Article

Affective Organizing: Collectivizing Informal Sex Workers in an Intimate Union

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Kate Hardy[1] and Katie Cruz[2]

Abstract

As informal, self-employed workers, street sex workers are frequently understood as a "hard-to-organize" group. As they are not legally registered or protected, they are excluded from institutional arrangements for unionization and collective bargaining and from access to both labor and social protections, due to the lack of recognition of the work they undertake. Despite this, sex workers in Argentina have been successful in generating solidarity and class consciousness as a basis for collective action. To do so, we argue that AMMAR (Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de Argentina), the Argentinean sex workers' union, has used a strategy of "affective organizing." Drawing on a participatory project developed with and involving sex worker activists from AMMAR, the article examines 108 interviews, questionnaires, and participant observations. Overall, we argue for greater attention to be paid by scholars working in the fields of the sociology of work and employment and industrial relations, attention to emotion and affect as their foundational role in labor organizing and collective action. Overall, it is posited that the practices of AMMAR in one of the most stigmatized sectors of the labor market hold invaluable lessons for locating relationality and care at the center, rather than the margins, of labor movements as a basis for the wider transformation of social relations in capitalism.

Keywords

sex work, informal labor, self-employment, Argentina, trade union

[1]University of Leeds, Leeds, UK
[2]University of Bristol, Bristol, UK

Corresponding Author:
Kate Hardy, Leeds University Business School, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK.
Email: k.r.hardy@leeds.ac.uk

> AMMAR means everything to me. I can safely say that I would give my life for my children, for my grandchild, but I think that for AMMAR it wouldn't take much thinking about either
>
> —Claudia

> Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way
>
> —E. P. Thompson (*The Making of the English Working Class*)

Introduction

At first, Marcela was apathetic when women from AMMAR (Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de Argentina) visited her on her corner in Alta Córdoba, a decaying neighborhood in the north of Córdoba city, Argentina. When they told her about the organization they had formed, she paid no attention. Eventually she gave in and went to a meeting. She stayed a while, but then, she got frustrated and left. No one asked her to return, but nevertheless, after a while, she came back. Today, she arrives at the office every day at 2 p.m. and stays until 7 p.m. when she goes out to *recorrer*, passing through her working area distributing condoms and checking on the women working there. She undertakes a full day's work before even embarking on her own job as a street sex worker. When asked why she returned to the organization, she answers, "I don't know, I just missed . . . doing things for the girls, handing out condoms, all of that. And I always had my ideas, always had my ideas." Marcela's frustration, her initial inability to connect or relate to the other women, and her later transformation into a stalwart of the group, motivated both by her politics (her "ideas") and by the fulfillment she got from providing care for her peers ("doing things for the girls"), are emblematic of the story of AMMAR, the Argentinean sex workers' union.

Despite the importance of intangible, microlevel affects in producing activists within labor organizing as described by Marcela, the "affective turn" (Clough, 2007) in sociology and cognate disciplines has left sociologies of work and employment largely untouched. The cultural "turn" to affect has been concerned with the "body's capacity to act, to engage, to connect, such that autoaffection is linked to the self-feeling of being alive—that is, 'aliveness' or vitality" (Clough, 2007, p. 2). On the other hand, emotion, affect, and intimacy have featured in materialist literature as being increasingly implicated in processes of capitalist valorization (Dyer, McDowell, & Batnitzky, 2008; Hardt, 1999; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008; Weeks, 2007).

Multiple authors have pointed to the exploitation of workers' affective capacities as human beings through the concepts of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) and immaterial labor or "affective labor" (Hardt, 1999). Marxist feminists also recognize the shift to a service-based economy and the concomitant reliance on worker's emotions; however, they also draw our attention to how capitalism has always relied on the affective, socially reproductive paid and unpaid labor of women in the home and community and

the gendered and racialised dimensions of this labor (Cruz, 2018; Federici, 2008; Hardy, 2016; Weeks, 2011). Indeed, sex work itself has been conceptualized as a paradigmatic form of affective labor by numerous scholars (Ditmore, 2010; Rivers-Moore, 2013), due to the simultaneous engagement of "activities of the body and the mind . . . reason and passion, intelligence and feeling" (Hardt, 2007, p. ix). While this literature has emphasized estrangement and alienation through such processes (Hochschild, 1983), there has, however, been less of a consensus about how affective, emotional, or socially reproductive labor can be a *positive* resource for workers.

Perhaps due to the implicit materialist orientation of scholars working in the fields of the sociology of work and employment and industrial relations, attention to emotion and affect have rarely appeared in analyses of labor organizing and collective action. This is somewhat surprising in that increasing attention is being paid to the ways in which "nonstandard" or "difficult to organize" workers can be collectively mobilized. In most countries in the "developing" world, the largest proportion of workers labor—like Marcela—outside of statutory, protective labor regulation in "informal" forms of work (Harriss-White, 2010). This means that their labor is not recognized or registered by, or perhaps hidden from, the state for tax or social security purposes.[1] While some informal workers are located within local or global production networks, working for registered or formal organizations, others are "own-account" self-employed workers who work for themselves with no employer and no employees. Self-employment, which might be informal or formal, is "outside the ambit of labor protection and collective bargaining" (Cranford, Fudge, Tucker, & Vosko, 2005, p. 4). Essentially, this means that informal, self-employed workers are not legally registered or protected. As such, they are doubly excluded—first, from institutional arrangements for unionization and collective bargaining, due to the absence of a shared employer, and second, from access to both labor and social protections, due to the lack of recognition of the work they undertake. As Davies (2006) has argued, "unprotected workers seem an unlikely source of antagonistic political subjectivity [due to] their very lack of institutional protection" (p. 90). It is therefore necessary to understand the production of antagonistic political subjectivities in the concrete conditions and social relations in which they—sometimes counterintuitively—arise (Thompson, 1963; Weeks, 2004).

The challenges posed by these conditions and the exclusion of such workers from existing apparatus for demanding labor rights means that it is often assumed that such workers are unable to collectively organize. Within debates on the possibilities and potentialities of organizing these groups of workers (or indeed more traditional workers) there has been little focus on the microscale of organizing and the role of affective and emotional mechanisms in the production of collective political subjectivities. To address this lacuna, this article starts from the invisible, the intangible, and the unnoticed emotional, corporeal, and affective engagements and entanglements in the labor activism of informal self-employed sex workers. These affects are produced in and through the labor organizing of AMMAR activists as they attempt to secure their historically specific and unmet human needs (Hennessy, 2009). We argue that it is through this process of "affective organizing" that AMMAR have built an "intimate union" and a collective class consciousness or "standpoint" based on their identity as workers.

The article is structured into four main sections. The first section explores established knowledge on labor organizing among workers characterized by similar conditions to street sex workers and the (lack of) engagement with issues of intimacy, emotion, and affect within literature on labor organizing. In the second section, the methodology of the article is laid out. In the third section, AMMAR's practices are outlined, demonstrating the ways in which emotions and affects circulate and accumulate among isolated street sex workers. In the fourth section, we argue that the circulation of affect and emotions in the organizing efforts of AMMAR occurs as activists attempt to secure the necessities for life and survival. "Affective organizing" has, for AMMAR activists, meant centering intimacy and positive affects within their organizing strategies and concomittantly creating a shared and critical angle of vision—a class identity based on their identification as *workers*.

Organizing the Informally Self-Employed

Sex worker organizing faces a trichotomous challenge in that its self-employed employment relations do not align with traditional forms of labor organizing, in that sex work is both informal and sometimes illegal work, and finally in that it faces a unique social stigma, notably in the disavowal of sex work as a form of legitimate work. The first central challenge for these workers is that the dominant model of labor organizing—industrial unionism—is not modeled on conditions of self-employment, which characterize their labor relations. It is, as Cranford et al. (2005) argue, clear that this type of organization "is not a suitable vehicle for organizing the many groups of self-employed workers who work for several different employers at different locations" (p. 171) and is not concentrated in one, large, shared workplace (Cobble, 2010). The inapposite nature of industrial unionism pertains largely to these "heterogeneous and highly individualized working conditions" (Pernicka, 2006, p. 125), which characterize much of self-employed labor. This not only presents challenges in identifying and finding one another and developing a shared identity and set of interests, but it is also complicated by the fact that the mode of contestation is not clear for workers who have no "real" employer, such as street vendors, taxi drivers, "beach hustlers," and street-based sex workers.

The second seminal challenge is the legal status of sex work, which in Argentina is unrecognized by the state as a form of labor (making it "informal") and in some parts of the country is intensely policed and criminalized.[2] As such workers "have no contract, no proof of employment and no recognition of their status as workers" (Hensman, 2005, p. 199) and therefore tend to be unprotected by any labor framework. This creates specific problems for collectivism and collective action not only because it dislocates workers from proximity to one another, but also—for self-employed informal workers—because there is no employer to whom they can direct their demands. Despite these challenges, workers, particularly women, have achieved a degree of collective of organization at the local scale, as well as globally in organizations such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, the Self-Employed Women's Union (SEWU) in South Africa, and Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO).

Third, most accounts of sex work highlight "whore stigma" (Pheterson, 1996) as a key challenge faced in general by sex workers and specifically for the possibilities for their collective organizing. As Link and Phelan (2001) and others (Zarhin & Fox, 2017) point out, stigma is both individual and structural and simultaneously social, cultural, and relational. Stigma has specific effects on people's ability to mobilize, both because it is "discrediting" (Goffman, 1963) to other political actors and because it limits workers' ability to speaking publicly (and therefore "out" themselves) as sex workers (Merteuil, 2015). However, the need for anonymity is not the only negative impact of stigma. As Melissa Ditmore (2010) points out, "Sex workers' self-esteem may be affected by the knowledge that some others imagine them to be tainted, untrustworthy, oversexed, duped, helpless and so on" (p. 179). Zarhin and Fox (2017) similarly argue that the stigma of sex work

> is an irreversible status, not only because society is unwilling to allow the stigmatised to reclaim the status of chaste women, but also because the lived experience of stigma transforms the stigmatised individual, changing her cognitively and affecting her choices. (p. 1089)

Despite the powerful and "irreversible" nature of this stigmatization, however, it is clear that political consciousness is developing among sex workers in places across the world in contradiction to and as a counterpoint against it (Hardy 2010; Hardy & Rivers-Moore, 2018; Mgbako, 2016). Yet it remains unclear as to precisely how this consciousness is produced or brought about, considering both the structural and psychosocial conditions in which sex workers labor, which strongly mitigate against it.

Gall (2006, 2007) has argued that sex workers cannot organize in unions because their working conditions do not conform to those that have historically shaped traditional union approaches. Indeed, Gall (2006, 2007) has argued that the greatest developments in union representation have primarily taken place amongst exotic dancers, as they labor in conditions amenable to organization, primarily in a shared workplace with a shared employer. Problematically, however, this retains industrial unionism as the litmus against which to normatively judge organizing and it does not accurately reflect the conditions in which self-employed sex workers tend to work, thus excluding such workers from analyses of worker power. Such an analysis might be considered one of the "economistic and factory proletarian biases" that Cobble (2010, p. 280) has argued still frequently characterize analyses of collective action.

In place of this narrow interpretation of union organizing, Cobble (2010) has argued instead for the development of "more intimate unions." By this, she refers both to the need to incorporate a greater number of intimate workers, that is, those workers "that entails touch . . . bodily or emotional closeness or personal familiarity" (Boris & Parrenas, 2010, p. 2) and also to encourage more intimacy within the labor movement. While Cobble (2010) carefully explores the labor of intimate workers—which would include sex workers—and the significance for this for organizing, less attention is paid to the ways in which unions can become qualitatively more intimate. She does,

however, call for a transformation in union culture that is able to create space for such workers, suggesting that

> Such a movement would be one in which intimacy is no longer feared and in which attention to the inter-personal in all realms of life, including the union movement itself, is recognized as essential for advancing freedom, human dignity, and social justice. (Cobble, 2010, p. 281)

Similarly, Rosemary Hennessy (2009) calls for analyses that pay attention to the "passionate politics" of organizing, positing that affect and emotion are not solely post-structuralist concerns, but can be considered within a materialist frame of analysis. Affective relations are, she convincingly argues, crucial to collective agency not least because "labor organizing taps emotions" (Hennessy, 2009, p. 309). Most saliently, she argues that "the hope for transforming capitalism's class relations lies in organized collective action, and yet we know relatively little about the affective dimensions of how collective consciousness is motivated or inspired" (Hennessy, 2009, p. 310).

These insights by Cobble and Hennessy are striking in relation to the absence of attention to affect within theory on labor organizing. In contrast, a significant body of research has explored the sociology of emotion in relation to social movements (see, e.g., collections by Goodwin, Jasper, & Poletta, 2001; Flam & King, 2005). Yet while these have provided important insights into the operations of social movements, rarely have these sociologies of intimacy, emotion, and affect engaged with those of labor organizing. As such, this article takes up Cobble's and Hennessy's challenge by examining the relationship between the affective, or cultural, and material dimensions of AMMAR's collective, worker-based consciousness as a basis for a wider transformation for capitalism's social relations.

Methodology

The study is based on a participatory project developed with and involving activists from AMMAR. The methods, which were selected and agreed to with the activists included 78 in-depth one-on-one interviews (with sex workers, activists from AMMAR and other social movements, trade unionists from the CTA [Central de Trabajadores Argentinos], and affiliated unions and politicians), group interviews (30 participants), questionnaires, and participant observations. Questionnaire data were collected from all the 10 provincial towns in which AMMAR has a branch, and qualitative data were collected in Buenos Aires, La Plata, Paraná, and Córdoba. Despite the methodological and practical difficulties in sampling and recruiting hidden and hard-to-access populations, 297 questionnaire surveys were undertaken in 10 cities across Argentina with sex workers who were and were not involved with the union. The surveys, which were largely undertaken in outdoor working areas and occasionally indoors or in union spaces, were undertaken by sex workers from AMMAR who had been trained to collect the data; all women were paid for their work. All questionnaire data were coded and entered into SPSS and analyzed using frequencies and cross-tabulations.

In total, individual and group interviews were conducted with AMMAR leaders (11), union sex workers (27), and nonunion sex workers (34), meaning that the data captured differences in experiences between women who participated in union activities and those who did not and was able to represent a wider variety of women working in the sex industry. These were undertaken in union offices and other spaces convenient to working areas (e.g., in a local hairdressers') and usually lasted between half an hour and an hour. All women were compensated with *viaticos* (expenses) for their time, approximately equivalent to the price paid by one client, to recognize the loss of income as a result of their participation. The in-depth interview data were transcribed in Spanish and collated and coded using NVivo, along with other further secondary material, including press releases, documents from the website, AMMAR bulletins, and fieldwork notes. Quotations were translated into English and double checked with bilingual colleagues. Follow-up interviews were undertaken with activists in 2014 as part of the wider project, but the analysis here is drawn from the questionnaire data and one-on-one and group interviews undertaken with sex workers in 2008.

The project itself was undertaken between 2007 and 2010, with core data collection taking place in 2008. Participant observation with the organizations in the four main cities involved attending public events, going each day to the union offices, undertaking *recorridas*, and spending time with women socially, while they were working, at parties and at their houses. The federal nature of Argentina means that different legal frameworks shape sex working practices in each province, meant that access to working areas was uneven, depending on whether the activities were criminalized, which generally made the areas more unsafe, and activists would limit presence in these areas.

Producing Solidarity: From Hostility to Sociality

As informal self-employed workers, women working in street sex work were highly individualized, did not have a shared workplace, and were intensely competitive with one another. The isolated and dispersed nature of spaces of sex work meant that there was no "cohesive place-based community" or bounded spatial concentration of subjects often deemed necessary for organizing workers (Cumbers, 2005, p. 126; Marx, 1990; Zatz, 1997). The diffuse and unbounded spaces of sex work meant that activists in AMMAR could not stand at the "factory gate" to try and organize workers.

The absence of a traditional workplace presented challenges and necessitated novel engagement strategies for contacting and mobilizing women to encourage participation in the organization. The answer to this challenge, developed by AMMAR, was the *recorrida*' (literally—"walk around," most akin to "outreach")

During *recorridas*, AMMAR activists visited working areas three to four times a week. They circled around working areas on foot until they encountered women who were working. They would chat for 5 or 10 minutes, asking after their children and their partners and sharing gossip. Eventually, the activists offered condoms, lubricant, and the latest leaflet or information about legal issues and campaigns. Activists invited women to workshops, parties, and other events; offered them health services including

HIV testing; and made them aware of the availability of hospital appointments. They spoke to them about their rights as workers, women, and citizens and gave them leaflets designed to increase women's predisposition to collective political action within the union. Various different leaflets explained the function of a union ("to claim rights as citizens and improve our standing of living"), why it was important to organize as a union ("so that, by recognizing us as workers, the law protects us and to start to get better conditions in life"), and linked it to a broader political space ("to contribute to building a space for struggle to create a more just and democratic country"). After a while, if it was too cold, or there are few women around, they would stop in a small *pizzeria* that stayed open most of the night. If there were workers whom they knew may not have eaten, they treated them to a piece of pizza and a cup of strong black coffee, often paid for with their own money.

Activists would ask women to come to AMMAR offices in order to sign up for a 5 peso ($1) AMMAR *carnet* (membership card). It acted as a useful defense against police threatening women with arrest. Women without the *carnet* could still receive solidarity and services from AMMAR, participate in workshops, and still often depended on AMMAR to be released from the *comisaría*. Rather than establishing a large membership base, the *carnet* was a resource for generating a sense of belonging and solidarity through conversation and the materiality of the piece of cardboard in and of itself.

Aside from information about sexual health and the law, *recorridas* enabled activists to distribute leaflets that taught the women self-worth, stating that as people, women, and workers "we deserve respect" and telling workers that "learning to love ourselves is learning to take care of ourselves." Others emphasized the collectivity of their experiences, showing that they "walk the same streets [and] share the same dreams." AMMAR also undertook workshops in working areas, using a series of materials designed for communications with people with low levels of literacy or confidence. A game of snakes and ladders allowed players to go forward three places for using protection with their romantic partners but backward four places for becoming pregnant while having a sexually transmitted infection.

"Affect refers equally to the mind and the body" (Hardt, 2007, p. ix) and touch can be considered a core component of generating intimacy within unions (Cobble, 2010). Cheek to cheek contact through the mandatory Argentinean salutary kiss, the brushing of hands as materials were exchanged, and empathetic attention from activists therefore set new affects in motion among women who were working. Edita, a nonunion member in Buenos Aires recounted a scene in which concern expressed by an AMMAR activist had stuck in her memory:

> One day I was here at my *parada*, . . . and that lady came, I think she's called Claudia . . . and she said to me "your husband is hitting you again" . . . but I said it's nothing like that. I hurt myself . . . and she gave me a little piece of paper where it said that I could call her about anything, that they would be there twenty-four hours for me. And I really liked that, it wasn't a big help, because honestly, it wasn't my husband, but it could have helped me.

Edita's attachment the organization emerged not so much the result of direct material benefits—in this case, leaving a violent partner—but instead the care embodied in Claudia's concern in and of itself. Such attachment was widely felt among the women, and the degree of awareness and engagement in AMMAR attests to the success of the *recorrida* as an organizing method. More than 80% of questionnaire respondents stated that they knew of the organization, and more than half (57%) ($n = 151$) of the workers in the questionnaire sample had come into contact with AMMAR through *recorridas*. More tellingly, of those that answered the question, 83.4% ($n = 141$) stated that they felt part of AMMAR. Even among those who stated that they tended not to participate in the union, 76.1% ($n = 83$) said that they felt part of AMMAR.

Beside the street, union spaces—AMMAR or CTA offices and health centers—were also principal spaces of interaction for the women, and they offered new arenas for engagement. As well as the material benefits of the union, more prosaically, the offices also offered a space of respite from the intensity of work and home, a place to drink coffee and share information. The dispersed spatialities of sex work meant that the bounded, safe, and shared physical space of the union had particular resonance unlike that for workers in an office or factory who share a defined workplace. Osana described the advantages of going to AMMAR offices and participating in events as "you meet all the girls that you never see, because the police always disperse us [so we never see each other]."

As well as spaces of care and solidarity, the intensity of the police repression faced by sex workers, the psychological effects of stigma, and the volatile nature of the industry meant that the street and the union were frequently highly emotional places. As Hennessy (2009) reminds us, "loyalty, camaraderie, and friendship" and "competition, jealousy, and betrayal . . . act on and meddle with the processes whereby the collective bonds are formed that enable people to take action" (p., 310).

At times, relations between the women on the street were fraught. AMMAR tried to mediate, often emphasizing the need for unity in the face of external enemies (the police). Jorgelina Sosa explained to women that they could not discriminate against other women on the basis of national, ethnic, or any other identity. Since "class happens when some men [sic], as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared) feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men" (Thompson, 1963, p. 8), we can understand these interactions as a moment of class making. Whether women were active or signed up members of AMMAR was irrelevant. The status of *compañera* was bestowed on any woman working in the street, and all *compañeras* were worthy of solidarity and to occupy a place in the emergent shared class identity.

Conflict and arguments punctuated the daily life of the union. These were, however, usually quickly resolved. Mariela was 19 and had begun working in sex work recently, she had become more involved in the organization through her mother who was one of the lead activists. Although she emphasized that it had saved her from an uncertain future and drug dependency, she still had wavering feelings about participating. She would often threaten to leave or withdraw from the organization, which she found overly conflictual:

> There are always problems. . . . It makes you want to just fuck it all off, leave it all and not come back again. [But] am I going to tire so quickly? As someone says, you tire quickly at the beginning, until you get used to it . . . and once you start to see the achievements, it's like you're not going care about the arguments with the others, but only about the purpose of the organisation.

AMMAR centered celebration within the activities of the union. Even though they resisted directly engaging in welfarist handouts, they recognized the women's work, commitment, and lives through prizes and gifts. In Córdoba, they developed an AMMAR-branded makeup bag that contained not only condoms, lubricant, and leaflets but also a mirror, lipstick, and tissues. This was distributed as a gift during *recorridas*, and Eugenia commented that it was often the first time that the women had been given gifts. As such the gift itself and the connection it materialized, represented recognition of their existence and importance as women and subjects.

On August 10, 2008, the *Dia de Los Niños* (Children's Day), AMMAR threw a party in the offices, enabling them to provide their children with access to the same goods and experiences as other children. It linked the children to the material space of the organization and to narratives of sex work as dignified work, enabling them to grow up with it as a normalized feature of their lives, potentially circumventing the internalization of stigma against their mothers. Every year on 17th December, International Sex Workers' Day, branches of AMMAR throughout Argentina celebrate the struggle to end violence against sex workers alongside others across the world.

As well as these events activists threw parties in the union for May 1 (Workers' Day), March 8 (International Women's Day), and on other important occasions, such as organization anniversaries, Christmas, Easter, and New Year. On their 10th anniversary, AMMAR held a street party in Buenos Aires with balloons, horns, and rattles. Similarly, after long workshops, the union always organized a party at the end of the week with meat on the *parilla* (barbeque), wine, beer, dancing, and singing. At these events, participants were rewarded with certificates and small mementos to commemorate their effort.

Women testified that being part of AMMAR had led to profound personal transformations. On a number of occasions, activists became tearful and emotional when talking about the changes the organization had made to their lives. Describing the change that she had been through, Claudia spoke of a sense of awakening: "It's like AMMAR wakes you up." This sense of renewal, rebirth, and life was reflected in the narratives of other women. Silvia said,

> You get called a whore . . . but here you come to AMMAR and here you're not a prostitute, here you are a family because you drink tea, they say to you "hey chick, your hair looks great!" . . . They encourage you. They say "you're pretty." . . . They say to you "that's great, you're going to get better." It makes me much happier, they embrace you, this warmth, this compañerismo, that maybe you don't get at home. I have family and I don't have it. They give you everything.
>
> AMMAR is the nicest thing there is.

What Claudia had identified as an awakening, Silvia referred to as "an energy to live." These changes not only occurred within themselves but also translated into shifting relations between self and body. Reynaga, for example, said that whereas she had treated sexual issues with shame, she now lived with them freely. Ana gave up drugs as her commitment to the other women in the organization overrode her desire or need to take them, and others had left violent partners. Adriana suggested that her understanding of her own body shifted from stigmatized, wounded, and hurt to nurturing and sustaining, recognizing that her "body . . . gave food to my son when he was in my belly, my body keeps giving food to my children" through sex work.

Relations between women in the street came to be characterized by more comradeship, interaction, and recognition. Ana meanwhile referred to the transformation of her relations with others from those of conflict to cooperation:

> When I started . . . I wasn't the same as I am now. I was a totally authoritarian Ana, a screaming Ana and lots of the girls didn't get on well with me because of what I was like. But this [AMMAR] brings you to a process, one comes from a place that . . . where . . . how can I put it. You have to defend yourself against the whole world.

The provision of social space, the centrality of fun, and personal feelings of self-worth are often dismissed by other, more "political," features in accounts of union organizing. However, for AMMAR, these were of considerable importance to building and maintaining new affective relations that were fundamental to collective organizing, since they produced political subjects with the capacity for struggle. Eva Amorín, an administrative assistant for AMMAR, reflected on the manner of the affective and emotional style of the women:

> They're different to other activists from other organisations. . . . The *compañeras* are super-genuine about emotional stuff . . . [it comes] from a place with much more emotion . . . to understand activism as an understanding of the lives that has touched them and how they can do something different . . . in general, it's much easier to become machines that struggle.

Amorín went on to state that it was not only sex workers who benefited from the "very different human relations" in the organization. Other civil society members and members of the CTA also attested to the gains in their relations that they had made through contact with AMMAR. Laughter and humor were both a source of and a step toward liberation (Irigaray, 2008) in producing a new space of interaction and emotional tone. It marked sex workers' interactions and exchanges as often playful and light, rather than always and necessarily being outweighed by their oppression, the violence and marginalization they face, and the intensity of the challenges they faced in reproducing themselves and their families.

Worker Identity and Collective Consciousness

Affects and socializing were, for AMMAR, interwoven with attempts to meet their (often unmet) human needs, which are the "baseline of history" (Hennessy, 2009, p. 310). While affects are the "cultural" dimension of capitalism's valorization process, we argue that while this may be true, they are also key to the resistance of workers. The cultural dimensions of class relations have been recognized recently by materialist scholars (Hennessy, 2009), Marxist scholars of the 20th century (Thompson, 1963), and Marx himself. Marx insisted that workers must collectively transform themselves—their attitudes, habits, and abilities—in the social sphere if any political change is to be thoroughgoing and long lasting:

> When communist artisans form associations, teaching and propaganda are their first aims . . . [but then] smoking, eating and drinking are no longer simply means of bringing people together. Society, association, entertainment which also has society as its aim, is sufficient for them; the brotherhood of man is no empty phrase but a reality. (Marx cited in McLellan, 1973, p. 87)

Affective cultural relations mediated and shaped—and were reshaped by—attempts by AMMAR to meet their historically specific needs. Historical materialism teaches that needs are the "seedbed" (Hennessy, 2009, p. 310) for organizing and refer to the socially situated basics required for survival and sustenance, including food, housing, health care, and education for individuals and their families (see Hardy, 2016).

A seminal strategy for shifting the stigma and isolation women experienced was therefore the development and adoption of a new collective identity that refuted the label of "prostitution." In other places and organizations, the prostitutes' right movement has mobilized the emotive identities of mothers and daughters to elicit sympathy for women in the sex industry (Jaget, 1980). Despite the relationship between sex work and the socially reproductive responsibilities of motherhood (Hardy, 2016) and the history of maternalist political discourses in Argentina, AMMAR have tended not to mobilize gendered roles as mothers as a strategy of legitimation. AMMAR have instead actively resisted relying on traditional gender roles for their political identity. Reynaga argued that it was important to develop the idea of work instead:

> All workers work because they have to feed themselves and their kids. So [it's important] to be able to get rid of this discourse from the compañeras of "I do it for my kids." . . . The miner works because he has to feed his family, obviously . . . so, the sex worker [too].

Reynaga's attempt to break the analytical link between motherhood and sex work was a discursive strategy for grounding sex work as work in line with other income-generating strategies of the working class, as a basis for developing consciousness *as workers*. One of the most striking findings in the survey was the degree to which respondents did in fact identify as workers. A large majority (84.9%, $n = 225$) of the respondents stated that they identified as "sex workers," while only 12.5% ($n = 33$) said that they identified as "women in the situation of prostitution." This is an

extraordinary degree of identification and demonstrates both the effectiveness of AMMAR's work and its resonance with women.

Through cooperation and humor, and the rejection of individualism and competition, AMMAR has had success in challenging stigma (including its internalization by sex workers themselves), promoting the legitimacy of sex work as a form of work, and identifying sex workers as workers. As various participants explained,

> It's important to work for empowerment and to take all the guilt away that they put in our heads: that you are bad, sinful, dirty, drug-addicted, all those disqualifying words. That's why it's important to work with the compañeras, to pick them up and tell them that it's dignified, as dignified as a gynaecologist, as a sociologist. (Elena Reynaga)

> AMMAR is important because it teaches us to look after ourselves and to be better every day, to value ourselves more as people and not to let them treat us as prostitutes, because we are sex workers. (Participant, Rosario, questionnaire data)

> Now, the rest of society respects us and values us as. . . . Never again as *putas de la calle* [street whores]. (Participant, Rio Negro, questionnaire data)

Authors elsewhere have noted rejection of and ambivalence toward sex worker identities (O'Connell-Davidson, 1998; Pope, 2005). For the women of AMMAR, the adoption of self-identification as workers had an important role in raising self-esteem and self-respect and for contributing to the change in their affective and emotional lives. Adopting a standpoint from the working class led not only to a categorical shift in women's identifications and understandings of their income generating activities, but also to a change in their affective registers and emotions. Aside from the important material gains that AMMAR has provided, such as education and health care (Hardy, 2016), the most important thing to many of the women were these more intangible feelings. These should be understood both as a good in and of itself and as a political act, in that it led to resubjectification, producing subjects with the capacity to transform their social relations.

Through this "affective organizing," AMMAR reflected and acted on the intersecting social forces constraining them as sex workers, including stigma, gender, and capitalism. For Weeks (2004), feminist activists develop feminist standpoints by locating the connections between our "everyday lives and practice and the larger framework of social structures within which they are organized" (pp. 183-184). AMMAR activists have developed a historically situated sex worker standpoint based in their identity as part of the working class. Many women reported improved conditions on the streets, making them feel safer and more unified. Silvia noted the change:

> Since AMMAR has been here, there's more *compañerismo* in that if something happens to you in the *parada* where you're working . . . before it was your problem, now they look after each other. They say to you "are you ok?

> Let's go and get a coffee" . . . There's a different connection since AMMAR's been here.

Affect creates changes that circulate "through our bodies, our subjectivities, yet irreducible to the individual, the personal of the psychological" (Clough, 2007, p. 3) and should be understood as implicated as a component of transformative change across multiple scales, including that of the "class relations of capitalism" (Hennessy, 2009). At the same time, much like the rejection of affect and culture in labor organizing literature, the claim that street-based sex workers are part of the working class would be, until relatively recently met with suspicion or rejection by many Marxist and labor organizing scholars (and still would be by some). Increasingly, Marxist and Marxist Feminist scholars have in common with AMMAR the recognition that the success of anticapitalist politics today relies on more than the collective experience of exploitation and collective action at the point of production (Denning, 2010; Fraser, 2014; Harvey, 2016; Palmer, 2014). It requires unity of the dispossessed, rather than the centring of specific relationships to the means of production, because dispossession from the means of life and subsistence "has always been the fundamental feature of class formation" (Palmer, 2014, pp. 44-45).

Conclusion

In analyzing the concrete conditions in which sex workers have organized—paying attention to relationality and the microscale of organizing—we know a little more "about the affective dimensions of how collective consciousness is motivated or inspired" (Hennessy, 2009, p. 310). What Hennessy (2009) describes as the "glues or solvents" (p. 311) of labor organizing are, for AMMAR, identities as workers, and feelings of belonging and dignity, achieved through socializing, debate and discussion, or gossiping and games and touch. If we understand intimacy as "a specific sort of knowing, loving and caring for a person" (Jamieson, 1989, p. 1 cited in Valentine, 2008, p. 2106), AMMAR have produced an "intimate union" through *recorridas* and "affective organizing." This has constituted the basis for the production and development of new subjectivities and political identities to generate collectivity among individualized sex workers.

Informal, self-employed sex workers in Argentina possessed no preexisting shared conceptions of themselves as occupying a shared social location, or even of their labor as work. Moreover, street sex work was characterized by hostile and antagonistic relations, which inherently undermined the capacity to recognize shared interests and social locations. In the absence of a "factory gate," AMMAR's *recorridas* engaged in practices of placemaking, transforming spaces of sex work characterized by hostility and competition into landscapes of cooperation and solidarity (albeit not in their totality). Through incessant relational work, building relationships with women on the street during the *recorridas*, activists transformed the social relations embedded in the street through the production, enactment, circulation, and accumulation of new feelings, affects, and emotions, increasing sex workers' self-esteem and self-confidence in the process. This was due in part to the production of class consciousness and a collective identity based on a shared standpoint as part of the working class. Whereas other studies have indicated working class women's dissimulation away from working-class

identities, activists in AMMAR have consciously mobilized them to produce new forms of sex worker subjectivities, particularly as political agents and actors. Far from experiencing class through exclusion (Skeggs, 1997), working-class identities have been a vehicle for inclusion and subjective well-being for informal, self-employed sex workers in Argentina.

Affect and emotion are intrinsically fluid, embodied, and relational, and they move and proliferate across spatial scales transforming subjectivities, identities, and experiences as a basis for labor organizing. In embedding affect and emotion in our conceptualizations of workers' collective and individual agency, it becomes evident that affect is not simply an individualized attribute available for exploitation, but it is key to transforming the individual and collective well-being of workers. Emotions and affect are then produced, reproduced, transformed, lived, and experienced at multiple scales of workers' lives through collective action.

By reframing positive affects from a capital-centric perspective, which conceptualizes them largely as a tool of exploitation, resource for accumulation, and source of alienation, to one which centers workers' agency, it is clear that positive affects can also be used as a counterpoint for worker resistance. The practices of AMMAR in one of the most stigmatized sectors of the labor market, as such, hold invaluable lessons for locating relationality and care at the center, rather than in the margins, of labor movements as a basis for the wider transformation of social relations in capitalism.

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Notes

1. We recognize that distinctions between "formal" and "informal" work are unclear and increasingly contested; however, we use the concept of informal work to indicate the lack of recognition and protection that these workers experience from the state.
2. The federal nature of the Argentinean state means that sex work is regulated at the provincial level, meaning that it is decriminalized in some provinces, including Santa Fe, and intensely policed and criminalized in other provinces.

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Author Biographies

Kate Hardy is an associate professor in Work and Employment Relations at the University of Leeds. Her work has been widely published academically and disseminated through radio and news media. Kate is committed to developing methodologies which work alongside research participants, in order to undertake socially and politically transformative research.

Katie Cruz is a lecturer in Law at the University of Bristol. As a socio-legal scholar with a commitment to feminist and Marxist approaches, Katie's research combines empirical, doctrinal and theoretical critique of the demands for labour, migrant and civil rights being made by sex worker rights activists and explores avenues for improving working conditions for sex workers. More broadly, Katie has an interest in current debates in feminist legal and political theory and is widely published in socio-legal journals.