



A Day In The Life Of One Legal Sex Worker, In Photos (NSFW)

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PHOTO: MARIE
HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

Distillery

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Working mothers are employed in every field and industry, and in Denmark, that includes sex work.

Bonnie, a single mother of three, has been working in Denmark's legal sex trade since she was 18 years old. Four days a week, Bonnie sees clients from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., when she leaves to pick up her children from school. In her small town in Sealand, Denmark, everybody knows who she is — and what she does.

Photojournalist Marie Hald documented Bonnie, then 39, for two years, taking photos as she saw clients or spent time with her children. For Hald, it was a mission to portray the whole story of making a living in the sex industry, and not just part. “I wanted to see if I could tell a story of someone who wasn’t just portrayed as being a prostitute, but also as a woman and a mother,” Hald told Refinery29 by phone.

Hald became interested in telling the story of a sex worker after an experience that hit close to home: She was living in a trendy neighborhood in Copenhagen when she discovered that her downstairs neighbor was running a small brothel out of her apartment. “The stories I’d seen of sex workers had often been people, women, living on the streets, doing drugs,” Hald said. Her

neighbor didn't exactly fit the stereotype.

“She looked like a 60-year-old, gray-haired lady. And I became interested in the fact that this was legal in Denmark,” Hald said. She found Bonnie through the industry network, and Bonnie agreed to let her document her life.

Prostitution in Denmark was decriminalized in 1999, but it’s still a controversial subject in the country. In 2012, the Nordic nation considered [reinstating a ban on the purchase of sex](#), though lawmakers eventually voted it down. According to a 2009 U.S. Department of State [report](#), there were an estimated 5,500 legal sex workers in Denmark.

Over the years, Hald slowly moved from the role of photographer to friend. Sometimes, she would help Bonnie clean the apartment between clients, getting ready for the next visitor. “I would help vacuum between customers, and open the door,” Hald said. “It was hard, involving myself so much in her life and family.”

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PHOTO: MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

Bonnie uses the professional name "Patricia" as a way to separate herself from her work. She's been working as a prostitute since the age of 18, when she and her best girl friend, trying to raise money to travel the world, answered an ad for "massage girls." Though Bonnie was shy and uncomfortable, the money was good.

"After that, she just pretty much stayed in the industry," Hald said.

PHOTO: MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

In Denmark, prostitution is a legal profession, and sex workers are even unionized. Bonnie pays taxes and is registered as a business with the Danish government.

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PHOTO: MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

Bonnie has three children, Michella, 16, Oliver, 14, and Noa, 6. Her two older children know what she does for a living, but her youngest, Noa, thinks she works as a cleaning lady.

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PHOTO: MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

In many ways, Bonnie is just another working mom. She wakes up at 6 a.m. every morning to make her kids lunch to bring to school, and every night before bedtime she gives Noa a bath. Sometimes, she joins him in the tub.

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PHOTO: [MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE](#).

Bonnie keeps her personal and professional life separate. She meets her clients at an apartment on a quiet road outside town.

"She has a sign that says 'open,' and she sits with her phone so people can call," Hald said. Customers call or drop by intermittently. Though Hald says that the number of customers can be "quite a lot," she averages around eight a day.

PHOTO: MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

Many of Bonnie's clients are regulars, and Hald was surprised at how open they were to being photographed. "When I got permission from Bonnie [to photograph her], I thought, *This is never going to happen*," she said. But when Bonnie asked on Hald's behalf, the men were fine with being photographed as long as their faces weren't shown.

PHOTO: MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

The community is small, and people know who Bonnie is. Though she feels safe in her town, she's not always welcomed. Her children have been ostracized by other kids and parents in the town. "It's mostly [things like] parents not wanting their kids to come to her kids' birthday parties and field trips, if she's the one to arrange them," Hald explained.

In this photo, Bonnie watches her oldest son Oliver's confirmation at the local church. Beside Bonnie is her mother, Doris, her stepfather, her oldest daughter, Michella, and a friend.

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PHOTO: MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

Despite rejection by some, Bonnie has a large circle of supportive friends. Here, people dance at her son's confirmation party.

PHOTO: MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

"I felt a bit of sadness," Hald said of documenting Bonnie's work, "because it didn't feel so much like a private act. Not the way I would want to have a private act going on."

PHOTO: MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

Bonnie has mixed feelings about her work, according to Hald. "[At times], she just works, and you can't really feel [that she feels bad]," Hald said. "And then sometimes, she sits down and doesn't want to do it anymore."

But she can also be very positive about what she does. "When I asked her in interviews about how she feels about it, she says, 'it's something that I'm good at. I'm good at making people feel good, and I've never been good at anything,'" Hald said.

PHOTO: MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

Above all, Bonnie is a good hostess. "She was smiling, making them feel good about themselves," Hald said. "She's a really [pleasant] type. So it was a good atmosphere in there."

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PHOTO: MARIE HALD/MOMENT/INSTITUTE.

Bonnie's profession can be hard on her older children, Michella and Oliver. "They were okay with me being there, but sometimes they felt really bad about Bonnie, their mother," Hald said.

In this photo, Bonnie and Michella are getting new tattoos together in the living room.