With or without external supporters I have 3 million sex workers behind me. (Irina Maslova, leader of the ‘sex worker movement’ Silver Rose, Russia, 2015)

I don’t foresee a situation where there will be no sex workers – in Kenya, in Africa, in the world – because there is demand for it. Sex is a human right, whether it’s free or there’s monetary considerations. (Penina Mwangi, Executive Director, Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme, Kenya, 2015)

The contemporary ‘sex worker’s rights’ movement is made up of a number of perspectives and positions, but the various strands have one core view in common: a passionate dislike of any legal or State intervention. This is a shift from the 1980s and 1990s, when the movement was united in supporting legalisation, such as the Dutch and German models. Today, most Sex Workers’ Rights Activists (SWRAs) oppose legalisation, with the exception of a number of activists in Germany, the Netherlands, and Nevada in the USA. But even in those areas, where the off-street sex trade is fully legalised, the system is staunchly criticised by those who wish to see an end to any regulation at all. Therefore, New Zealand, which has fully decriminalised all aspects of the sex trade (see Chap. 1 for a description of the various legal regimes) has become the preferred model.
Supporters of legalisation often cite the Netherlands as a shining example. For a number of years, beginning immediately after the sex trade was legalised there in 2000, delegations were brought from the Netherlands to elsewhere in Europe to sell the model. More recently, and especially since decriminalisation was introduced in New Zealand in 2003, the SWRAs are unlikely to admit that their side of the political fence ever supported legalisation and criticise the regime for being over-regulated.

Since its inception, the ‘sex workers’ rights’ movement has been successful in identifying key issues and problems faced by women in prostitution, such as police violence and harassment, and social stigma. During its early days, as we will see in this chapter, the movement was led by socialist women who had a class, rather than gendered, analysis of prostitution, but who genuinely fought for better ‘working’ conditions and rights for the most disenfranchised women in the sex trade.

The History

The term ‘sex work’ was coined in the early 1980s by Carol Leigh and was popularised by a 1987 anthology of the same name.

As she describes in *The Prostitution Papers,*¹ the feminist icon Kate Millett was at a 1971 women’s liberation movement conference at which some SWRAs became very angry with the feminists there. They became particularly enraged when a panel entitled ‘Towards the Elimination of Prostitution’ was organised including ‘everyone but prostitutes’. Things rapidly degenerated into chaos. Prostitutes had gathered their still nebulous rage against their own lives and redirected it towards the movement of women who appeared to be summarily ‘eliminating’ prostitution: aka the means of their livelihood. The argument became so heated that a physical fight broke out.

In the mid-1970s, Helen Buckingham² promoted herself as the main spokesperson for women in the sex trade in Britain. Buckingham has

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¹Kate Millett, 1971, *The Prostitution Papers.*
²Real name, Bridget Allerdyce.
been described as a ‘high-class call girl’\(^3\) and claimed to have a num-
ber of regular, wealthy punters. In 1975 she was declared bankrupt by
the Inland Revenue, which demanded tax from her earnings in pros-
titution. Buckingham argued that if she was required to pay tax, she
must be allowed to work legally. Buckingham founded a group PUSSI
(Prostitutes United for Social and Sexual Integration) which later
changed to PLAN (Prostitution Laws are Nonsense) and allied herself
to Selma James, founder of the International Wages for Housework
Campaign, which demands money from the government for wom-
en’s unwaged work in the home. Together they founded the English
Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) in 1975.

In the early days, the ECP were abolitionists. The aims and objectives
of James and her colleagues were clear: women should be paid for all
labour, including housework and sex. ‘For prostitutes, against prostitu-
tion’, was its mantra. The ECP positioned itself as part of the working-
class movement for more money and less work. They referred to the
introduction of the kerb crawling law as ‘the new suss law’ (‘suss’ is the
abbreviation for a stop and search law in England and Wales that per-
mitted a police officer to stop, search and potentially arrest people on
suspicion of having committed a crime).

Meanwhile, the prostitutes’ rights movement in Europe was launched
in Lyon, France, in 1975, when French prostitutes occupied a church in
protest at the way in which they were treated by the police. They went
on strike to protest against the savage police repression and corruption in
Lyon, which had been experiencing a wave of brutal murders of prostitutes.

Margaret Valentino and Mavis Johnson of the ECP provide an intro-
duction to the volume of life stories of French women involved in the
strike, and an analysis setting out the ECP position. They explain that:
‘Prostitution was one way women had been fighting to get paid for
housework—by getting paid for all the sexual services all women are
always expected to give for free’\(^4\) The cause of prostitution was ‘po-
verty and women’s refusal of poverty’, and ‘the end of women’s poverty is

\(^{3}\)http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244016679474

the end of prostitution’. The ECP approach was abolitionist rather than celebratory. Rather than arguing that ‘sex work’ is empowering or even enjoyable, the ECP saw it as exploitation, the same as they did for all labour under capitalism.

COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) was founded in the USA out of WHO (Whores, Housewives and Others) in 1973 by Margo St James, who described herself as an ex-prostitute. St James was given money by the Point Foundation at Glide Memorial Church, San Francisco, and later received $1000 dollars from the Playboy Foundation. St James recruited 50 high-profile individuals to form the COYOTE advisory board, as well as prostituted women to campaign for decriminalisation. Interested parties, including students, sex buyers, politicians, media personnel, activists and representatives from other advocacy organisations were invited and encouraged to become members of COYOTE.

In 1976, COYOTE filed a lawsuit against Rhode Island. In the case of COYOTE v. Roberts, the argument was based on how much power the state should have to control the sexual activity of its citizens. The lawsuit also alleged discrimination on how the law was being applied. Data was submitted that demonstrated selective prosecution as the Providence Police were arresting female ‘sex workers’ far more often than their male customers. St James testified in the case. Although the case was eventually dismissed when the General Assembly changed the prostitution statute in 1980, COYOTE and St James are given credit for contributing to the decriminalisation of prostitution in Rhode Island.

St James attended a number of international conferences throughout the 1970s, promoting the view that prostitution is ‘liberating’ and should be decriminalised and viewed as ‘work’.

Fundraising involved an annual hosting of the well-attended Hookers’ Ball, which nabbed 20,000 attendees in 1978. Cherie Jimenez, an abolitionist campaigner and survivor of the sex trade, recalls the annual event. ‘For several years I remember doing the so called Hookers’ Ball’, she told me. ‘A costume party at a club in Cambridge that was also raising money for PUMA [Prostitute’s Union of Massachusetts]. There was a bail fund for women, I do remember that. I still know some of these women, and we continue to argue our positions.’
Valerie Jennes writes in her book on COYOTE: ‘As one newspaper stated, “It was something between the 1906 earthquake and fire, and the opening of the opera”’.\textsuperscript{6} The Chicago Tribune reported: ‘For the press it was an orgy. They filmed, photographed and interviewed anyone who was generous with her eyeshadow’.\textsuperscript{7} More locally, the San Francisco Chronicle described the events as ‘wild masquerades that drew the kind of people who really knew how to party [and that became] legendary, even though they only lasted a few years’.\textsuperscript{8} The tide was turning from politics to glamour.

Unsurprisingly, COYOTE soon began to be lauded by the liberal male elite. Jennes records that in the first year of COYOTE’s existence, the Seattle Post Intelligencer reported: ‘Margo is “in” socially this year. Well-to-do liberals invite her to things and seek her company’.

The movement had become less about workers’ rights, and more about ‘happy hookers’.

Former ‘sex worker’ Xaviera Hollander claims credit for coining the term ‘happy hooker’, although it is likely it was thought up by Robin Moore, who co-authored the bestselling book of the same name about Hollander’s life. The book went on to be an international bestseller, was adapted into a 1975 film starring Lynn Redgrave, and has also been performed as a play and an opera.

Despite the influence of The Happy Hooker on popular culture, it is now clear that it was composed almost as a piece of fiction, with two ghostwriters orchestrating the account of Hollander’s life in the sex trade. They could not even decide if this was about a pimp or a ‘hooker’. ‘[Moore] actually hired Yvonne Dunleavy who was a famous journalist at the time. She was the one who wrote the book. They taped me, simply asking [me] questions about my life and had the chapters spewed out in three months,’ Hollander told me. ‘She wrote it, he edited it. He tried in vain to write a chapter, it was a piece of shit.’

\textsuperscript{5}Jennes, 1974, \textit{First Annual Hookers’ Ball}.
\textsuperscript{6}Cited in James, Withers, Haft & Theiss, 1977, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{7}Keegan, 1974, \textit{Book Title Here}, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{8}Rubin, 1986, \textit{Book Title Here}, n.p.
When I asked Hollander how long she had sold sex for before living off the earnings of other women, she answered: ‘I was a physical hooker for about half a year to learn the trade. I went from an L shaped apartment to a five-bedroom penthouse apartment in rocket time’.

**Prostitution is ‘Work’ or ‘Labour’**

In 1985, 15 years before the Dutch government lifted the ban on brothels and effectively legalised the sex trade, the ‘sex workers’ rights’ organisation Red Thread (a government-funded ‘union’ for people in prostitution) organised a congress that led to the forming of the International Committee for Prostitutes’ Rights. The draft of a World Charter for Prostitutes’ Rights was drafted and finalised at a second international congress in 1986.

Its ‘Statement on Prostitution and Feminism’ declares that prostitution is ‘legitimate work’. The World Charter includes a defence of sex buyers, explaining that: ‘The customer, like the prostitute, should not … be criminalised or condemned on a moral basis’.

The prostitution as ‘work’ approach was spearheaded by Australian groups such as Scarlet Alliance. This was clearly an appropriation of the liberationary arguments adopted by the gay rights movement and the HIV/AIDS crisis that transformed the ‘sex workers’ rights’ movement into an international force. Large amounts of government funding were made available for HIV/AIDS prevention projects (as we shall see in Chap. 7), and this money was used to found organisations including TAMPEP (The International Foundation: European Network for HIV/STI Prevention and Health Promotion among Migrant Sex Workers), the Network of Sex Work Projects and COYOTE.

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Unionisation

The International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW) is a lobby group that campaigns for total decriminalisation of the sex trade.

‘Sex work’ activists recognise that ‘downsides’ exist in prostitution, such as violence, stigmatisation, poor pay and conditions of employment, and job and employment insecurity. However, these are believed to be a result of how society views ‘sex work’ and to also be present in other areas of non-sexual employment.

‘Working in the sex trade is often a way for migrants to avoid the unrewarding and sometimes exploitative conditions they meet in the low-skilled jobs available to them, such as: waiting in restaurants and bars, cleaning, food packaging, etc.’ said Nicolas (Nick) Mai, a UK-based academic and filmmaker whose research on migrant ‘sex workers’ in the UK, as we will see in Chap. 7, was used to convince a number of politicians that concerns about trafficking was largely a ‘moral panic’.11

Pro-prostitution organisations argue that treating prostitution as ‘sex work’ would make addressing those incidents of ‘forced’ prostitution and trafficking easier. By acknowledging prostitution as a legitimate form of ‘work’, prostitutes would then have access to a range of resources to protect them (legislations, grievance processes, officially recognised unions).

There are a number of key tactics used by the ‘sex workers’ rights’ activists to promote blanket decriminalisation of the sex trade and to lobby against the criminalisation of sex buyers. And today’s movement blames feminist abolitionists for the danger and abuse faced by those in prostitution and names them ‘whorephobic’.

But while third wave ‘fun feminists’ get their thongs in a twist about the very idea that this multibillion-dollar capitalist industry is not above criticism, the most vocal strand of the SWRA movement in the UK and

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in a number of other European countries is linked to the wider anti-
capitalist movement.

Academic, anthropologist and political activist Chris Knight is one of the founders of the IUSW. I interviewed him in 2010 when I was researching an article on the so-called union. At the time, Knight was living in a tent on Parliament Square, London, UK, as part of an anti-
war protest. He said: ‘The whole point of setting the union up is to end prostitution. But there are different ways of going about that. Marx said all workers are prostitutes. If we want to end prostitution we have to end capitalism’.

Ana Lopes, an academic and another founder of the IUSW, said: ‘The name International Union of Sex Workers occurred in a discussion with Chris Knight. It had been agreed in the first meeting that the group’s main aim would be to establish sex work as legitimate work. Therefore it made sense to follow the footsteps of other workers and claim our place in the mainstream trade union movement. The word “international” came from our perception that the industry has gone global and therefore a successful mobilisation of workers should overcome national borders too’.

The IUSW is not an actual union, as I discovered both from whistle-
blowers and extensive research. Offering discounts to its members in self-defence classes and lingerie products, the IUSW is a mouthpiece for pimps and punters. The IUSW was founded in 2000, 3 years before the British-based trades union the GMB\(^\text{12}\) endorsed it and allowed a ‘sex workers’ branch’ to be formed in 2003. The IUSW described itself as the campaigning wing of the sex workers’ branch, but would allow outsiders to believe that the IUSW was the actual branch within the union.

Such organisations are politically motivated lobby groups campaign-
ing for total decriminalisation of the sex trade, hence the number of pimps and punters involved. There appeared to be few people in the organisation who actually sold sex for a living.

Douglas Fox used to be a well-known face of the IUSW. He and his partner John Dockerty run Christony Companions, one of the biggest

\(^{12}\)A general trade union in the United Kingdom, which has more than 631,000 members.
escort agencies in the North East of England. Fox used the GMB membership as a way to legitimise his business. In fact, the GMB logo was used as a kite mark on the Christony Companions website as a way to endorse his ‘product’: the women.

Many members of the IUSW were academics, some doing their research on ‘sex work’.

According to Chris Knight: ‘Ana Lopes achieved a first in 1998/1999 then a masters degree at UCL in 2000 and said “I really want to do something with my knowledge, in particular the sex strike stuff”. When I next saw her she said, “I am a sex worker”. We made a banner and she said that if you are trying to organise a sex strike we need to get into where the commercial sex is going on. We had a sex strike in Soho [a London district which houses a large off-street sex market]. We were on a “no sweat” demonstration and Ana approached a GMB rep and he said “Let’s meet”.

The IUSW, in its heyday, was led by managers who supported the Conservative Party. In fact, they got money from the Conservative Party.

Cambodia: Fake Unions

One human rights activist working on trafficking prevention in Cambodia, who asked not to be named, told me that: ‘A group with trafficking in their title that were pro-prostitution in the early 2000s—they came and helped form the Women’s Network for Unity [WNU] and helped them form the language. It was an outside group that came in, they worked with a lot of the groups in the region and they helped them start. Because Cambodia has built a strong protest movement, we are one of the few garment factories in the region that has a workers’ union, so they have set up a lot of their language to match the garment union workers’ rights’.

In Cambodia, I had arranged to meet a group of women who were members of the sex workers’ union in Phnom Penh, which had been founded by the WNU. The WNU, which has received funding by the
Open Society Foundation, a philanthropic organisation committed to building democratic societies, came out of the Womyn’s Agenda for Change (WAC). Their activities in the first year of operation (2003–2004) included WNU and WAC hosting a visit by two representatives of the INSW. Two members of the WNU secretariat participated in a ‘sex workers’ rights’ conference in Hong Kong on 1 May 2004 and two ‘sex workers’ were sponsored to participate in a UN conference on AIDS in Thailand. So the WAC (also funded by Open Society) had a clear pro-prostitution agenda from the very beginning.

Our meeting was scheduled for 8 a.m. and it had been decided that I would take with me a translator from another Cambodian women’s non-governmental organisation (NGO). On arrival at the venue, we were surprised to find that one of the board members of WNU had also decided to attend. I had received an email from her a few days before I arrived in Cambodia, asking me to submit my questions in advance so that she could reassure the women that my research would be beneficial to them. I did so, including several questions about police corruption and brutality. I assumed, on seeing the board member, who was not herself in prostitution, that she was doing some kind of ‘gatekeeping’ on behalf of the women.

However, all became clear when the women arrived, having been ‘working’ all night. They were warm, open and desperate to tell their stories of the daily violence and abuse they endure from sex buyers, and how much they hated selling sex for a living. They talked over each other, ignoring my questions to start with and simply offloading about how terrible their lives were. The board member would interrupt them regularly and often spoke for them. I asked: ‘What are the benefits of being in the Union?’ and was answered not by the women, but by the board member. She spoke solidly for five min about the benefits for members: for example, if the women are beaten by the police, they are given legal training on their rights; if they are arrested, the WNU


will provide food during the time they cannot work; and if one of the women dies, they will help to buy the coffin. Knowing their rights ‘empowered them’, I was told.

The prostituted women sitting cross-legged on the floor near me looked anything but empowered. Two had babies with them, both born of sex buyers. Another was pregnant with a buyer’s child. At least one was HIV positive. All had been raped on multiple occasions. Each one told me they could get out of prostitution if only they had $200 to buy formal identification papers, because this was the only way to secure legitimate employment such as in the service industry or a factory. When I asked if the WNU could help them do this there was silence.

In the meantime, WNU representatives claim they have 6500 Cambodian ‘sex workers’ on their books, all fighting for ‘sex workers’ rights’. None of the women, the translator told me, used the term ‘sex work’ to describe what they do, or ‘sex worker’ to describe who they are. This language was used by the WNU. One of WNU’s aims is ‘to challenge the rhetoric around sex work, particularly that concerned with the anti-trafficking movement and the “rehabilitation” of sex workers’. All of the women asked where they could get help to escape the hell they were in. And while they endure this, the WNU board members and paid staff travel the region, speaking at ‘sex workers’ rights’ conferences, distorting the voices of the exploited women.

The women I met in Cambodia would really benefit from linking up with the survivor-led abolitionist movement. Every single word said by these women made clear to me how much they hated prostitution. They were openly begging for alternatives, only to be talked over by the coordinator. The coordinator told me that she had been at a regional conference with other ‘sex workers’ rights’ activists. She told me that she had 50,000 ‘sex workers’ in Cambodia signed up to this so-called union. The women I spoke to did not know that they were ‘sex workers’ rights’ activists.

The experience of these women had been colonised. They were being used by this NGO to promote the idea that legalisation would somehow be of benefit to them. The horrific tales the women told me about the violence perpetrated upon them by sex buyers stay with me to this day. But all the coordinator could speak about was the abuse and
exploitation the women suffered at the hands of the male police force. There is no doubt that the police treat women in prostitution appallingly in Cambodia, as they do elsewhere. There is also no doubt that decriminalising the women selling sex would help immeasurably. But the coordinator was not interested in the stories the women had to tell of the everyday abuse within prostitution, perpetrated by pimps and punters. It was blatantly obvious that this did not suit her narrative.

The women had been up all night, being used and abused for enough money to be able to afford food to feed their dependents. They clearly had no idea what a survivor movement would be like. They had no concept of political activism that would put their experiences at the forefront, and that would respect their lived reality. The difference between them continuing to be abused on the streets of Phnom Penh, or in the provinces, was not just the $200 that they would need for identity papers that would allow them to apply for jobs. The biggest barrier was the NGO that was supposed to be helping them. This NGO considered the concept of ‘sex workers’ rights’ to be above and beyond the importance of the lives of the women themselves. I asked the board member if they were planning on raising the money to help the women out of prostitution. She told me: ‘No’.

Feminism Is All About Women Having Personal ‘Choice’ and ‘Agency’

As part of the My Body My Rights campaign, Amnesty International sought to develop a policy around the decriminalisation of sex work. The My Body My Rights campaign seeks to raise awareness of, and advocate for, sexual and reproductive rights. One of the guiding principles of this campaign is that people should be able to exercise autonomy over their bodies, reproductive capacities, and sexual choices. (Amnesty International Australia)

Those engaging in ‘sex work’ often use ‘choice feminism’ to defend prostitution: the notion that a woman choosing to do whatever she wants is performing an inherently feminist act. In accordance with this, the
abolitionist argument is anti-feminist: it is an effort to constrain the ‘free choices’ of other women who are perfectly capable of making their own decisions. Julian Marlowe, a male pro-prostitution activist who was previously involved in escorting writes: ‘[T]o suggest that prostitutes who do not see themselves as victims just don’t know any better is patronising and contradicts the very essence of feminism—the freedom to make one’s own choices’. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this argument is commonly used by women prostituting in relatively independent and low-risk areas of the sex trade.

### Pimps Redefined as ‘Sex Workers’

One argument which is played out on social media and in the press concerns who gets to speak for women in the sex trade or, as the pro-decriminalisation lobby puts it, ‘sex workers’ (a handy way to remove any notion that prostitution is based on the oppression of women).

In Norway I meet with Indian sex-trafficking abolitionist Ruchira Gupta, who has flown in from Delhi to speak at a conference on the sex trade. I ask Gupta about the pro-prostitution lobby in India. ‘The term ‘sex worker’ was literally invented in front of our eyes. There was no poor woman or girl who thought that sex and work should go together. The pimps and brothel keepers who were on salaries began to call themselves sex workers and they became members of their own union. This is the only union in the world where the employers are members along with customers and the academics.’

Valerie Jennes’s book *Making It Work: The Prostitute’s Rights Movement in Perspective* (1993) inadvertently exposes COYOTE founder Margot St James as being strategically dishonest about the organisation consisting largely of women in prostitution when she explains that:

‘COYOTE spokespeople have not taken serious or consistent action to debunk the notion that it is an organization of prostitutes. On the contrary, organizational leaders have been central in creating and

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15Julian Marlowe in Nagle, 2013, *Whores And Other Feminists*. 
promoting the image of COYOTE as an organization that is of and for prostitutes. As a 1988 edition of COYOTE Howls declared on the first page, ‘most members of COYOTE are either prostitutes or ex-prostitutes, with a few non-prostitute allies’.16

Whilst SWRAs often accuse survivors of lying, they themselves are not averse to using the tactic of identifying as a ‘sex worker’ while refusing to disclose in what way they were involved in the sex trade. For example, the ECP could be using the hard left tactic of identifying as a ‘worker’ (in this case, at the coalface of the sex trade) as many privileged Oxbridge graduates did by taking jobs in factories back in the days of radical leftist politics.

Douglas Fox describes himself as a ‘sex worker’ but in fact is co-owner of one of the biggest escort agencies in the North East of England. By my definition, that makes him more pimp than prostitute. Fox is described on the Guardian’s Comment is Free website as ‘… an independent male sex worker. He is an activist for the International Union of Sex Workers and has appeared in a Channel 4 show called The Escort Agency. His agency has been operating for ten years. Most of its 20 escorts are now members of or in the process of becoming members of the IUSW/GMB London branch’.

I interviewed Fox, alongside the feminist writer and union activist Cath Elliott, in 2010 for an article about the IUSW. During our interview, Fox claimed he was a ‘sex worker’ and not a ‘manager’. His partner John owned the agency, said Fox, and he simply helped out ‘as any husband or wife would do’. I asked why he had never identified himself as such previously. Fox said: ‘Well it’s not selling women and it’s not pimping, it’s management. I think John’s a sex worker as much as I’m a sex worker, but I had not come out as being a frontline sex worker, i.e. speaking with and seeing clients’.

In another example, Melissa Gira Grant, pro-prostitution activist and author of Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work,17 refused to tell a Channel 4 news anchor about her involvement in the industry, despite

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having written a book in which she described herself as a ‘former sex worker’ during a debate on the legitimacy of sex work as labour.\textsuperscript{18} Gira Grant, it turned out, was a stripper and webcam girl.\textsuperscript{19}

‘\textit{Trafficking Would Be Bad if It Existed but It Is a Myth Anyway}’

Sex law is often a front for ideology that constrains rather than liberates women. What most appals me about the recent conflation of trafficking and sex work in law and policy is that some feminists support the confusion. These women would normally never dream of telling other women how to behave, because they have fought against imposed constraints in their own lives. (Melissa Dittmore, former inaugural Chair of the Advisory Board of the Sex Workers’ Project)

This stance draws a clear distinction between ‘sex work’ (empowered, chosen, non-violent) and trafficking (dismayed, forced, violent). It is a key argument of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), which presents itself as an anti-trafficking organisation but uses its platform to campaign for drawing a sharp distinction between ‘sex work’ and human trafficking.

Its working paper, ‘Exploring Links Between Trafficking and Gender’, argues that ‘commercial sex work is not inherently exploitative’,\textsuperscript{20} that ‘policies created or actions performed in the name of anti-trafficking have at times resulted in gross human rights violations against sex workers, including economic exploitation and physical and sexual violence by law enforcement’.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18}Gira Grant, M. (2014.) \textit{Playing the whore: The work of sex work}. London: Verso.
\item \textsuperscript{19}Gira Grant, M. (2014.) \textit{Playing the whore: The work of sex work}. London: Verso.
\item \textsuperscript{20}Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, (2010). \textit{Exploring Links Between Trafficking and Gender}, p. 29.
\item \textsuperscript{21}Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, (2010). \textit{Exploring Links Between Trafficking and Gender}, p. 29.
\end{itemize}
This paper also warns against an over-focus on sex trafficking and suggests avoiding using the term: ‘A sole focus on trafficking for the purposes of prostitution can also divert attention and urgently needed resources from human rights violations in other sectors, e.g. labour exploitation’.

This argument ignores: the blurred lines between sexual exploitation, trafficking and so-called ‘chosen’ ‘sex work’, and the evidence that those ‘entering’ prostitution do so with, at the very least, constrained choices.

In its submission to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on prostitution, 2016, the Sussex Centre for Gender Studies argued that: ‘Defining prostitution as violence against women erases sex workers’ rights to agency and autonomy. This places all decision-making about their lives in the hands of the state, reduces their power to act for themselves, and increases the likelihood they will be subject to violence (World Health Organisation 2013, Amnesty International 2015). Since the majority of workers in the sex trade are women, this perpetuates gender inequality (GAATW 2011)’.

The submission continues: ‘If all sex work is violence, there is no way to distinguish between sex workers who are working voluntarily and those who are being exploited, and sexual encounters which are consensual and those which are not’.

The submission includes a defence of sex buyers: ‘Clients who believe that women are commodities and it is impossible to rape a sex worker may be more likely to be violent, exploitative and abusive than those who subscribe to ideas of sex workers’ rights (e.g. that services should be negotiated and that sex workers have a right to be safe) (GAATW 2011). O’Connell Davidson (2003)/ found that men who saw prostitution as a sector of work were more likely to be concerned about trafficking, while those who were most likely to use the services of trafficked sex workers perceived women as commodities and felt that payment signified ownership rather than exchange’.

Here, the author is suggesting that the abolitionist—as opposed to the ‘sex workers’ rights’ approach—can be held responsible for punters becoming violent and abusive.

**Men Who Attack and Murder Women in Prostitution Are ‘Posing as Clients’**

‘Decriminalise now! Stigma kills’ chanted the protesters outside the Swedish Embassy in 2013. Stigma does not kill women in prostitution. Men do.

In an article entitled ‘The Bloody State Gave Him The Power: A Swedish Sex Worker’s Murder’, Pye Jakobsson, in an interview with Caty Simon (whose blog The Virtues of Vice contains articles praising pimps and intravenous drug use), claimed that ‘stigma’ brought about by criminalising punters resulted in the murder of the ‘sex workers’ rights’ activist Petite Jasmine.

Eva Marree Smith Kullander (‘Petite Jasmine’ was the name Kullander used in prostitution) was not, in fact, stabbed to death by stigma, but by her violent ex-partner during a contact visit with the children she had lost custody of several years earlier. Kullander’s murderer was not a pimp or a punter but a domestic abuser. Kullander had not lost her children because, as the Rose Alliance (a ‘sex workers’ rights’ organisation based in Sweden) claimed, she refused to accept that prostitution was bad, but because she was reported to social services for misusing alcohol and drugs.

Following her death, rallies in 36 countries and six continents were held by ‘sex worker’s rights’ organisations calling for full decriminalisation of the sex trade and an end to the laws criminalising demand.

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26There is no evidence that this claim is true.

In an article focusing on Kullander, Gira Grant mentions ‘Dora Özer, a Turkish trans woman who was murdered by “a man posing as a client”’.\(^{28}\) It is unclear why Grant assumes the murderer ‘posed’ as a sex buyer as opposed to actually being a sex buyer. This is a common tactic used by ‘sex workers’ rights’ activists to minimise or deny the endemic violence inherent in the sex trade.

Writing in the *Huffington Post*, Kate L Gould claimed that Özer was also ‘stabbed to death by stigma’, although she said that Özer was ‘murdered by a client’ as opposed to a man masquerading as one. Gould argues that the cause of Özer’s murder was the Government closing some of its 54 State-run brothels.\(^{29}\)

Carol Leigh, the COYOTE spokesperson who coined the term ‘sex work’, made a video about the two murders,\(^{30}\) and also claims that Özer’s killer was ‘posing’ as a client. It makes me wonder why Ugly Mugs\(^ {31}\) (schemes that circulate information regarding violent and abusive punters to women in prostitution and advocacy services) exists if no actual punter is responsible for violence against prostituted women?

Since decriminalisation in New Zealand, as documented in an article by Penny White on *Feminist Current*,\(^ {32}\) several prostituted women have been murdered. In Germany, there are at least 55 women who have been murdered by punters during the past 14 years, and in the Netherlands that figure is 28. I have been unable to find any evidence of a single ‘sex workers’ rights’ protest organised on behalf of these murdered women.

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\(^{31}\)National Ugly Mugs (NUM). Retrieved 16 June 2017, from [https://uknswp.org/um/about/](https://uknswp.org/um/about/).

‘Prostitution Is not About Gender Inequality or Patriarchy’

In their research into ‘Statistics on Sex Work in the UK’, Nicola Smith and Sarah Kingston argue that:

Perhaps the most dominant stereotype of commercial sexual exchange is that only women sell sex. This was not borne out by our analysis, which found that one in three (33%) people advertising as escorts self-identified as male. In addition, 4% of escorts self-identified as trans, of whom 70% self-identified as female, 27% as male and 3% as non-binary. Just under 63% of total escorts self-identified as female. Our findings support those of another recent, large-scale survey, the Student Sex Work Project, that sex work does not equate to ‘women’s work’ – indeed, male students were found to be more likely than female students to engage in commercial sexual activity.

The study was not about sex buyers. It was solely about one escort prostitution website’s advertising. What is advertised is not necessarily what you get. That is true in all advertising, not just in the case of prostitution.

They continued:

The site isn’t specifically/primarily geared towards LGBT/Q escorts, although it does have a partner site that is. Another recent, large-scale study found that many more sex workers are male than is conventionally assumed is the Student Sex Work Project, which found that male students were actually more likely to engage in sex work than were female students.

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I emailed Nicola Smith, co-author of the report, a number of questions, all of which she politely responded to. For example, why did they choose to not name the website they relied on to gather their data? Smith responded by arguing that it was simply to protect the anonymity of those advertising on the site.

I asked why the authors concluded that prostitution should not be seen as an issue of women’s gender inequality, when it was known that the majority in the sex trade are female? I further asked if they gathered any supportive evidence, other than relying on data from one website, that rising numbers of sex buyers are women? Smith responded by saying that: ‘We do not claim that most clients are women but rather that a large proportion of people advertising as escorts on the website advertise to women, which we believe troubles assumptions that “most” clients are men’. But ‘advertising to women’ is not the same as ‘women paying for sex’.

The report states: ‘Calls for national policy to follow a “Swedish model” of criminalisation depend upon constructions of sex workers as victimised women and their clients as predatory men. Our research directly contradicts such assumptions, and instead points to a diversity of identities and practices in the contemporary sex trade’.36

The aim of ‘de-gendering’ the sex trade is to argue against those of us who point out women’s structural oppression in relation to men, and to argue that it should never be included in legislation, policy or discourse about violence against women.

Discrediting Abolitionists

The denunciations of decriminalisation come from a strange alliance of feminists who regard all sex workers (including porn stars and strippers) as victims of oppression and Christians who see them as drenched in

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depravity. Both exploit the sense that some types of sex are shameful, dangerous and intolerable – an attitude that long fuelled the persecution of gays. (Steve Chapman, 2015) 37

This argument positions abolitionists as prudes who are ‘anti-sex’. A key tactic of activists who use this argument is to draw comparisons between abolitionists and religious moralists.

For example, in an article entitled ‘If You’re Against Sex Work, You’re A Bigot’, 38 ‘sex worker’ Conner Habib calls abolitionists ‘anti-sex activists’ and compares an argument made by an abolitionist about the bodily impact of prostitution (vaginal tearing, pregnancy, disease) with a Christian, anti-gay YouTuber on the damage caused to the rectum through anal sex: ‘Same gesture, same hate, same simplifications’.

This argument ignores the fact that feminist abolitionists’ reasons for opposing the legalisation of prostitution are not built on flimsy moralistic grounds but on solid research on violence and coercion in prostitution. It also ignores the strong links between LGBT and feminist activism.

In Chap. 10, we explore the attack on abolitionists/survivors in more detail.

The Attack on Abolitionists as Racists and Colonialists

In a charming little piece, written by white transgender activist Paris Lees, entitled ‘Ban sex work? Fuck off white feminists’, published in that well-known bastion of women’s liberation Vice magazine, 39 the notion that it is desirable to end prostitution was ridiculed.

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The slur ‘white feminism’ is now commonly used by pro-prostitution ‘feminists’ to discredit abolitionists. In fact it has recently become shorthand for describing radical feminists, particularly those who campaign to end male violence towards women and girls. The implication is that those who practise ‘white feminism’ are far more privileged than those who are in political opposition to them. In the past it was used by black and other minority ethnic feminists to critique feminists who failed to understand or recognise the privilege afforded to white people. It was never used against women of colour, and certainly never used by white women towards women of colour. By implication, Lees is denying the existence of survivor abolitionists and any woman of colour in the movement. This omission is particularly shocking, as well as insulting, bearing in mind the disproportionate number of women of colour who are prostituted.

Lees, who was raised male and, prior to his transition, was briefly involved in the sex trade, felt qualified to lecture abolitionists about how cruel it would be to ‘ban sex work’ while some women were ‘relying on food banks’.

There appears to be something missing from this analysis. Not only are abolitionists assumed to be speaking for women in the sex trade, they are also assumed to be white. Or, a political category that Lees has devised where ‘White’ is capitalised, used as an adjective and employed to describe women of colour who dare to speak against the sex trade. Bearing in mind that the abolitionist movement is led by survivors, this seems not only patronising but also massively and embarrassingly ill informed.

‘Take the open letter to Amnesty International [AI], signed by Lena Dunham, Meryl Streep and Emma Thompson last week’, writes Lees in another article,40 giving the impression that, because those three signatories are white, wealthy and successful, all signatories were. Nothing could be further from the truth. I asked Taina Bien-Aimé, Executive Director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), her view of the accusation that the letter to AI was, as Crabapple suggested, signed by ‘many fancy white ladies’. In response, Bien-Aimé, who is of Haitian

heritage and very familiar with the argument about ‘White Feminism’ in relation to the abolitionist movement, sent me a breakdown of the signatories to the letter: ‘I counted about 50 (known) Caucasian women out of 400 plus’, says Bien-Aimé. ‘The vast majority of survivors who signed are of colour. Not a bad percentage for “White Feminism”’.

‘Sex workers need a voice’, Lees continues in the *Vice* article. ‘There are a handful of current and former sex workers in the public eye – Brooke Magnanti, Stoya and Molly Smith for starters – but we’re a teensy minority.’ One small fact had clearly escaped Lees: all three aforementioned women are white. Magnanti is hardly representative of the women in prostitution: she describes herself as a former ‘high-class call girl’, has a doctorate, has written several books and has made a fortune from the television adaptation of her life in prostitution. Lees speaks from a media platform, and Smith is from a middle-class background and is involved in the campaign to legalise the sex trade.

Another white feminist who is offended by ‘White Feminism’ is Gira Grant, who wrote in an article (in which she blamed ‘White Feminists’ for Donald Trump being elected)\footnote{http://theweek.com/articles/668061/what-feminism-age-trump.} that ‘Black feminists and womanists, queer feminists, Arab feminists, disabled feminists, trans feminists, and sex worker feminists, to name just a few, have long called for white feminism’s funeral’.

I met Siouxsie Q, a ‘sex worker’, porn performer and journalist based in California at the Los Angeles Porn Awards in 2015. She also defines abolitionist politics as ‘white feminism’:

\begin{quote}
I think the problem with feminist abolitionists and sex work is that they are rooted in the white middle-class rescue industry. White Feminism has historically been something for the middle class to do, and white feminists have really tried to rescue different marginalised populations, dating back to the very beginnings of feminism, the first wave when it was linked to the slavery abolitionists. I’m not saying that’s a bad thing – we do have to acknowledge that as white people we are trying to rescue poor unfortunate brown people. It’s not quite what we know is good in the social justice – what you actually do is you go to marginalised groups and say ‘Hey, what do you need? What do you want? How can I help with
my privileged resources?’ That’s not what I see with feminist abolition sex work, folks.

Academic and pro-prostitution lobbyist Thaddeus Gregory Blanchette, anthropologist at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, also seems to think that only ‘privileged’ feminists are critical of the sex trade. In 2016, Blanchette wrote on his blog: ‘I go in and out of brothels every week, registering working conditions, talking to the women, counting clients, passing out literature. All things none of these young, white, middle class women would ever dream of doing. And I am a pimp, simply for relating to whores. Of course, whores have it worse. I guess I can say I am now finally feeling a part of the stigma attached to them’.42

It is telling that white, highly educated men and women vilify those who campaign to end the sex trade, when the vast majority of prostituted women and girls are poor and otherwise disadvantaged. Vast numbers of Native women and women of colour populate the sex trade,43 and the survivor/abolitionist movement reflects this.

Abolitionists Don’t Listen to ‘Sex Workers’

One of the most exploitative things anti-sex bigots do is select voices of former sex workers who’ve had terrible experiences and prop those voices up as representative of the entire population, even though they’re not. (Conner Habib, ‘sex worker’ and journalist)

This argument completely ignores the fact that most studies show the vast majority of ‘sex workers’ experience high levels of rape, sexual assault, physical violence and harassment. It also ignores the fact that many of the most vulnerable people in prostitution—children, for example—cannot safety advocate for themselves, and therefore visible ‘voices’ of sex work can never represent the true picture.

Sex Work Is Helpful and Liberating to Women Who’ve Been Sexually Abused

Prostitution is described as ‘cathartic’ in that it is a way to deal with the negative effects of male violence rather than an extension of it. For example, Alison Bass in her book *Getting Screwed* argues that:

Just as sex work can be an avenue for some women to take control in a situation where they had none, some sex workers and psychologists see it as a way to triumph over tragedy. That’s certainly how Maddy Colette, the high-end escort from North Carolina, frames it. When Maddy was 17 and on a vacation trip to Costa Rica with her mother, she was violently raped and left for dead … At the age of 18, Maddy went to live in Spain, and that’s where she began working as an escort.44

When interviewed by Bass, Maddy added: ‘My Spanish clients were paying me thousands of Euros and it was very empowering. They gave me extravagant gifts, took me out to the opera. That feeling of being in control helped me heal’.45

Whilst sex trade survivors routinely describe the everyday reality of prostitution as ‘violence’, ‘sex workers’ rights’ lobbyists claim that the only violence comes from the police and other state actors.

‘The Nordic Model Puts ‘Sex Workers’ in More Danger’

Frankie Mullin is a journalist with a longstanding involvement in ‘sex work’, based in the UK. I asked Mullin, who writes about the ‘failures’ of the Nordic Model,46 why she was so against criminalising demand.

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‘Jumpy, paranoid men make dangerous clients,’ says Mullin. ‘Picture yourself trying to arrange a meeting with someone who refuses to give their name, or trying to discuss safety or condom-use on the street with a man who is terrified being arrested. You’ll be forced to work in more isolated areas, possibly later at night. You’ll have less time to negotiate before you climb into someone’s car. Police will be watching you because that’s how they’ll catch the buyers.’

In the 18 years the Nordic Model has been operational in Sweden, not one prostituted person has been killed by a sex buyer. But the argument persists, with academics such as Jay Levy, whose book, *Criminalising the Purchase of Sex: Lessons from Sweden*\(^\text{47}\) giving credence to such claims.

‘How can women in Sweden be in more danger than they were before the law?’ asks Simon Häggström, a police inspector from the Prostitution Unit of the Stockholm Police. ‘When all she has to do is pick up the phone, even if [the punter] is rude to her, and we will arrest him because he is already committing a crime.’

Many of those high-profile pro-prostitution lobbyists who speak as ‘sex workers’ are what I would call ‘tourists’. Melissa Gira-Grant for example, who is highly educated and earning her living as a journalist; Brooke Magnanti, who holds a PhD, has written several books, and worked as a scientist; and Douglas Fox, whose partner owns one of the largest escort agencies in Britain, are not representative of the sex trade.

The model of framing prostitution as labour, and decriminalising the entire market, would be the best model for the ‘tourists’ and is the sensible approach to take. But it would work simply because these women (and men) are atypical, privileged ideologues. They are the student revolutionary International Socialists\(^\text{48}\) of the 1960s, taking a job in a factory to be close to ‘the people’. This bourgeois model does not work for those who have been drawn into the sex trade by horror and abuse rather than by ideological choice. And such women make up the majority of those in prostitution.

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Their arguments work because of the very women and men making the argument—the privileged minority. This is why the public are convinced by it, because it is coming from the mouths of those who appear to have done rather well out of prostitution. The next chapter will look at the way that the pro-prostitution lobby have become adept at disguising the harm and horrors of the international sex trade.