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Creating hostile environments

Reframing sex work as a form of violence against women

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Acknowledgement of country





Sex work as purely harm

Swedish model & ‘exiting’ studies

“As we know it, the women’s ability to escape an unbearable reality through fantasy plays a major role during their time in prostitution. Moreover, the ability to dream and fantasize is also important after the breakaway. A natural comparison might be between prostitutes’ experiences and those who have been captured or locked up in, for example, prisons or concentration camps. Being able to imagine another life and to think differently about how this life can become a reality can be a crucial survival strategy”.

Månsson & Hedin, 1999, p. 74



Creating a world free of sex trade abuse

“The conference is about supporting [sex trade survivors] in Australia and to collectively organise politically against the sex industry and to tell people such as me and others how to support them in the best possible way”.

Norma in McCullagh, 2016.

THE WORLD'S OLDEST OPPRESSION

**2 DAY CONFERENCE FOR A
WORLD FREE OF SEX TRADE
ABUSE**


RMIT University
Saturday 9th - Sunday 10th, April 2016

TICKETS

\$100 - Waged
\$50 - Unwaged
FREE - Sex Trade Survivors

Available on Eventbrite.com
<http://tinyurl.com/zed65ys>

MORE INFO

 [Facebook.com/events/1674706386143664](https://www.facebook.com/events/1674706386143664)

BOOK LAUNCH "PROSTITUTION NARRATIVES"

Edited by
Caroline Norma
and Melinda
Tankard Reist



Hear from survivors
of the sex trade and
abolitionist activists
from around the
world, including
Rachel Moran and
Julie Bindel



“I suggest that the people who are sort of launching online protests and carrying on have substantial connections to the sex industry and are seeking to protect the men who buy them. But we don’t care one bit about prostitution buyers”

Norma interviewed by McCullagh, 2016



The Swedish model

Three-pronged legislative model:

- a) criminalises the purchase of sex (or criminalises clients);
 - b) removes existing laws that penalise and/or criminalise sex workers (or people who provide sexual services) and;
 - c) 're-educates' the police and judiciary (as well as the general population) about sex work.
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- Re-education = promotion of sex work as a form of violence against women (explicit focus on the harms of sex work, seen as a form of human rights violation – aim is to abolish sex work).



Sex work as violence against women

Sex workers as rape victims

“...the way into the sex trade constitutes the culmination of a long chain of previous, destructive events ... a cycle of victimization characterized by insufficient emotional connection, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation during the teenage years, rape experiences and, later on, prostitution. Central to the process is the incorporation of inadequate self-esteem ... many of the women were labelled as “whores” early, often long before their actual entry into prostitution”.

Månsson & Hedin, 1999, p. 71



Moral engineering – governing sex work via ‘exiting’ &....

- A sex worker’s identity becomes fixed as the ‘**prostitute-victim**’ (Scoular & O’Neill, 2007).
- Sex workers are “repsonsibilised to exit sex work, with limited agency or voice, excluded from certain forms of citizenship, and whose only socially acceptable ‘moral’ option is to exit sex work or be labelled as deviant or criminal” (O’Neill & Jobe, 2022, p. 69).



Moral engineering – governing sex work via ‘exiting’ & client criminalisation

Clients are vilified as rapists:

- **“What shall we call the men who buy the women and children in prostitution? They are socially tolerated sexual predators but are rarely identified as such” (Farley, 2004, p. 1118).**

John School program, Hull:

- **“A strong focus on humanising sex workers and encouraging those undertaking the course to consider the sex worker’s wider circumstances and lives, but also covers implications and consequences for those charged with kerb crawling and buying sex generally” (Centre for Justice and Innovation, 2025, p.1).**



The 'pimp lobby'



- “powerful, protected industry operating with impunity” (Tankard-Reist, 2017)



Conclusions

- Framing sex work as purely harm makes it difficult for sex workers to speak about the harms they can face in their work.
- Only legitimate subject position offered to sex workers is as victims (and rape victims):
 - Divides sex workers into two key groups: the morally good and bad (Skeggs, 2005):
 - “sex trade survivors” become “subjects with value”
 - sex workers as part of the “pimp lobby” become “subjects without value”
- Clients are vilified as rapists
- Societies ‘re-educated’ about sex work as harm
 - = how to create societies hostile to sex work**



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Thank you

Any questions?