BCULST 593A/BIS 490: Commercial Sex Work, Sexual Health, and Global Human Rights
W 5:45-10:00 pm

Commercial sex workers have long had the dubious honor of being simultaneously glamorized, pitied, and condemned. And since the passing of the 2000 Trafficking Victim Protection Act (TVPA), sex workers have now also become equated with victims of human trafficking and in need of rescue.

This discursive shift has created significant funding shifts toward federal, state, and local policing agencies. Many evangelical Christian groups, media producers, neighborhood associations, and women’s/feminist groups have also provided enthusiastic support of law enforcement’s fight against human trafficking in the sex industry (AKA “sex trafficking.”) These social shifts have lead critical scholars to critique U.S. based anti-trafficking efforts as addressing social problems with criminal justice vs. social justice solutions, and hence feeding the “carceral state.”

This course will examine the working conditions of sex workers across the industry in the US (with differing levels of coercion vs. autonomy) as well as the politics and logics underlying those who organizing “for”, “against”, or “around” sex work. The course readings will focus most intensively on sex work and human trafficking in the U.S. with a focus on the sexual health and human rights of individuals in the sex trade. In so doing we will examine the best available empirical evidence on both sex work and human trafficking, and assess how U.S. based sexual politics impact cultural understandings and policies about both.

Students interested in issues pertaining to sexuality, gender, global health, worker’s rights, human rights, immigration, and carceral politics will find many points of resonance with the course materials. Students will be expected to keep up with a heavy reading load, short writing assignments and in a final written and/or creative project.

For more information, please contact the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Graduate Office at 425.352.3406 or visit www.uwb.edu/culturalstudies