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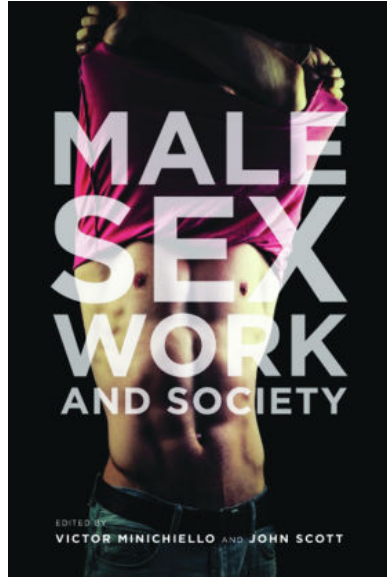


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WINDY CITY TIMES

BOOK REVIEW Male Sex Work and Society by Terri Schlichenmeyer 2014-11-05



Edited by Victor Minichiello and John Scott. \$50; Harrington Park . Press; 512 pages

Money does strange things to a fellow.

It can lead to greed, dishonesty, mistrust and even murder. It changes friendships and families. Money puts people on a shelf and it puts food in a man's stomach, which is what you needed back when you did what you did.

You're not proud of it—or maybe you are since, according to the authors of Male Sex Work and Society, edited by Victor Minichiello and John Scott, sex for money has gained social acceptance.

When most people think of sex workers, female prostitutes come to mind. There is evidence, however, that the world's oldest profession may have had practitioners of both sexes all along.

It's a widely accepted fact that ancient Greek and Roman men took younger males as lovers, and acted somewhat as mentors. That was appropriate behavior—encouraged, even—as long as the older man didn't "exploit" his younger friend. Slaves and former slaves, however, were a different matter: they "were forced to engage in survival sex," usually for an insultingly low price.

That was the case in 1607, when the Jamestown colonists tried to tough out their first winter; documents exist that mention exchanging certain favors for stolen biscuits. Meanwhile, on the other side of the pond, British male sex workers enjoyed tolerance—as long as they represented themselves as their true biological gender. Transgender people were arrested for cross-dressing.

By the late 1800s, those attitudes changed, too. Both Europe and the United States saw a great number of biological males who dressed and worked as female prostitutes. Many worked in all-male brothels;

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some specialized in women as clients and others worked the streets.

It's believed that the preponderance of male sex workers by the 1960s were gay, although gay writers in those Stonewall years sometimes made issue of the sexual identification of clientele. Were customers of gay sex workers straight or gay themselves?

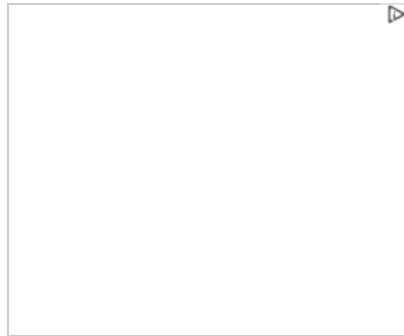
The answer today, according to male escorts, is that a "significant percentage" of male customers are straight and "many" are married. Furthermore, modern male sex workers utilize paid advertising, which makes it easy for clients to consciously choose partners based on specific preferences. And now, as it was centuries ago, male sex workers most commonly said in a survey that they choose to sell sex for economic reasons.

By its very nature, pleasure reading should be a pleasure. Alas, Male Sex Work and Society is not.

But let me define that further: This is not a bad book—it's just way more academic than I expected, more than a curl-up-by-the-fireplace read should be. The essays here feel like college theses or doctoral dissertations; indeed, in their acknowledgments, Minichiello and Scott say how much they enjoyed working with contributing scholars. There's a definite place for such erudite work, but it's probably not by the easy chair.

Overall, again, this isn't a bad book. It's good, but I think academes and social workers will get much more from it. For casual readers, Male Sex Work and Society is probably not worth the money.

Want more? Look for Rent Boys: The World of Male Sex Trade Workers, by Michel Dorais, translated by Peter Feldstein; or Male Sex Work: A Business Doing Pleasure, by Todd G. Morrison and Bruce W. Whitehead.



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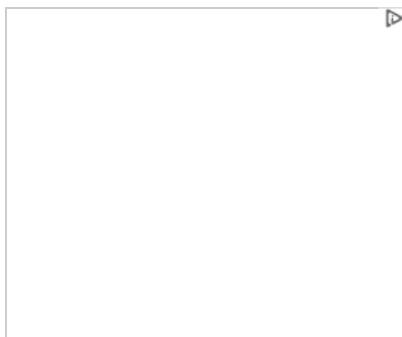
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