



Thank you Stan for opening this exhibition. I am happy that it is you who does it because you know what stigma means, and what it does to you.

FAGGOT! is the worst swear word for a man. WHORE! is the worst insult to a woman. Faggots and whores, according to many people, do not deserve respect but contempt and humiliation.

Nobody expected us to be here. Sex workers in the building of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment! Officially, sex work falls under the Ministry of Justice and Security, but here is where we belong, just like other workers. Thank you for this opportunity!

You probably can't imagine it. Or well, some of you here probably do can...

But there was a time in the Netherlands when homosexuality was not considered equal to heterosexual sex. A person could have heterosexual sex from the age of 16, and sex with someone of the same sex only five years later, from the age of 21. Aimed to protect young boys from gay men.

This had serious consequences:

The vice police created card systems, registers and photo albums of suspected homosexuals. The police posted at urinals and in front of houses, questioned neighbours, relatives and acquaintances, and raided private gatherings.

This led to tragedies in the lives of many homosexuals: they were ostracised by their own families, their rent was cancelled, they were fired, and they became easy targets for blackmail and prey for gay-bashers.

Unbelievable, eh?

It is almost impossible to imagine that this ever happened in the Netherlands....

But it's still happening! In 2023. With sex workers.

Back then homosexuality was not treated equal to heterosexuality, now sex work is not treated equal to other work.

The consequences for us are huge.

A sex worker thinks she is opening the door for a client and suddenly there are 5 cops standing in front of her. Mostly her, because when it comes to sex work, women are seen as the victims. And straight men as perpetrators.

So the next time you read in the papers that an illegal brothel has been closed down, remember that it could be that sex worker who is now homeless. This also

happens to sex workers who are registered with the Chamber of Commerce and duly pay their taxes.

Sex workers who are raped or robbed are afraid to go to the police for fear of fines, restraining orders, eviction from their homes or deportation. And of course criminals and unscrupulous clients know this!

There is even a bill, the WRS, which will require sex workers to register in a national database.

We don't want a national register of homosexuals, we don't want a national register of journalists, and we don't want a national register of Jews. So why a national register of whores?

Those who do not want, who not dare or the sex workers are not allowed to register, will be send into illegality, a world without laws.

Hunting sex workers and pushing them to illegality, increase stigma and prejudices against sex workers. It makes violence acceptable and deserved by sex workers, whores, sluts, faggots, gays, queers, men, women, people.

It makes it more dangerous for sex workers and anyone who does not conform to the imposed sexual morality! STIGMA KILLS

Everyone has prejudices. Prejudice is easy, quick and requires little effort. Conscious thinking takes effort. We all look at the world in stereotypes; that is how we understand the world.

The more stereotypes, prejudices and stigmas are repeated, the deeper they become embedded in our brains, the more we come to believe them.

We wish we were rational, but we are not. We are irrational beings. Sex workers can point to as many scientific studies to the contrary as they like, but activists know, facts do not convince! But stories are believed. Whoever tells the story has the power!

The media plays an important role in fuelling and perpetuating prejudices, stereotypes and stigma. Because many sex workers in the Netherlands are not openly sex workers, most people's perception of sex work is based on the news, TV series or pornography. Unintentionally, reporters adopt the language of politicians and police without speaking to sex workers themselves. In the news we often only hear one side of the story.

But the media can also have a positive impact on how people perceive sex work! By showing more sex workers' stories, prejudices, stereotypes and stigmas are

reduced. You cannot debunk a stereotype by showing one person who does not fit the stereotype. It is important to show the diversity within our community so that people get a multi-faceted picture of sex workers.

Giving more sex workers the stage and telling different stories of sex workers on TV and in newspapers helps to give a more complete picture of truth and reality.

Thanks to the sex workers who are here, there are new images to see and different stories to hear. You are the heroes, the champions, the protagonists. Our dearest gratitude goes to you.

It is scary to stand in front of an audience and share painful experiences. To explain again and again that sex work is work. Sex work provides income, independence, freedom!

Sex work is often seen as a problem. But it is the very solution. For sex workers with children studying, or for sex workers who are studying themselves. For those who are caregivers. It is a solution for people who are discriminated against in the labour market because they are trans, because of the colour of their skin, or simply because they are women.

When sex workers are prohibited from doing their job, our lives are made harsher.

We are not standing here for our fun.

People who no longer want to be seen with us in public. The birthdays we are no longer invited to. Our children being bullied at school. Police who don't want to take our reports because they think that violent robbery is the risk of our profession. Imagine the police saying the same thing to a jeweller who has been robbed?

But we are here anyway!

Because we need to be seen. When we tell our stories, we think of our colleagues, of those who do not dare or cannot speak because the consequences of stigma are too big for them.

Fortunately, we also have many positive stories to tell.

During the photo tour, sex workers will tell you about the photography workshops, the charity bingo, the peepshow on wheels, the Trans Sisters Fashion Show and much more! And there will be plenty of time for talking over drinks afterwards.

In 1963 and 1964, writer Gerard Reve and interior designer Benno Premsele were the first men to be openly gay on Dutch television, using their real names and without masks.

In 1969, the first open Pride gay protest was held in the Binnenhof here in The Hague. Perhaps the first in the world, six months before the famous Stonewall riots.

1970: The first kiss between two men on television.

1971: Article 248bis was abolished, the article in the criminal law that made the distinction between hetero and homo sex.

It is 2023. We dread the day when the Sex Workers Registration Act is passed and comes into force. But that day is not yet here. And look how many of us there are! Some with our real names and no masks.

Growing visibility of sex workers leads to normalization and greater public acceptance of sexual diversity, and increases social pressure on politicians to give people the same rights as other people, so that all people, all of us, really do feel safe to be open about who or what we are.

It is also encouraging to see so many allies here today at the opening. Because we cannot do it alone!

Without the photographers, no pictures.

Without the journalists, no stories in the papers.

Without financial support, no free media guides.

Without the opportunity provided by this ministry, we would not be here today.

We need you.

People who see more than the work we do. People who are not ashamed of us. Courageous people who have the guts to hang pictures of sex workers on their walls, in their college in The Hague, in the university in Utrecht, in the town hall in Tilburg and now even here, in the corridors of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. In your face!

We need people who give us opportunities. People who believe in us. People who support us. People like you! We feel your support. We are not alone.

We are not alone. We are with you! With the photographers Sabine Joosten and Tammy van Nerum who took these beautiful photos. The journalists who wrote the media guide together with sex workers, with special thanks to Saskia Wassenaar. The picture editors who participated in our focus groups. The confidence in our idea and support from VSBfonds and SWAD. The ANP who took the photo of Caja from the image bank. All those venues where we were allowed to hold the photography workshops, Belle, Candy Shop, PIC, P&G292. All those officials at the ministries who made sure we were allowed to exhibit in their buildings, first at Justice and Security and now at Social Affairs and Employment (too many to mention) The mayor of Tilburg. Brenda Oude Breuil of

the University of Utrecht and Justine Le Clerq of the Haagse Hogeschool where we are allowed to hold exhibitions and who bring their students, the students who have come to this. All our dear allies at Sekswerk-Expertise, SoaAidsNL, Shop, Spot46, Door2Door, SeksWorks, SAVE, Jacky, Yvette Luhrs, Minke Dijkstra. The scientists, the artists, a fashion designer, friends, family. Everyone here today, all of us, want to live in a world where all people are safe ♥

This is only the beginning. A change has been set in motion, our community is growing.

Today, different stories are being told. We don't want to tell fairy tales. We want to tell true stories of real sex workers.

We want to hear, see and read more stories. There are so many more sex workers out there with so many more stories to tell.

You just have to listen

