

Support Ho(s)e

Sex Work Centered Guide
for Academics



Table of Contents

- 2 Introduction to the Support Ho(s)e Toolkit for the Academy
- 3 Indispensable Prerequisite Reading
- 6 Ways to Discern Good from Bad : Critical and Popular Sources
9 : Popular Cultural Portrayals
of Sex Work
- 11 Types of Courses and Directions for Inquiry
- 12 Research Areas/Questions
- 13 Ethical In-Person/Ethnographic Sex Work Research
- 14 Intersecting Study Topics and Lenses
- 18 Politics
- 19 International Context(s)
- 21 For/Towards the “Non-Traditional Classroom”
- 22 Terms and Concepts

Introduction to the Support Ho(s)e Toolkit for the Academy

The following is the third in a set of toolkits developed by the Support Ho(s)e collective. The first two, one each designed for journalists/media and health care professionals, may be of value to the presumed audience for this one: those involved in secondary and collegiate education. This toolkit is most precisely meant for instructors, lecturers, and professors at American universities and colleges, but may be useful for their students in a variety of fields as well.

About us: Support Ho(s)e is a radical support collective comprised of sex workers and their co-conspirators, active in both Chicago and New York City, as of 2020. The closed collective includes academics, radical organizers, public health professionals, and (in most cases, overlapping) current and former sex working individuals. The major frames of Support Ho(s)e activism are campaign-based organizing for currently and formerly incarcerated sex workers, public engagement around policies and laws which impact sex working people and their communities, and public education, of which this document is one element. Support Ho(s)e operates under principles of the decriminalization of sex work in all its forms, the abolition of and subsequent resource reappropriation from police and prisons, and the belief that no person is illegal and there are no perfect victims of violence or harm. These principles will be touched on throughout this document, but are not automatically prerequisite to understanding or using the materials and ideas within. But we believe they are endemic to anti-racist, anti-misogynistic, anti-transphobic, and anti-homophobic frameworks for pedagogy.

Indispensable Prerequisite Reading

This section is, sadly, fairly brief. Academic textbooks that deal with sex work tend all too often to sensationalize and focus on more lurid details, and/or “prove” preconceived theses regarding sex workers and their work. Other, popular texts range from memoir and first-person narrative to highly assumptive monographs that operate from principles that render sex workers voiceless or select voices that paint narrow and willfully incomplete pictures of the complex interlacing of topoi and concerns we will detail below. We will discuss these sorts of texts as well as how a student or instructor might discern some of the presumptions and presuppositions which can color the presentation of sex work in various contexts.

As for the most broadly useful primers on sex work—in and of itself such a broad subject matter it is difficult to imagine any text encapsulating it completely—there are a few written and published in English in the last few years:

Playing the Whore by Melissa Gira Grant has become a kind of industry standard for both introductory and more advanced courses focusing or even touching on sex work. Gira Grant is a longtime journalist and former worker who has written extensively on sex work and myriad other subject for a variety of publications. This work is not, however, journalism by any stretch. *Playing the Whore* is equal parts theoretical overview, structured as it is around the various parties and interests involved in sex work (the police, other women, activists, politicians), and interrogation of the debates around sex work. Its value regarding the latter is specifying what seems to make sex work unique from other industries, what kinds of questions are asked around it, and what kinds should be. It is a rather short text, and can be worked through with even a lower-level college course in the span of a few weeks. It is difficult to recommend the text highly enough, even acknowledging how much has changed regarding the subject matter in the few years since its publication.

Revolting Prostitutes by Juno Mac and Molly Smith is a slightly longer text, though the book can be looked at as two halves depending on one’s goals in employing it. Mac and Smith are both well-published sex working people (Mac’s TED talk is a useful, freely available adjacent resource), though this is the first book for each of them. *Revolting Prostitutes* opens with pointed considerations of both the “sex” and “work” elements of the trades, and continues, critically, with a chapter on borders and migrancy. One of the crucial contributions of the text is working against a variety of confections and their specific harms for the most vulnerable sex working people. The back half of the text offers a variety of international models (Mac and Smith are Scottish and British, and thus these “foreign” contexts include the American one), thus offering an interesting and trenchant comparison between how different political systems have and do treat sex work and sex workers. Mac and Smith also include a massive works cited list, which is invaluable to students attempting further research on a variety of subjects.

The previous two texts could form (and have formed!) courses by themselves. The following two open onto some other, adjacent concerns, and are valuable both for comparison and expansion of viewpoint. They are each moderately to substantially more difficult than the two previous.

Mobile Orientations by Nicola Mai is a predominately ethnographic work in which the author writes from years of research interviewing and following migrant, generally transgender sex workers in Europe. Mai introduces a number of concepts which could prove valuable in a variety of social and political science contexts. He writes from the perspective of an academic who had bought into many of the harmful confections regarding trafficking and sex work, and was forced to confront realities he had not anticipated as he intimately interacts with individuals whose impetuses to migrate and attempt to socially advance are extremely diverse and enlightening. This is a unique work of social research that is perhaps best understood in the context of courses around migrancy, immigration policies, human/sex trafficking, or transgender issues, among others.

Brokered Subjects is the most recent book-length work of Elizabeth Bernstein, a scholar at Barnard College best known, in some circles, for her coining of the term “carceral feminism” in regards to feminisms which endorse the use of state violence to advance the ends of gender equality. This work deals with the strange bedfellows of Christian Evangelicals, venture capitalist tech companies, government bodies, and SWERFs (Sex Work Exclusive Radical Feminists, more on them to come, later). *Brokered Subjects* details the ways in which militarized humanitarianism and moral gentrification contribute to a furor around sex trafficking which serves to both inflate and obfuscate the actual harms to victims, and reinforce the conflation which harms so many others who do not identify as such. It is a book dense with concepts and international research on trafficking and the rescue industries which fetishize victimhood.

It should also be noted that there are excellent nation- or region-specific texts regarding sex work in Asia, Australia, Africa, and South America, which will be clearly referenced in the selected works later in this toolkit. If, for instance, one was researching labor, feminism, politics, or any other adjacent subject in multiple African contexts, Mgbako’s *To Live Freely in this World* would be indispensable, in addition to the above.



Ways to Discern Good from Bad: Critical and Popular Sources

Here we consider a (necessarily limited) list of ways an instructor or student might evaluate resources they encounter in constructing a course or researching sex work. We frame these as questions one could ask of a source to determine the likelihood of its bias, and what that bias might mean for its conclusions:

Does the source use the consensually attained voice(s) of sex worker(s)? Obviously, it would be ideal in many ways to work solely from the words of sex working people, who have found it necessary to adopt the disability rights mantra of “nothing about us, without us” due to the mass of words written about them, without them. But care should be taken with any source that purports the experience of sex working people without representing their voices.

How is the source funded? Anti-trafficking, Evangelical, and other rescue industry groups have funded a variety of websites, research, and more popular materials for the purpose of furthering policy and funding agendas. These are often not difficult to pick out, but when “experts” are quoted elsewhere, their affiliations may require further research if not cited directly.

For quantitative research, what sorts of control groups are used, and what do the workers have in common with one another?

For qualitative research, what efforts are made to present a representative individual or sample, and what kinds of hypotheses are pursued, or conclusions drawn?

Generally speaking, analyzing bias, whether implicit or explicit, is especially important in research around sex work. **The most predominant biases operate from the position of sex work as a monolithic experience, or the presumption that any one event or account can stand in for the wide diversity of experiences in the trades.** We might ask some further questions of any research that asserts any of the following:

- x All sex workers are women
- x All sex workers are victims of abuse
- x Sex work is by nature abusive or exploitative
- x Sex workers have no agency in their work
(i.e. “pimps” or other managers force them into the work)
- x Sex work is trafficking and vice versa
- x Sex work is strictly an employ of last resort
- x Sex work is only street-based, full-service, outdoor work

There are inevitably many others, but a key point to keep in mind (and Melissa Gira Grant notes this clearly) is that **sex workers seem to be required to justify their work and existence in a manner almost no other professional group does.** Sources that further this absurd and harmful requirement are not worth using, other than as illustrations of said bias.

Finally, what is the actual context of the piece? Is it crime reporting (as many forms of sex work remain criminalized)? Academic research funded by an institution, or by a governmental or private source? There are researchers who make no bones about researching sex work as abuse and including only accounts which match that presumption. Extreme care and caution must be exercised when researching sex work, and opening a classroom dialogue regarding said biases can be very instructive for considering broader prejudices around race, class, gender expression, colorism, and migrant status in social science and other disciplinary research.

Ine Vanwesenbeck is one scholar who has written a fair amount about biases in sex work studies. One recent piece that can be found via academic searching is entitled “Sex Work Criminalization is Barking up the Wrong Tree,” originally published in *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2017; 46(6): 1631–1640). Vanwesenbeck has also published on feminist interventions of various varieties (some positive, some deleterious, some relatively neutral) in both qualitative and quantitative sex work studies. Assigning her work before analyzing more empirical, data-driven studies could be valuable in a variety of disciplines.

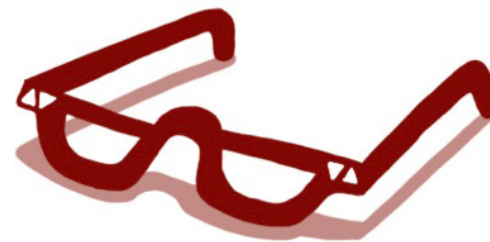
Ways to Discern Good from Bad: Popular Cultural Portrayals of Sex Work

Obviously, the above considerations apply to a great extent here as well. Still, the relative paucity of sex work-centered film, television, and literature renders sex workers pure victims or evil opportunists in many depictions. Depending on one's generation, the most immediate popular culture depictions of sex work in film will almost certainly be, in chronological order: *Klute*, *Pretty Woman*, and *Hustlers*. Each stars glamorous, true-blue movie stars as leading women, and each has some level of melodrama around the motivations of the worker—as perhaps do all Hollywood films. The other major sources of sex work portrayal in popular culture tend to be crime shows (*Law and Order* being a notorious example) or video games (the *Grand Theft Auto* series as the most widely-played and egregious). Sex workers are props in these depictions, fully dehumanized and existing only for titillation or disposability.

A more recent phenomena regarding portrayal of sex work in non-fiction media is what we term the *Vice*-ification of sex work. *Vice* media is a popular conglomeration of a variety of different branches of content production, and has had perhaps the widest reach of similar “guerilla” or “gonzo” journalism cites. The issue with *Vice*-type articles is rarely that they directly dehumanize or slander sex workers, but instead that they seem to exist predominately as spectacular or curiosity pieces. “A Former Porn Star Sues Her School” and “A Sex Worker Explains How She Separates Her Work from Her Sex Life” sit alongside quite useful reporting around decriminalization and (slightly) less sensationalistic listicles and crime reporting. Publications such as *Teen Vogue* have done more consistent work around the balanced portrayal of sex work and sex workers. But pieces which deploy sex worker voices for lurid and “isn't that weird?” accounts tend not to be useful for any kind of academic inquiry.

For popular media/journalistic research, please reference the appended *Support Ho(s)e Toolkit for Journalists and Media*. Here you will find details regarding the kinds of imagery and language to be avoided in reporting on sex work. These criteria and suggestions will be useful in assessing the quality of articles.

As for generally “safe” sources, there are relatively few. *The Guardian* could run one excellent piece and then a terrible, exploitative one the next day. www.titsandsass.com is a site run by and populated entirely by content written by current and former sex workers. Anything vetted through *Support Ho(s)e* online will be similarly safe. But there are few-to-no other outlets that more or less guarantee sex worker voices are represented, hence the need for this guide!



Types of Courses and Directions for Inquiry

Obviously, this an abbreviated list based on experiences of and solicited by *Support Ho(s)e* members. The intersections of sex work with various academic disciplines will be further illuminated by other elements of this toolkit.

Sociology

- social problems
- race/class/gender/sexuality analyses
- social deviance
- sex and sexuality

Public Health

- intersection of sex work policy/theory and anti-trafficking policy/theory
- international approaches to sex worker health/wellness

Criminology

- policing
- penology
- criminalized labor
- broken windows/quality of life policy/theory/policing
- status offense/juvenile delinquency

Public Policy

- health and wellness policies
- vagrancy/conduct policies
- immigration/documentation policies
- symbolic politics

Literature

- by and/or concerning sex working people

Art History

- by and/or concerning sex working people (See Red's presentation as an example)

Popular Culture

- social media
- popular music/film

Media Studies/ Communications

- reportage around sex work
- moral panic

Research Areas / Questions

As this toolkit implies, a simple library or online search of terms around sex work is likely to result in an avalanche of biased, slanted noise. Careful research requires narrow and clear research questions and areas of inquiry, as well as employing the guidelines listed earlier in this toolkit.

- 🔍 Alternative system of care/finance created by SW
- 🔍 Missing/overlooked/ignored murdered women/femmes/GNC people
- 🔍 Race/whiteness in mainstream SW movement(s)
- 🔍 Public health impacts of SW criminalization
- 🔍 Popular/social media treatment of SW
- 🔍 Transgender overrepresentation in various forms of SW
- 🔍 Undocumented/migrant SW
- 🔍 Conflation of SW and trafficking
- 🔍 SW use of tech/social media/alternative forms of communication
- 🔍 Unionization/labor organization of SW (both US (see especially writing around the Lusty Lady organization efforts) and internationally (see especially India/Desi diaspora, South Africa, Brazil, Scotland, England, France, Australia, Thailand, Canada, and Argentina examples))

Ethical In-Person / Ethnographic Sex Work Research

...is very difficult, and ought mostly to be avoided by researchers of any level who do not have clear, positive ends in mind. Researching criminalized populations carries with it the responsibility not to out or otherwise harm those who could easily be so by virtue of the research. Ethnographic work of a sort can be accomplished via the large and growing body of first-person narratives published online and in various collections (such as *Coming Out Like a Porn Star* and Red Umbrella Project's *Prose and Lore* journals, which have been multiply collected). So long as the standards of consideration listed above are used, students should be able to employ internet research skills and arrive at a spectrum of voices from within the trades. Obviously, this method carries the same risk inherent in researching any historically disenfranchised group: the most vulnerable and voiceless members of the population may be overlooked. As regards sex work, however, the main issue for most research is that it wholesale ignores or reduces the voices of currently and formerly sex working people. The best and most immediate way to combat this phenomenon is to elevate the well-vetted voices which are available, and be critical about the proposal of any ends which are designed to eliminate or curtail the work, or harm the workers themselves.

Intersecting Study Topics and Lenses

To include a week or a couple of units on sex work in courses which fall under any of the broader disciplinary areas below should be a no-brainer at this point in history. We have offered a few thoughts on specific inquiries and interventions, but even a cursory literature review will reveal many more. Sex workers have occupied and currently occupy a wide variety of subject positions, and both the worker and the work are “metaphorized” far too routinely in these areas—the figure of the prostitute is one that inevitably dehumanizes the worker and propels the work into a strata of fantasy and fetish (and not the good kinds) that render actual discussion nearly impossible. Considering sex work through, in parallel with, and against some of the lenses below can lead to unexpected and fruitful discussions and research.



Feminism(s)

- the strands of SWERFism vary greatly depending on national context: the British and Nordic folks have perhaps the most virulent versions of these
- Sophie Lewis (among many others) has written about the intersections between SWERF and TERF as failed, exclusionary feminisms
- it is worth considering efforts such as COYOTE, St James Infirmary, and the Lyon resistance of 1975 (each of which has been written about a great deal) for a sense of resistance-based/sex worker inclusive and led feminisms of the 1970s and 1980s
- examining the relative failures of the organized Left in the US (and elsewhere) to promote and include sex working voices is instructive in considering some of the broader qualified successes and failures of feminist movements
- one must also consider the interventions of Black feminisms in the American context, and the ways in which formations from the Black Panthers and Combahee River collective to Black Lives Matter have or have not included sex working voices
- similarly, migrant feminisms from Gloria Anzaldua's writing and

activism to current formalized groups such as Women's Refugee Commission and RAICES have had varied intersections with the issues of sex working women and femmes

Labor/emotional labor

- Marxist studies (Engels has marginally more to say about sex work/sex workers than Marx, though both could use some further nuance. See also Voltairine de Cleyre, among others)
- Anarchist studies (Emma Goldman's writing on sex work as related to marriage, and extensions from Gayle Rubin are both critical and relevant today; Spanish anarchist women's organization Mujeres Libres is worth considering as well)
- The "Work" chapter of *Revolting Prostitutes* is as good a primer as any, and Mac and Smith source their material well
- there are a variety of fruitful intersections between considerations of emotional labor from Silvia Federici (less than great on sex work recently) to Arlie Hochschild to a wide swath of contemporary popular and academic writing on sex work and emotional labor

Queer history/studies

- Routledge's *Queer Sex Work* collection is a wide-reaching and recent academic text, some of which draws clear connections between queer theory and sex work research; definitely worth a look, and university libraries ought to carry it

Trans history/studies

- as trans folks are overrepresented in many of the sex trades, but often underrepresented in writing and thinking about them, this is a fruitful area for consideration
- insofar as two of the critical moments in trans resistance in the US (Compton's Cafeteria and Stonewall) were heavily instigated by sex working femmes of color, the two histories are intimately entwined
- against the variety of archival and documentary material available regarding Stonewall, Susan Stryker's *Screaming Queens* documentary is an excellent and singular overview of Compton's
- a quick review of contemporary trans fiction and memoir reveals the quotidian and omnipresent nature of sex work in trans experience;

sex work experiences span from the most/only available employ to capitalizing on fetish to sexual exploration, or all of the above

Migrant studies/border policing

- again, the *Revolting Prostitutes* chapter on borders is an excellent starting point, as are the Mai and Bernstein texts listed above
- sex work and other criminalized forms of labor offer a variety of points of entry into considering migration and border studies, though what makes sex work unique is that it is not illegal (at least in the majority of countries) strictly by virtue of the status of the worker. As such, the additional category distinction of "trafficking" complicates the subject position of the worker. Under certain definitions, a migrant sex worker is de facto trafficked and/or trafficker.
- the "gray areas" of labor/sex trafficking are valuable areas for inquiry, as suggested above: who defines the experience of the migrant sex worker, and what does their lack of agency suggest about border policy more generally?
- considering statuses of "victim," "refugee," "immigrant," and "undocumented," again among others, are especially interesting as regards criminalized labor such as sex work

Literary/Art history and criticism

- cultural artifacts are useful to consider portrayals of sex workers in the popular consciousness; regardless of what we think of *Pretty Woman*, it's an enduring trope of the "hooker with a heart of gold" and thus must be tangled with
- the more open identification of sex working pasts from major music artists such as Cardi B puts a finer point on how sex work intersects with hip hop cultures
- as referenced above, sex work runs through queer and trans literatures as almost omnipresent; see novels such as Jordy Rosenberg's *Confessions of the Fox*, Casey Plett's *Little Fish*, or Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore's *Sketchtasy* for just a few such, recent examples
- a spate of recent gallery shows, including *On Our Backs* at the Leslie Lohman Museum of Art in NYC (2019) or STROLL Portland's

annual sex worker art show, demonstrates the growing sense of sex workers as art producers and having a unique set of aesthetic perspectives on their work and lives

- even a cursory overview of the history of Western studio art history reveals a consistent engagement with sex workers as inspiration and subject matter
- more contemporary artists such as David Wojnarowicz and Mark Morrisroe have written about their sex working pasts



Politics

U.S. Party Politics

Especially in undergraduate course, it is important to present and emphasize the rather apolitical maltreatment of sex workers, at least in the American context. FOSTA and SESTA, the house and senate versions of a bill targeting website owners for the potential human trafficking content therein, are the most sweeping and harmful pieces of legislation for sex working people passed at the national level in this generation. Those bills were passed by massive majorities in both houses, with legislators for both parties parroting bad data and empty platitudes regarding “saving the girls,” while arguing for legislation that even the FBI suggested would actually make finding and prosecuting traffickers more difficult. Legislation to “study the effects” has not found footing in either chamber. Generally speaking, legislation regarding sex work mirrors the pattern of any national or municipal policy in the US, with Republicans and Democrats fighting to be the “law and order” party. One needs look no further than Clinton’s 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, or the Obama administration’s sweeping deportation campaigns to see that the ostensible mainstream, liberal left is hardly a champion of the criminalized or undocumented person.

All that said, one teaching anything related to sex work in an American context must be aware of the effects of recent legislation (most notably SESTA/FOSTA, but also pending pieces such as EARN IT), and decriminalization efforts in various municipalities (perhaps most notably New York City and the District of Columbia). At the national level, Ayanna Pressley’s criminal justice reform bill included the decriminalization of sex work (perhaps one of the reasons it did not gain much traction, but still a significant event).

International Context(s)

Variance of laws

Mac and Smith break down many of these distinctions in *Revolting Prostitutes*, but as circumstances evolve both in locales with strong, established sex worker rights movements and those with more nascent efforts, it is impossible to keep a toolkit such as this completely up to date. Needless to say, one doing international research should first determine whether a country's laws represent some form of decriminalization (New Zealand), partial legalization including Nordic Model (Sweden) or not (Canada), a confusing and evolving nether region (UK), full criminalization of various forms of sex work (US), or even countries without any formal legal structure (a variety of sub Saharan African countries have rather confusing variations on abolitionism, or little structure to laws around prostitution at all). This is all to say, there is an enormous variety of legal precedent and enforcement, all of which could be further researched and written about.

Variance of SWERFs

We mention this only because those less entrenched in social and popular media around sex work may be surprised to find how virulent certain strains of Sex Work Exclusive (Radical) Feminism are in some regions around the world, whereas elsewhere it simply is not as visible and public a discourse. The UK certainly has produced some of the most hateful and bilious rhetoric around sex work, and perhaps some of the most clearly overlapping with Trans Exclusive (Radical) Feminist "thought." Public feminists from the media to the Akademy seem to have far more license to spew anti-prostitution screeds, despite and in the face of strong sex worker organizing from groups such as SWARM, the English Collective of Prostitutes, and SCOT-PEP. In the US, SWERF thinking is perhaps more commonly espoused through popular media and the more

casual bile of "feminist" media figures (such as Amy Schumer, Tina Fey, Rashida Jones, and Lena Dunham) or celebrity anti-trafficking advocates (Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore, Sean Penn, Jada Pinckett-Smith). A combination of mocking and defaming sex workers alongside "save the girls" rescue industry rhetoric creates a different-but-related set of discourses in the American context. Again, valuable research in international contexts could be as simple as internet searching and tracing the current state of play.



For/Towards the “Non-Traditional Classroom”

Popular education

As has been repeatedly noted above, one of the great difficulties in studying sex work and the effects of criminalization is the relative paucity of sex working people’s voices in academic publications. There are noteworthy exceptions, of course, but such a great majority of quantitative, qualitative, and popular/journalistic sources report on sex work without any recourse to the experiences of the workers themselves, and even many that do follow a tired set of stereotypes and normative assumptions that silence and marginalize some of those experiences which might be among the most telling and valuable. One of the (admittedly double-edged) weapons to escape this bind is the internet, in terms of “underground” or “alternative” journalism, freely published first-person narrative, and social media. Obviously, any of these must be treated with care, as biases are perhaps even easier to hide when outside the academic or corporate journalistic purviews, but they should also each be embraced for what they can add to discourse and research into the experiences of sex working people, including the effects of criminalization, undocumented status, and healthcare access. “Non-academic” resources, including but not limited to zines, medium articles, blogs, personal websites, podcasts, and twitter follows should be critically examined alongside peer-reviewed journal articles and pricey edited collections.

Terms and Concepts

What follows below is far from a complete, authoritative set of definitions—entire books can be, should be, and have been written about each of them. Still, we find it useful to have shorthand, glossary-version definitions of terms which students, instructors, and researchers will almost doubtlessly encounter. Furthermore, the contested nature of the usage of many of these terms means that defining them more precisely (or complicating them beyond sometimes-reductive uses) is crucial to understanding implicit and explicit bias in writing about sex work and related topics.

“Abolition” in its many guises

No sex work adjacent term is more multifarious than abolition. In the American context, abolitionism is inseparable from the cessation of the legal practice of chattle slavery. But Frederick Douglas and Sojourner Truth could not possibly have predicted how their struggle would be appropriated and redefined over a century later. The concept of abolition is now best known according to two, entirely at-odds, political praxes. First, prison and police abolitionists are those who hold that the constitutionally-protected vestiges of slavery (in the 13th Amendment) within the United States prison system extends through the entire carceral logic of the US criminal legal system and must be done away with. This abolitionism holds that the state’s monopoly on violence is at its most overt and brutal in the figure and use of police, who serve to divide communities, work against political activism, and exist solely to protect the property and rights of specific classes in late-stage capitalist America. On the other hand, when it comes to sex work, abolitionism (and, confusingly, neo-abolitionism) refers to some form of “end demand models,” which hold that prostitution (the only shorthand they tend to use, as these abolitionists refuse to acknowledge sex work as work) is inherently exploitative, and thus must ultimately be done away with. They see “ending demand” for sexual services as the most humane means to

accomplish this goal, and thus advocate a set of laws which, perplexingly, criminalize either or both of the buyers of sexual services or/and the operators of more corporatized businesses of the trades (such as brothels or peep shows), but not the workers themselves. The effects of these models are, unsurprisingly, devastating for the most vulnerable groups of sex working people. Prostitution abolitionists comprise some of the most violent (and politically efficacious/connected) opposition to safer and more humane treatment of sex working people.

Trafficking/sexual slavery

One need not delve particularly deeply into sex work studies to observe the stakes of moral and sex panic around trafficking and its potential overlap with (or, for that matter, disjunct from) “consensual” sex work. We use the scare quotes around consensual not in any way to suggest that the majority of sex work fails to fit most definitions of consensual labor, but instead to point out how much waged or unwaged labor is in fact coerced by the circumstances of life under late-stage capitalism. Definitions of trafficking tend in some way to stem from the United Nations’ criteria of “force, fraud, or coercion,” and anti-trafficking organizations often carry a combination of uncited, massively inflated statistics and lurid, sensational accounts of the abuse of young women. The concept of trafficking almost never takes into account the diversity of experiences of those labeled as “trafficking survivor,” and the organizations which claim to aid them too often are more focused on the optics of rescue and the preservation of their own anti-prostitution morality than actually addressing the vulnerabilities which create the conditions for any forced, fraudulent, or coercive labor. Sex slavery is an even more charged version of the trafficking discourses, which ignores one critical distinction regarding slavery in the American context: it was legal for decades upon decades, and, as noted above, remains so as a form of punishment. To conflate the realities of sex work and even trafficking with slavery is counterproductive to the pronounced aim of anti-trafficking work, which is the safety of potentially vulnerable populations and communities.

Whorearchy

In its simplest terms, whorearchy refers to any stratification of sex working people which declares some as morally superior to, or simply separate from, others. It is the vestiges of classist, racist, sexist, colorist, homophobic, transphobic, and anti-migrant alienation within and around sex worker rights movements, and serves as an effective form of division between those whose class interests and subject position as “sex worker,” “prostitute,” or even “whore” (a term itself reclaimed by many within these trades and movements) would be strengthened if united. It has manifested itself in gatekeeping and sowing mistrust between people in the sex trades for at least a generation and likely longer.

Whorephobia

As the name implies, this term refers to the fear and hatred of those involved in the sex trades, as well as what they represent as challenges to hetero/homonormative conceptions of amative relationships and sexualities.

Whore stigma

The term refers to the stigmatization of those either involved in, presumed to be involved in, or, crucially, even briefly occupying the subject position of one involved in the sex trades. Whore stigma is useful as a way of considering the whorephobic logic which pervades ideologies as varied as broken windows policing and those which resulted in SESTA/FOSTA. Its impacts are equally cultural, political, economic, and aesthetic.

Sex Work Centered Guide for Academics
1st Edition, 2021
Compiled by A. Hammes
Published by the Support Ho(s)e Collective
Design + Illustration by Jett George