workers and be aware of the risks they face. Actively seek out critique before starting your project from sex workers, sex workers support organisations, sex workers who are artists and artists who have ethically worked with sex workers. You are not the first to do a project like this so actively seek advice and critique from those with more experience and continue to have these conversations both during and after the project.

- **How is the identity and information being recorded safely so that it won't endanger the workers?**

It is extremely important you have data security methods in place, If you have agreed with the sex worker(s) to keep or release information about them, security methods should be guided and supported by sex workers, as data security and consent processes are as much a part of the project as the art. Never out a sex worker against their will, as they can be at a high risk of violence, discrimination and legal repercussions due to their work. By releasing information you may also be outing queer and trans sex workers, a persons migration status and putting any other employment they have at risk. A consent form may not actually be the safest way to record the consent of the workers and could provide further danger by having their details officially recorded and held by an institution.

- **Are you aware about what is considered consent?**

Consent should be given at every stage from the making to the display of work whether on social media, in print or on a gallery wall. Consent should be freely given every time or freely given overall if the person giving consent would find it difficult to do this on numerous occasions. There are many forums that can give you advice on how and what consent looks like, such as the following links - <http://consentculture.co.uk/manifesto/>
<https://www.rewriting-the-rules.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Consent-Checklist-1.pdf>

- **How is the work accessible to sex workers ?**

- **Are you being respectful?**

Ask them how they want to be represented. Make sure the language you use is not degrading or disrespectful and that when you talk about the project it is not all about you but the community and done so in a positive way. Use the correct pronouns, and respect the right for self identification. Many trans people engage in sex work and often do so under a different gender, record them with the gender and pronouns they have asked you to us.

- **If you are curating/ supporting a show in any way do you know the artist(s) will be following this guide or a similar process?**