

Border and street sexualities

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In this paper I discuss the power that the circulation of stereotypes and narratives has in sex workers' lives in a central district of Bogota where prostitution has been legalized since 2001. I focus on sex workers' accounts as well as residents and clients narratives obtained through different stages of ethnographic fieldwork. Categorical images built around them undermine their rights and keep administrators, bosses, clients, and police violence underreported. Sex workers narratives question dominant sexual, social and labor organizing principles as well as a complex and hierarchical moral economy of sexual commerce. Moral boundaries of contamination borrow from economic, religious, medical, health and security discourses and domination matrixes. Residents link prostitution to vice, curse, plague and disease whereas clients classify sexual workers according to their beauty, appearance, age and whether they work inside or outside, in places with security guards or on sidewalks. Territorial disputes, rivalry and conflict characterize the relationships between heterosexual and trans-sexual workers. Although trans-sexual women attract a bigger number of clients they are perceived as dangerous and unpredictable since they know the rules of the streets. On the other hand, heterosexual workers have to follow strict schedules and norms to cope with constraining work conditions, family duties and sentimental ties. In both cases and despite legalization there is little law enforcement regarding these women labor rights and living conditions.

Key Words

Prostitution-Street violence- sexual commerce- sexualities

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