

“Think of sex workers and one usually thinks of women” is the opening gambit of this volume which aptly sets the scene through which to challenge heteronormative conceptions of commercial sexual encounters. This multidisciplinary, transnational volume represents the first comprehensive edited collection of male sex work and its circular relationship to societal norms and practices. Fusing together rich qualitative and vast quantitative data, the volume provides extensive insight into experiences of the sale and purchase of sex for men, issues surrounding male sex work regulation and provides practical advice and intellectual critiques of barriers to sexual health and safety promotion and practice. These important dimensions are contextualized in contemporary and historical contexts, across different spaces and countries. Key changes brought about by the advent of the Internet and newer digitally mediated communications are also well documented. The book comprises four sections, beginning with detailed analyses of the historical and social context of male sex work, before moving on to discuss economic and marketing dimensions. Many different issues pertaining to health, policy, regulation and client experiences are covered in the third section, before the final section considers the global dimensions of sex work outside the usual focus upon the US and UK contexts.

The strength of the book is in its emergent themes, which build upon and expand previous research insights to highlight what is potentially distinctive about male sex work. Of particular interest is the discussion of how sex workers both challenge social constructions of masculinity, together with disrupting popular conceptions of male sex work. Tyler's chapter draws out the ways in which sex workers may sometimes “blur” the boundaries between sex work and body work (Tyler, 2014, p. 90), and both Laing and Gaffney and Maginn and Ellison's chapters indicate that for some men, “sex worker” is not their overriding identity category, but rather sex work is experienced as a transitory period which they “dip in” to (Maginn & Ellison, 2014, p. 455). Logan also explores how sex workers potentially re-frame their experiences in relation to hegemonic masculinity, even at the same time as hierarchies of masculinity may be reproduced. These refusals to categorize, and/or the more fluid identifications that may be possible, perhaps point to the ways in which sex work can be re-read in potentially “queer” ways (Laing, Pilcher, & Smith, 2015). Laing, M., Pilcher, K., & Smith, N. (2015). *Queer sex work*. London: Routledge.

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Through an embodied approach, aiming to counter “sterile and mechanical” writings regarding male sex work (Minichiello & Scott, 2014, p. x), male sex workers’ lived experiences and their self-identifications are positioned at the centre. We are also offered a window into the world of male sex work clients, as Kong's and Scott et al.’s insightful chapters demonstrate. While the book largely focuses upon men who have sex with men in commercial encounters, it begins to explore women as customers of male sex workers. Scott et al.’s chapter provides an interesting analysis of women clients’ characterizations of their sex work encounters on Internet forums. The volume suggests that the “sexual scripts” (Sanders, 2008). Sanders, T. (2008). Male sexual scripts: Intimacy, sexuality and pleasure in the purchase of commercial sex. *Sociology*, 42(3), 400–417. doi: 10.1177/0038038508088833

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[View all references](#)) of male sex workers and clients are complex and multiple, rather than there being any simple or one-dimensional experience that characterizes the purchase or sale of sex.

By creating a useful connection with wider sex work research and drawing further attention to literal and figurative violence experienced by sex workers, the book highlights the stigma, or perhaps the “double” stigma, that male sex workers face in different social arenas and countries, due to connections with homosexuality and the performance of sex work. Links are

drawn between experiences of stigma and feelings of isolation (Niccolai, 2014, p. 353), and how experiences of stigma act as a barrier to accessing sexual health services (Boyce & Isaacs, 2014, p. 293), building upon insights about similar issues facing women sex workers (for example, see Clark, 2009). Clark, L. (2009). Street sex workers' experience of accessing health services: A report for the Department of Health. *The Griffiths Society*. March 2009. Retrieved from http://www.uknswp.org/wp-content/uploads/Griffins_Society.doc

[View all references](#)). Koken and Bimbi's (2014) chapter highlights strategies that male sex workers may draw upon to mediate stigma, including how they construct themselves as "professional" as an "identity-management strategy" (p. 227). This is a similar finding to my research with male erotic dancers which found dancers constructed a professional work status to counter stigma, but did so through Othering different forms of sex work as a boundary-forming mechanism which ultimately reproduces problematic social hierarchies within the sex industry (Pilcher, forthcoming). *Male Sex Work and Society* also touches upon the stigma surrounding sex work as a field of study (Crofts, 2014, p. 180), something receiving greater critique within academic debates (Hammond & Kingston, 2014). Hammond, N., & Kingston, S. (2014). Experiencing stigma as sex work researchers in professional and personal lives. *Sexualities*, 17(3), 329–347. doi: 10.1177/1363460713516333

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[View all references](#); Pilcher, forthcoming).

As the editors point out in their conclusion, I found discussion within some chapters of how ageing mediates sex work performances particularly illuminating. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given many societies culturally valorize and privilege youthful embodiments, male sex work participants in Laing and Gaffney's (2014) survey indicated they would leave sex work when they were "too old" (p. 279). Maginn and Ellison's (2014) chapter also suggests clients may be "discriminatory" towards older male sex workers, which limits the "durability" of their careers (p. 449), and Boyce and Isaacs (2014) argue that embodied concerns about ageing can lead to "anxiety about what happens after sex work" (p. 305). Such insights could be usefully extended in future research to fuse connections with the sociology of ageing literature. Minichiello and Scott's (2014, p. 464) suggestion that older male sex workers may be read by clients as physically desexualized could be further connected with literature which discusses tensions in competing constructions of older men as simultaneously desexualized and yet required to present themselves as "forever functional" in discourses of "active" ageing (Marshall & Katz, 2002). Marshall, B., & Katz, S. (2002). Forever functional: Sexual fitness and the ageing male body. *Body & Society*, 8(4), 43–70. doi: 10.1177/1357034X02008004003

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While the book seeks to move beyond debates which position the sex worker as a passive victim who is subject to inherent repression (Minichiello & Scott, 2014, p. 462), critical discussions of the operation of power are still prevalent. Chapters highlight specific power dynamics that manifest within client/worker interactions. For example, Boyce and Isaacs (2014, p. 300) offer a fascinating discussion of the keeping/breaking of "secrets" between sex workers and clients. Further examples critique the wider governance and regulation of sexuality and sexual practices in different spaces and societies. The book focuses on the globalization of intimacy, with many chapters suggesting that new communication technologies and increased travel opportunities have facilitated the growth and scope of male sex work. Yet, how global dimensions are mediated by powerful tensions are also critically considered. Kong's chapter, for instance, illustrates that global sexual economies are not only fuelled by the individual "choices" of sex workers and clients, but are also underpinned by

the demands of global capitalism. Further, Logan's chapter, among others, highlights the intensity and proliferation of racialized power relations. Practically, the editors' chapter synopses provide insight into how they envision each chapter advancing our understanding(s) of male sex work. Colour images, somewhat refreshing for an academic book, are interspersed throughout the text, which Minichiello and Scott (2014) suggest highlights "the visibility of the male sex industry in popular culture and to show how we as society portray male escorts" (p. xi). I argue that the images can potentially convey more than this: these illustrations are a powerful means through which the male sex industry is greater brought "to life" for the reader, and also offer another avenue for the book to achieve its aim of highlighting the "lived experiences" of male sex workers. The images depicting advertisements from male sex workers across print and Internet media and throughout different time periods often contrast sharply with the (stereotypical and problematic) depictions of male sex workers in popular culture. Additionally, the vivid illustrations from outreach campaigns highlight tensions that campaigners negotiate in trying to reconcile potentially differing representational practices and lived experiences. Combining theoretical debates with empirical case studies and intriguing snapshots and anecdotes from "the field" with vivid illustrations and recommendations for sex work policy and practice, this volume is a valuable and entertainingly composed text suitable for a wide readership. Irrespective of one's "take" on sex work debates, this volume provides a comprehensive insight into the male sex industry. Its key strength, is in documenting the embodied experiences of male sex workers and their clients and its quest to challenge myths and misconceptions that currently permeate popular social imaginations.

References

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