

Help *Not* Harm: Anti-racist and  
Intersectional Social Work Education on  
Youth in the Sex Trades

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Faculty Forum

WCU Research Highlights: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

# Introduction

- Assistant Professor in Undergraduate Social Work Department
- PhD in Social Work and Social Research with a focus on criminalization of people in sex trades; sexuality; anti-oppressive social work
- Coordinated harm reduction–based program for women, trans, and non-binary identified sex workers (Philadelphia)
- Program Coordinator for LGBTQI Intimate Partner Violence services (OR & WA)

## Background

- Legislation intended to stop violence through threat of incarceration (Law, 2014; McCardle, 2001; Thuma, 2015; Whittier, 2016)
- Criminalization of Black cis and trans women (Davis, 2003; INCITE!, 2014; Mogul, Ritchie, & Whitlock, 2011; Richie, 2012; The Revolution Starts at Home, 2003)
- Blurring of choice, circumstance, and coercion (Lutnick, 2016; Sex Workers Project, n.d)
- No place of innocence (Rossiter, 2001)

# Clarifying Definitions

Sex Work

Sex Trade

Sex Trafficking

# Overview of the Research

- RQ: What are social work instructors teaching about the sex trades in social work coursework?
- Theoretical Framework: Anti-carceral feminism
- Methodology: Feminist, Qualitative, Directed Content Analysis, Thematic Analysis



# Overview of Findings

- ☆ Depiction of People in the sex trades
- ☆ Instructors socialize students to respond
  - ☆ 3<sup>rd</sup> parties facilitate sex trade
- ☆ Good intentions & Carceral Feminisms



## Quote



“...having that many body parts in your body parts—having that many body fluids near you, doing things that are freaky and weird really messes up your ideas of what a relationship should look like, and intimacy” (Roe-Sepowitz, 2013).



Racialized imagery used to teach  
about the sex trades



Use an intersectional lens to examine  
concepts and values about sex(uality)



Cultivating empathy for “good  
victims”



Impact of Feminist Imperialism on cis  
women and girls in the Global South



Rescue work is paramount

16-year-old killer

Victim of human trafficking at just 15

Teenage prostitute

Afraid

Runaway

I want people to see me as just an average white girl

“alleged sex trafficking victim”

kidnapped

“girl, 15, sent to prison for luring robbery victims with internet sex ads

Just 21 years old...

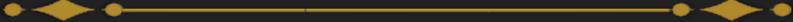
Does kid things

rebellious

# Rescuing Victims



## Next Steps



- ◆ Focus on communities that are disenfranchised in sex trades and traumatized as they navigate systemic resources to access healthcare, housing, welfare, and safety.
- ◆ Harm Reduction Project with Providers
- ◆ Harm Reduction Project with Youth

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