

# Review Essay: *Mothers, Mothering and Sex Work*

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## Book Under Review

DeJong, Monique Marie and Rebecca Jaremko Bromwich. *Mothers, Mothering and Sex Work*. Bradford: Demeter Press. 2015. 200 pp.

Sex work and mothering are identities that, in the spaces where they intersect, challenge stereotypical notions of what it means to be either. Patriarchal understandings of sex work and motherhood force the experiences of women into tight spaces, within limited discourses; this book challenges those stereotypes, opening up the process of meaning making to prioritize the voices of lived experience.

This book is a multimedia collection of both academic and non-academic pieces on sex work and mothering that examines and challenges mechanisms of social control around both. What it means to be a sex worker, a mother, and more importantly, what it means to embody both identities at once, is defined by women within the context of their own lives; that in and of itself is an inherently political endeavour.

The greatest strength of this book is the inclusion of pieces by women with sex working experience, and the presentation of their stories and multimedia work within a highly politicized context. Too often researchers and academics speak over and for people who do sex work; when their voices are heard, the stories are often taken out of context, depoliticized as a result, and presented in support of some ultimate truth about sex work. That process, at worst, results in furthering a highly stigmatized discourse around sex work, and at best presents accounts of sex work for no other purpose than the explicit voyeurism of the reader. In contrast, this collection highlights the politicality inherent in women's tellings of their own experiences, and situates these personal accounts as critical analysis of the socio-political context in which sex work happens, including sex work laws, "social policy, child protection, regulatory frameworks, structures of power in a variety of social regimes, and discursive structures" (p. 12).

The editors of this book understand that there is no one truth or shared experience in sex work (or mothering), and have chosen pieces from women with a wide variety of lived experiences to demonstrate that. The diversity of contributors means that space is opened

to explore the intersections of not only mothering and sex work, but also of race, class, age, migratory status, sexuality, and drug use, among other themes.

These chapters are presented within the context of an introduction in which the editors aim to outline the current legislative context of sex work in Canada. My only criticism of this book is of the introduction, where a confusion of terms leads me to believe that the editors are not entrenched in, or even familiar with, the world of sex work activism or academic work in Canada. On page 8, the authors state: "In recent decades considerable debate has raged between "abolitionists"... and other scholars and activists who would like to see sex work legalized," and on page 13, they then go on to use the words decriminalization and legalization interchangeably. In sex work activism, legalization and decriminalization are not interchangeable terms, and denote two very different legal circumstances around sex work. A full discussion of the differences is beyond the scope of this review, but It is decriminalization, not legalization, that is fought for by sex workers and allied groups who wish to increase the human rights and safety of sex workers. The introduction would have been strengthened by a better unpacking of the terms criminalization, decriminalization and legalization, as well as a discussion of the important differences between them.

As a woman who runs a human rights based sex worker outreach program in Newfoundland, as well as a member of the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform and academic who has researched with people who do sex work in NL, I believe that this book is an excellent addition to the field. This collection as a whole broadens understandings by presenting a myriad of lived experiences and meanings related to sex work. It is well suited for both graduate and undergraduate courses on relevant topics, and is also an excellent read for anyone looking to gain insight into what it means to inhabit two seemingly conflicting, and highly stigmatized identities.