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Book Review

Armstrong, L., & Abel, G. (Eds.). (2021). [Sex work and the New Zealand model: Decriminalization and social change](#). Bristol University Press.

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Often, the terms sex work and human trafficking are directly associated by those who have not read or engaged in the discourse on these issues. In my case, I have neglected these issues for many years. As a social worker and social work educator, I have delved deeply into the issue of human trafficking in fits and starts depending on the immediate focus of my work. As a young social worker working with adolescents in the juvenile justice system, issues of sex work and sex trafficking would often surface. These juveniles were always poor and disenfranchised and often had been trafficked by their own families. I equated sex work and sex trafficking without any evidence. Approximately 15 years ago I began seeing feminist literature considering sex work as a commercial endeavor (Duggan & Hunter, 2006) and pointing out the differences between the two. This research had the power to properly inform sex trafficking and sex work policies, which are usually ideologically driven. Although the literature was robust with feminist discourse on sex work, researchers were often poor activists for policy changes based on their studies. However, this work provides a vigorous look at the impact of the Prostitution Reform Act (PRA)

legislated in New Zealand in 2003. The book discusses the decriminalization of sex work and explores the viability of the law in other countries.

Armstrong and Able (2020) provide a powerful compendium from a variety of researchers studying sex work, most notably from the perspective of the sex workers themselves. The edited work succeeds in providing powerful arguments for legislative changes involving sex work and provides an evaluation of New Zealand's Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) of 2003. The initial three chapters provide the foundation for the reader to consider the history of sex work from social and political perspectives incorporating public health, gender studies, criminal justice, and advocacy. In Part 1 of the book, the editors select research contrasting the problems encountered by sex workers before and after decriminalization of sex work and provide research focused on the future of sex work. Chapter Two highlights the creation of the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective with very detailed notations about writing the bill for the PRA, changes and amendments, and how the bill was implemented. Part 2 looks at the disenfranchisement and underrepresentation in the literature of diverse sex workers such as transgender and migrant workers, investigating the impact of being outside of the protection of the law. Part 3 includes a collection of robust feminine discourse focusing the observations of sex workers who discuss the stigma associated with their work.

Chapter Three discusses the relationship of sex work and sex work activism and Chapter Four discusses trans sex-workers' thoughts and experiences working under decriminalization. Gilmore recognizes the advantages of decriminalization but maintains that there continues to be a great amount of stigma and fear of the police within the community. Chapter Five focuses on Section 19 of the PRA, discussing how migrant sex workers are being placed in harm's way because of being denied protections of the PRA. The authors maintain, "some sex workers benefit from the protections of the PRA while others work in a precarious situation that places them at risk of harm" (p. 114). Chapter Six is focused on the clients of sex workers and the power they hold. The book continues thematically focused on the clients of sex workers, discussing boundaries and services.

Finally, drawing on interviews with sex workers, a discussion using media narratives shows how stigma is experienced by sex workers. The public's perception and acceptance of sex workers is introduced with thoughts of how to mitigate issues and improve relationships among various groups. Through a careful review of the literature Armstrong and Able connect themes, define the differences between sex work and sex trafficking, and define what decriminalization of sex work means. As such this work is an excellent influence on creating meaningful legislation around sex work, which will ultimately impact a decline in sex trafficking. Armstrong and Able clearly show that when the public conflates sex trafficking with sex work, unintended individuals who are being trafficked are traumatized by prosecution in addition to the trauma of being trafficked.

I learned a great deal from this work. This book is an excellent resource for those in social work, public health, criminal justice, and any social science. The research presented in this work provides excellent information on an international scale for both direct practice and policy practice professionals. It highlights the effects of decriminalizing sex work on many levels, including the occupational health and safety of sex workers and those who are sex trafficked.

I recommend this book for all social work students. This book will be recommended as required reading for the Marshall University social work course on Human Trafficking.

Reference

Duggan, L., & Hunter, N. D. (2006). *Sex wars: Sexual dissent and political culture*. Routledge.