

## Research Article

**Effects of sex premises on neighbourhoods:  
Residents, local planning and the geographies of  
a controversial land use**

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**Abstract:** The paper examines 284 resident submissions to sex premises planning processes, and a survey of 401 residents living near sex premises in New South Wales, Australia, to investigate resident concerns about the effect of sex premises on local environs, and how these concerns inform resident views on the spatial ordering of sex premises. The investigation found that there was a discrepancy between the views of the broader residential population and the views of participants in planning processes. The investigation suggests that geographers need to consider more deeply the connections between residents, planning and the geographies of this controversial land use.

**Key words:** effect, land-use planning, New South Wales, residence, sex premises, spatial ordering.

**Introduction**

In recent decades research into the geographies of sexuality has been important in highlighting how mechanisms, such as policing, licensing and planning, have long been used within diverse international jurisdictions to regulate the location, visibility and discreteness of businesses that profit from sex, including brothels and massage parlours that sell sexual services, adult bookshops and other sex premises (Prior 2008; Hubbard 2009; Mathieu 2011). Processes of economic and social mainstreaming have brought sex commerce out of the shadows and into the formal economy (Brents & Sanders 2010), with sex businesses, such as sex shops and adult retailers, taking more prominent positions within a range of international jurisdictions (Coulmont & Hubbard 2010), while in some jurisdictions, such as New South Wales (NSW), Australia, even brothels and erotic massage parlours are now regulated as legiti-

mate land uses (Crofts & Prior 2011). While attitude surveys indicate that the public is becoming more liberal in its opinion of commercial sex (Tibbetts & Blankenship 1999), when confronted with sex premises in their own city, many residents and business owners display a strong 'Not in My Back Yard' (NIMBY) attitude (Boffa *et al.* 1994; Mathieu 2011). Opposition to sex premises proceeds from the assumption that they encourage a broad range of negative effects such as immorality, nuisance, antisocial behaviour and criminality (Edwards 2011). Such opposition is often particularly pronounced when sex premises are proposed in areas with little prior experience of the sex industries (Hubbard 2009). As a result of these objections, sex premises are often socially and spatially marginalised (Papayanis 2000; Prior 2008; Coulmont & Hubbard 2010), typically located away from residential neighbourhoods and in 'red light districts' or industrial areas.

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As a result of the mainstreaming of sex business within some jurisdictions, the regulation of sex premises has shifted from policing to land-use planning (Prior 2008); in NSW, this occurred in 1995. As a consequence, NSW local governments and their communities now have a great deal of discretion in how they apply planning to sex premises development (Crofts & Prior 2011), provided that they do not prohibit sex premises from operating in their local areas. Sex premises refused by council can appeal to the NSW Land and Environment Court (LEC). While this approach appears more liberal than that evident in jurisdictions where sex work is criminalised (Weitzer 2012), there is a fundamental ambivalence inscribed in the NSW legislative framework (Crofts & Prior 2011). On the one hand, legislation has been constructed around the idea that sex services premises should be treated as equivalent to other non-residential premises, with planners setting requirements as to provision of parking, opening hours and size of the business, which are not coloured by moral judgments about those who buy or sell sex. On the other hand, the regulatory regime also sustains the perception of sex premises as inherently disorderly by insisting they are incompatible with 'sensitive' land uses such as schools and religious establishments.

Research into the role of land-use planning in controlling the location and visibility of sex premises has emerged as an important theme within the geographies of sexuality (Kerkin 2004; Prior 2008). This research has sought to elucidate 'geograph[ies] of [sex premises] planning practice' (Forester 1983). Sex premises land-use planning is a complex terrain (which includes planning legislation, planning instruments, development processes and judicial hearings), which we explore by examining the roles of various participants (Lyons *et al.* 1993; Papayanis 2000; Paul *et al.* 2001; Sanchez 2004) and the arguments and evidence used to plan sex premises (Prior 2008; Prior & Crofts 2011). Most research to date has focused directly on the contents of planning processes (Kerkin 2004; Prior 2008). With few exceptions (Paul *et al.* 2001; Prior 2008) most scholarship highlights the ways in which sex premises land-use planning is dominated by arguments asserting that premises disrupt local communities by

contributing to: blight and urban deterioration (e.g. decline in property values); deleterious effects on environmental and personal health (e.g. noise); antisocial behaviour and crime (e.g. drug dealing, public urination); and the erosion of community standards (Papayanis 2000; Prior & Crofts 2011).

While this research highlights the dominance of presumed negative impacts in planning processes, there remains a dearth of evidence about the nature and extent of local impacts within jurisdictions such as NSW (Harcourt 1999), and a reliance on a small number of US studies. Some of these US studies highlight the adverse effects of commercial sex industry premises (New York Department of City Planning 1994; Linz *et al.* 2004; Enriquez *et al.* 2006), but are limited in terms of validity and reliability (Linz *et al.* 2004; Hanna 2005). Others report no significant association between crime and the presence of adult businesses, with sex premises attracting less criminality than equivalent licensed premises (e.g. clubs or bars) because security is generally better and clients are older (Linz *et al.* 2004; Hanna 2005; Enriquez *et al.* 2006). Broader community research is essential so that 'community and council debate in respect to [sex premises] and the sex industry generally' can be based on factual knowledge of the broader communities views and not on 'community responses generated by sensational and selective reporting, relying heavily on anecdotal and emotionally charged "evidence"' (Harcourt 1999, p. 34).

Our paper contributes to, and goes beyond, existing research. Our paper draws on original primary research in which we surveyed residents living near sex premises regarding their perceived effects and compares this with the perceptions of those residents who participated in planning processes. NSW planning legislation (Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, s. 79) specifically enshrines the right of members of the public to be consulted and make submissions in respect of land-use decisions about sex premises. Consent authorities (e.g. local governments and the LEC) are required to give genuine consideration to the matters raised in those public submissions. This research has temporal and spatial aspects that contribute to geographies of planning. Participants in planning processes tend to articulate

*predicted* and *assumed* impacts in relation to proposed sex premises, while our survey participants detailed their *experience* of living near sex premises. Our research suggests that formal planning processes tend to attract participation by those who are negative towards a proposed land use. In contrast, our survey showed that the majority of people living near a sex premises are either unaware of its existence, or regard the business as having neutral impacts.

We also explore how spatial assumptions contribute to residential expectations and experiences of sex premises. Expectations tend to be expressed as 'common sense', and in the absence of research, contribute to and are in turn reinforced by planning principles. Planning principles are used to remove sex premises from public awareness by containing, enclosing, concealing and isolating them, and by reducing their visibility (Hubbard *et al.* 2008; Prior & Crofts 2011). Planning principles not only express assumptions but also constitute knowledge and visibility about and for sex premises. Our survey highlights different 'common sense' notions and experiences of the city and sex premises.

## Research methodology

We employed an analysis of two sources of data – resident submissions to sex premises planning processes and a survey of residents who reside near an operating sex premises. Both sets of data relate to residents in the same local areas in NSW. The survey focused upon sex premises where sexual services were sold (i.e. legal brothels, sex-on-premise venues and swinger's clubs), while resident submissions additionally included adult entertainment premises where no sex services were provided (i.e. 'gentleman's clubs' and sex shops).

### *Resident submissions to sex premises planning processes*

The first data source was 284 resident submissions to 47 planning processes for sex premises in two local government areas (LGAs) in NSW – City of Sydney Council (COS) and Parramatta City Council (PCC). COS includes Kings Cross, a historic 'red light area' with a high concentration of sex premises and street-based sex workers; PCC is located 24 kilometres west of COS. Submissions were collected between

July 2009 and November 2010. These resident submissions were primarily predictive, that is, 37 of the 47 submissions were in response to *proposed* rather than *existing* development applications for sex premises.

The analysis of the submissions utilised a stepped qualitative data analysis: first, describing phenomena; second, classifying phenomena; and third, assessing how the phenomena interconnect. Resident submissions were classified according to three themes: overall (potential) effect of sex premises (an objection constituted a negative overall effect and a letter of support constituted a positive overall effect); types of (potential) effects (effect types such as noise were identified and attributed a positive or negative value based on the resident's explanation); and methods for spatially ordering sex premises that were expressed (e.g. resident suggestions concerning the proximity of sex premises to other land uses). It was only possible to collect limited demographic data on the residents that lodged submissions (Table 1). NVIVO software (QSR International) was used for coding themes from residents' submissions.

### *Survey of residents residing near operating sex premises*

The second data source was a random survey of 401 residents who resided within 400 meters of one or more operating sex premises in either COS or PCC. Thus in contrast to the resident submissions, our survey was based on experiences rather than predictions of the impact of sex premises. These sex premises had been subject to the planning processes that were identified in the first data source. Residents that participated in the fixed line telephone survey were randomly contacted using a list of telephone numbers attached to residents in COS and PCC collected from a commercially available database of 1.905 million household numbers for NSW. Because this database is sortable by postcode, suburb and street, it was possible to identify telephone numbers of residents who lived within a 400-metre radius of operating sex premises. Telephone numbers were excluded from consideration if they were attached to residents who lived on the other side of a main road or railway line from sex premises. Potential respondents were screened

**Table 1** Demographic characteristics of residents who lodged submissions and residents who took part in the survey

Characteristics	Resident submissions ( <i>n</i> = 284)	Resident survey	
		Total residents surveyed ( <i>N</i> = 401)	Proportion aware of premises ( <i>n</i> = 228)
	<i>n</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>n</i> (% of <i>N</i> )
Location:			
COS	183	241	179 (74.3)
PCC	101	160	49 (30.6)
Gender:			
Male	—	186	113 (60.8)
Female	—	215	115 (53.5)
Age:†			
18–35	—	84	32 (38.1)
36–50	—	125	72 (57.6)
51–65	—	115	74 (64.3)
>66	—	75	50 (66.5)

Notes: †2 out of 401 did not provide details of age. COS, City of Sydney Council; PCC, Parramatta City Council. Based on authors' data.

to ensure they were aged 18 or over and lived within the relevant LGA. The survey was conducted using Plenari CATI software (Potentiate Group) in October–November 2010.

Several questions in the survey were designed to collect data on the same themes that structured the analysis of the resident submissions. Residents were asked to indicate if they were aware of a sex business operating in their local area. Aware residents (56.9%, or 228 out of 401) were asked to provide information about sex premises in terms of the overall effect, the types of effects and the principles upon which they thought decisions about the location of sex premises should be based. Residents were also asked to value the overall effect and types of effects, using a scale range of –3 (extremely negative) to +3 (extremely positive), where nil (0) was understood to mean a neutral effect. To allow comparison with the first data set, all negative responses were assigned the same negative effect value (i.e. scores of –1, –2 and –3 were all assigned the same negative value), all positive responses were assigned the same positive effect value, and all nil (0) responses were assigned a neutral value. The full range of effect values were only used when calculating mean scores for the cohort. The survey also collected demographic data on the participants (Table 1). The analysis

of the survey data used the same thematic coding developed for the analysis of the resident submissions. Both SPSS (SPSS Inc.) and NVIVO software were used for analysis of the resident survey. Descriptive statistics, and checking for significance where appropriate with non-parametric tests, were used to interpret the quantitative results of the survey.

The analysis and data collection was conducted in accordance with the ethics approval provided by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee.

### Sample

Those who submitted planning submissions and participated in the survey exhibited the demographic characteristics in Table 1.

One limitation to this study was that we could not analyse the suggestion that opposition to sex premises development often coalesces with objections of religious groups and anti-pornography campaigners who regard commercial sex as a form of *moral* pollution (Hanna 2005). Furthermore while this study examines resident experiences of sex premises it does not explore how residents experience different types of sex premises, nor does it examine the effect of demographic factors such as gender or living in a household with chil-

dren. These are important future directions for research that deserve attention (Edwards 2011).

## Discussion of research findings

The findings from the analysis of the resident submissions and the survey are presented and compared in three sections. We discuss firstly resident concerns about the overall effects of sex premises on local areas, secondly the types of effects that residents associate with sex premises and finally the ways in which residents seek to influence the location and design of sex premises in their neighbourhoods. Direct quotations from the survey and resident submissions are shown in quotation marks without in-text referencing.

### Overall effect

The analysis of resident submissions found that the vast majority (279 out of 284, 98.2%) believed that the proposed sex premises would have an overall negative effect on the surrounding neighbourhood, and only a tiny proportion (5 out of 284, 1.8%) asserted that sex premises would have an overall positive effect on the surrounding neighbourhood. In contrast, our survey produced a broader range of perspectives on the overall experience of the effects of sex premises. Among those who were aware of sex premises in their neighbourhood, almost half (48.2%, or 108 out of 224) believed that sex premises had no overall impact on their surrounding environs. Of the remaining residents, nearly as many residents rated the overall impact positively (24.1%, or 54 out of 224) as rated it negatively (27.7%, 62 out of 224). Thus, 72.3% of the total survey experienced *no negative effects* as a consequence of the nearby sex premises.

The disparity between the diversity of views expressed in the survey and the predominantly negative views expressed in the submissions can be explained in different ways. First, it suggests that planning processes tend to attract those members of the public who wish to object, and that those with neutral or positive views about the effects of sex premises on local environs are less likely to make submissions.

Second, the disparity suggests that there is a great difference between predicted or imagined

fears of proposed sex premises and the lived reality. This was underlined by the survey revealing an association between the length of time that residents were aware of a sex business operating in their local area and the perceived overall negative or positive assessment of its effect. Surveyed residents who had known about local sex premises for more than three years on average tended to perceive their effect in neutral terms (mean 0.05), whereas in general, respondents with three years or less knowledge had a negative perception of impact (mean -0.65) ( $P = 0.018$ , statistically significant at 95% level). This suggests that residents become more accepting of a nearby sex premises the longer they are familiar with its presence. This is in accordance with disgust and disorder theories which suggest increased levels of acceptance of objects of disgust through increased familiarity and prolonged contact (Miller 1997, p. 15). The longer we are in contact with an object of disgust, the more our fears can weaken by extinction or adaptation (Rozin *et al.* 2004). Through the process of familiarisation we are able to remove the ideational factors that often drive our fears and assumptions. Systems of order on an individual and/or social level can be changed, so that through familiarity, experience and/or change of law, businesses such as sex premises, which have historically been constructed as disorderly (Crofts 2007), can be recognised and regarded as lawful and orderly.

This change due to increased familiarity was apparent in the commentary in both the surveyed residents and the resident submissions. As one survey respondent noted:

I strongly protested against the brothel before it opened but now I have no problem with the brothel as no problems have eventuated and I admitted that I was wrong with my concerns.

Similarly, one resident submission stated:

[I live] . . . directly opposite the . . . premises. . . . When they originally lodged their DA a couple of years ago, I was very hesitant and actually wanted to oppose their application. I was very doubtful they would honour their agreement once their DA was

approved. . . . Well, shock and horror, they kept their word. In fact, I have been rather surprised at how diligently they have run this business with the locals in mind. . . . They have also shown genuine interest in the community and are prepared to help in whatever way possible.

Our analysis thus highlighted a disjunction between the imagined fears of sex premises as inherently disorderly expressed in resident submissions, compared with the lived experience of brothels as orderly businesses among those surveyed. Those who saw the overall effect as being neutral often noted their 'indifference' towards sex premises as a result of their familiarity with them. Survey respondents reported that 'they're around and a fact of life', they had 'no impact on [them] or [their] neighbourhood whatsoever' and 'It's been there as long as we've [been here], thirty years, there's never been any problems or caused any trouble'.

#### *Types of effects*

Table 2 presents the most common types of potential effects that were identified during the analysis of resident submissions, and details the number of times these same types of effects were identified by residents in our survey. A review of Table 2 shows that all types of effects, except noise, were assigned positive, negative and neutral values, revealing the diverse ways in which residents believe sex premises affect surrounding neighbourhoods. This is clear evidence that the effects of sex premises cannot be assumed to be generally negative. Moreover, the table shows that the majority of resident submissions and survey respondents attributed a neutral value to all types of effects.

Table 2 also shows that positive and negative values are not equally distributed across the two data sources. There is an almost complete absence of the attribution of positive values in the resident submissions, while in the resident survey there is a greater attribution of positive values. This reiterates our argument that local government planning processes attract those members of the public who wish to identify negative effects, and do not attract those who identify positive impacts. This inference is further supported by the fact that the survey respondents who also engaged in planning pro-

cesses for sex premises (6.7%, or 16 out of 224), did not include any residents who attributed positive values to effect types (Table 2).

The positive and negative dimensions identified for each type of effect can be further understood in the context of qualitative comments which provide insight into what the residents believed would cause the positive or negative effect. For example, the belief that sex premises could have a positive effect on their surrounding neighbourhood by (italics added) 'contribut[ing] to the *sexual health* of the community', was seen as resulting from their ability to promote safe sex practices in the community. 'Design features' and 'effective management' of sex premises were also seen as enabling a range of positive effects (italics added):

Higher levels of *lighting* [outside premises] . . . improve *safety and security* in the neighbourhood.  
CCTV coverage and security guards [outside premises] will . . . deter *crime* and . . . reduce *fear of crime* . . . and reduce *noise* in the area.

A range of residents identified 'economic benefit' as a key driver behind the positive effect of sex premises on local areas (italics added) by:

Providing local *employment* opportunities, . . . which added to the economic value of the locality.  
Improving the [state of] *the neighbourhood* through an increased diversity of local goods and services . . . attracting people and travellers to come through the area and visit cafes.

Residents also identified a range of generators for negative effects. Sex premises would have a negative effect on the local neighbourhood by 'adversely [affecting] the *sexual health* of local community' (italics added) as a consequence of the ability of premises to 'increase [the] prevalence of sexually-transmitted infections'. It was claimed that the 'type of clientele' – 'male, alcohol-fuelled' – that sex premises attracted were seen as having a (italics added): 'predisposition to be *noisy*, disorderly and engage in *anti-social behaviour* . . . pissing in

**Table 2** Type and value of effects identified in resident submissions and by surveyed residents aware of sex premises in the surrounding neighbourhood

Type of effect:	Effect value detailed in resident submissions ( <i>n</i> = 284)			Effect value noted by residents in survey who are aware of operating sex premises near their home ( <i>n</i> = 224)			Effect value noted by residents in survey who are aware and engaged in DA processes for that premise ( <i>n</i> = 16)		
	<i>n</i> (% of 284)			<i>n</i> (% of 224)			<i>n</i> (% of 224)		
	+ve	-ve	Neutral	+ve	-ve	Neutral	+ve	-ve	non
Sexual health	0	5 (1.8)	279 (98.2)	17 (7.6)	14 (6.3)	190 (84.8)	0	1 (0.4)	15 (6.7)
Antisocial behaviour	1 (0.3)	44 (15.5)	239 (84.2)	4 (1.8)	30 (13.4)	191 (85.3)	0	5 (2.2)	11 (4.9)
State of the neighbourhood	2 (0.6)	58 (20.4)	224 (78.9)	6 (2.7)	23 (10.3)	192 (85.7)	0	4 (1.8)	12 (5.4)
Safety and security	0	57 (20.1)	227 (79.9)	6 (2.7)	20 (8.9)	193 (86.2)	0	3 (1.3)	13 (5.8)
Parking and traffic	1 (0.3)	106 (37.3)	177 (62.3)	5 (2.2)	27 (12.1)	196 (87.5)	0	5 (2.2)	11 (4.9)
Crime	0	41 (14.4)	243 (85.6)	6 (2.7)	17 (7.3)	198 (88.4)	0	1 (0.4)	15 (6.7)
Fear of crime	0	44 (15.5)	240 (84.5)	3 (1.3)	18 (8.0)	201 (89.7)	0	3 (1.3)	13 (5.8)
Employment	0	7 (2.5)	277 (97.5)	13 (5.8)	9 (4.0)	201 (89.7)	0	1 (0.4)	15 (6.7)
Property values	0	40 (14.1)	244 (85.9)	5 (2.2)	18 (8.0)	202 (90.2)	0	2 (0.9)	14 (6.3)
Morality	1 (0.3)	12 (4.2)	271 (95.4)	1 (0.4)	19 (8.5)	203 (90.6)	0	4 (1.8)	12 (5.4)
Noise	0	50 (17.6)	234 (82.4)	0	28 (12.5)	204 (91.1)	0	3 (1.3)	13 (5.8)
Lighting	0	6 (2.1)	278 (97.9)	7 (3.1)	6 (2.7)	211 (94.2)	0	0	16 (7.1)

DA, Development Application. Based on authors' data.

doorways'. Sex premises are 'often associated with owners . . . that have known criminal histories or have other reasons to clash with the law' and that employees at the sex premises are linked to 'crime . . . we all know that prostitution and drugs, plus robbery, go hand in hand'. Residents asserted that sex premises would have negative effects such as *crime, threats to safety and security, fear of crime, antisocial behaviour*. Residents feared that sex premises would adversely affect the *state of the neighbourhood* by 'detrimental[ly] impact[ing] on local businesses' and the 'family-oriented nature of the local area'. They would 'devalue the quality and price of . . . apartment[s] being close to a [sex premises]' as 'investors and renters see [sex premises] as *devaluing . . . property*' (italics added). They create 'repressive *employment*' (italics added), are subject to the 'the sex trade' and lead to 'psychological . . . problems [for employees]'.

Those who asserted positive effects frequently used personal experience to substantiate their assertions. In contrast, personal experience was only rarely used by residents to substantiate negative effects, most frequently with regard to *noise, parking, lighting, and anti-social behaviour*. Most of those who asserted negative effects corroborated their assertions through such expressions as 'it is well known', 'accepted fact' and 'studies show' (although no such studies were ever cited). For example, one submission asserted (italics added):

It is an *accepted fact* that the very nature of brothels brings a seedy element into play. The majority of existing brothels, and their staff, have, or have had, involvement in drugs, violence and the use of illegal immigrants.

These results underlined again the difference between predicted and experienced impacts of sex premises.

### *Spatial ordering*

There was a diversity of opinion among residents about the ways in which sex premises should be located and designed. What one resident viewed as a desirable solution was likely to be seen as unwelcome by another. For example, in the same planning process one resident noted 'I'd live next door to one [a sex pre-

mises]' and another noted '*any* proximity is dangerous, I am strongly opposed to paid prostitution in this area'.

Almost half (131 out of 279, or 46.9%) of the resident submissions suggested what they believed was the appropriate proximity between 'sex premises' and other land uses. This varied greatly – some felt that they could live next door to a sex business without any problem, while others suggested that sex premises should be at least 100 or 200 metres away from homes, or that they should not be in the same neighbourhood or in the city at all. These gradations of proximity also took on non-numeric forms. For example, some submissions argued that sex premises are out of place in neighbourhoods because they are 'anti-family' while others saw them as part of their community.

Those who identified negative effects (Table 2) often sought to validate the 'distancing' of sex premises, not only promoting distance in terms of objective data (metres, quantity) but also by claiming there was a 'gaping distance' between the danger, criminality, immorality, disorderliness of sex premises and the quiet, moral, law-abiding, orderly, family-oriented qualities of other land uses. One resident explained (italics added):

*They [sex premises] need to be at least 400m from homes, churches, schools and shopping centres . . . The proximity of a [sex premises] would . . . bring an increase in drug use and of course robberies and muggings, all of which we law abiding citizens can very well do without. . . they shouldn't be in our suburb.*

While there was great variety in the types of land uses that residents felt had some degree of discordance with sex premises, the land uses that people associated with children, families and religion were the most commonly noted (e.g. 'family homes', 'schools', 'community facilities').

In contrast, residents who identified the positive effects of sex premises (Table 2) often made statements that endorsed the 'similarity' of sex premises to the character of their local area – 'they are like any other business in the local area', 'they are part of the diversity of the



neighbourhood' – and used terms that promoted 'nearness' and belonging. For example, one survey respondent noted:

I have found *my neighbours* [occupants of sex premises] to be most considerate and civic minded individuals.

Those who asserted spatial orderings that encouraged 'nearness' and those who encouraged 'distance' had one thing in common: both groups attached importance to preserving a perceived neighbourhood identity. This identity was constructed through spatialised boundaries which distinguished between such dualities as self and other, home and abroad, foreign and familiar, moral and immoral (Nast 1998). Spatial order naturalises distinctions, separating what is in place (expected) from what is out of place (abnormal). 'Common sense' is spatialised, and given material and embodied form (Cresswell 1996). Our research highlights the disparities of 'common sense' about space in the city.

For some the only 'acceptable' spatial ordering that preserved social structures such as 'family neighbourhood', 'family unit' and 'society at large' was the 'containment' or 'isolation' of sex premises in 'marginal landscapes' such as industrial estates or red-light districts. The restriction of sex premises to marginal locations is indicative of the heightened anxiety which the presence of such premises often provokes among many urban dwellers (Hubbard 2000). A broad cross section (121 out of 279, or 43.4%) of resident submissions expressed the wish that sex premises be prevented from being too conspicuous in the public domain. This view was held by residents who had positive views about the impact of sex premises as well as those who held negative views. The desire to minimise the visibility of sex premises in the public domain varied among the submissions. Some sought to eliminate 'obviously lewd and flashing signage and markers', while for others *any* indication that a building housed a sex business was unacceptable.

This desire to limit the public profile of sex premises can be understood as part of a broader spatial ordering of sexuality within LGAs. This division and confinement of sexual identities seeks to keep particular sexual activities, such as commercial sex, 'discrete' within sequestered

spaces (e.g. sex premises). Many residents indicated that 'very discrete' premises were felt to have little or 'no negative effects on [the] local area whatsoever', and their concern was limited to those premises that were 'not really very discrete'. Residents in COS were 'more worried about the street workers' and believed that commercial sex industry premises were 'positives' in that they provided an enclosed and regulated space for 'sex work' that was [italics added] 'in marked contrast to [the] uncontrollable nature of street activity which was *out of place*'.

### Concluding remarks

In recent decades public participation has become a central feature of land-use planning in a range of international planning jurisdictions, including NSW (Lane 2005), with the interest of communities being a principal ethical concern for planners in these jurisdictions (Planning Institute of Australia 2002). Consequently, information about residents' views collected through planning processes has become vital in decisions about where to locate sex premises. The absence of evidence of the effects of sex premises on the broader community has posed a major challenge for planners in gauging whether the loudest and most articulate voices opposing sex premises are actually representative of community opinions and/or experiences.

This investigation provided a snapshot of resident submissions, bringing into sharper focus the concerns residents expressed about the impact of sex premises and their views on how these potential impacts can be addressed through design and location. These fears were imagined and predictive but, in the absence of empirical research, were expressed in and contributed to planning processes. Our survey of those residents who lived nearby sex premises indicates disjunctions between concerns expressed through formal avenues of planning practices and those of the broader community, and predicted fears as opposed to experiences. Our survey showed that there are diverse views within the broader community concerning the effects of sex premises, and demonstrates how such views change through factors such as familiarity.

The wide range of views expressed in our survey responses contrasted with the narrow

range of views expressed in the resident submissions. This highlights some potential dangers which arise from the likelihood that urban planning processes, instruments and policies are dominated by the interests of vocal minorities, do not canvass the views of the wider range of community members, and appear not to engage more sympathetic or tolerant voices. This was suggested by the virtual absence of submissions from those who asserted positive effects, while our survey showed an almost equal presence of those who asserted positive and negative effects in the broader community. In this respect, our survey of residents living close to sex premises reveals a much lower perception of negative impacts than might be supposed from objections to councils and previous studies (Edwards 2011).

Furthermore, the investigation has paved the way for a better understanding of how residents relate to sex premises based on their perceptions about the effect of sex premises on their local area. The analysis of both the survey and the resident submissions suggests that those who sought to distance or isolate sex premises from their neighbourhood and homes were driven by assumptions about the negative effects that would result if sex premises were allowed in their neighbourhoods. Conversely, our research highlighted how those who perceive positive effects encourage proximity. While those who perceived negative and positive effects had their differences, they also shared some similar desires for the containment of sex premises by drawing firm boundaries between the public and private, the intention being to ensure that sex premises were hidden from the public gaze.

The findings in this study need to be understood in the context of Sydney's diverse sexual landscapes as well as in relation to the legal status of sex work in NSW. This may encourage more tolerant, and even positive attitudes to sex premises than in jurisdictions where sex work is prohibited or highly restricted. Indeed, legalising brothels has allowed them to be acknowledged, discussed and subjected to the application of pragmatic planning principles in NSW (Crofts & Prior 2011). The fact that few in the survey registered major dissatisfaction about living in areas with sex premises might suggest that the planning process has suc-

ceeded in identifying suitable locations for sex premises where they cause little offence. On the other hand, it might imply that planning controls are over-precautionary, with little evidence that sex premises promote nuisance.

While the results of this study should not be interpreted as suggesting that sex premises are suitable in all locations at all times, the implication is that treating them as legitimate and orderly businesses might help integrate them into the community and 'build in respect' (Sanders & Campbell 2007, p. 12) for sex work and sex workers. This study suggests a need to reconsider the 'rational' assumption that sex premises are disorderly, and hence do not belong in such areas of the city as residential neighbourhoods and be relegated to marginalised areas such as red-light districts and industrial areas. Distancing sex premises from residential neighbourhoods certainly appears unobjectionable given the potential 'risks' associated with sex premises, but it is ultimately a form of social ordering that reaffirms the connection between commercial sex and the socially marginal, rendering it potentially more disturbing and constructing it as Other (Prior & Crofts 2011). 'NIMBY' mobilisations towards sex work and sex workers are often fuelled by fears of social contagion (Mathieu 2011; Tibbetts & Blankenship 1999). Our study suggests experience and familiarity can reduce anxiety about, and negative perceptions of, sex premises. Accordingly, locating sex premises within the community may be an effective means of reducing perceptions and anxieties that continue to circulate around sex premises.

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