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Bindel, J., *The Pimping of Prostitution: Abolishing the Sex Work Myth*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017; 355 pp.: ISBN 978-1-137-55889-3, £22.50 (pbk).

Sanders, T., O'Neill, M., and Pitcher, J., *Prostitution: Sex Work, Policy & Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., SAGE Publications Ltd, London, 2017, 276 pp.: ISBN-978-1-47398-935-1, (pbk)

*Prostitution: Sex Work, Policy & Politics* is a comprehensive primer for undergraduate and postgraduate students and researchers on prostitution and sex work in the UK and beyond. The authors seek to take the reader beyond the stereotypes and assumptions about the sex industry.

There is a strong focus in the book on both the sociological understandings of sex work (Chapter 1) and the importance of making sense of the practice of buying and selling sex in the context of contemporary capitalism, globalisation and technological change (Chapters 2 and 9). Chapter 3 explores the demographics of those involved in selling sex, routes in and out and managing harm. Chapter 4 addresses the involvement of children and young people in paid sex and/or being sexually exploited. The careful discussion within this chapter about how we make sense of young people's agency in terms of the replacement of the term 'youth prostitution' with 'child sexual exploitation' is important. Chapter 5 considers who pays for sexual services with the attendant policy and criminal justice responses are outlined in Chapter 7. Chapter 6 on sex workers, labour rights and unionisation is important in documenting the emergence of a social movement, galvanised in part by the identification of HIV/AIDS. Chapter 8 explores the conflicting discourses of welfare, community and justice through which sex sellers and buyers are variously supported or chastised. Chapter 10 is another strength to this book, exploring feminist epistemology and methods and considering the practical and theoretical issues raised by research with sex workers, buyers and third parties.

In terms of format, the typologies presented in the book (for example, sites of direct and indirect sex work (p.29) or male involvement in buying sex across the life course (p.109)); are particularly helpful for teachers and students alike, as are the identification of research gaps (most of which, illustratively, carry over from the 2009 to the 2018 edition) and study questions. The liberal use of sub-headings in places, the listing of legislation or the summarising of existing research using bullet points chapters are on the one hand useful and succinct; but can also make for a piecemeal read in these sections (particularly Chapter 4, pp.86-90; parts of Chapter 7).

There is not a great deal of new material updating the first edition in 2009 – notable edits concern the expansion of online activity, the influence of queer theory, shifts in policy discourse and related legislative change. Yet this arguably underlines the prescience of the first edition, published at a point where changes in the industry and in policy were marked.

In places, I would say that the book struggles to reconcile the intersection of gender and power *and* capitalism and consumption within the sex industry. The authors claim that:

“Laying the ‘blame’ for the rise in the sex industry just at the door of certain types of heterosexual men is missing the point that the commodification of sex is prolific and entrenched in capitalism and consumption” (p.122).

They also point to the:

“breadth of literature on who buys sex indicates that the sex industry caters for many different groups of people and sexualities rather than just men buying sex from women” (p.121)

Yet as the thin content in Chapter 5 on women paying for sex (partly due to a paucity of research, but partly due to a paucity of activity) and the following reflection on male buyers suggests, consumption *is* gendered:

“the first thing to say about the largest group of purchasers of sex is there is no ‘type’ and that men who engage with the female sex industry are from all walks of life across the population” (p. 107))

It is predominantly individuals who identify as male who purchase sexual services from different groups of people and sexualities. And it is the interplay of *masculinity* and capitalism as a social power dynamic which is of interest to gender scholars: a position that can be explored fruitfully without necessarily ‘blaming’ or undermining the agency of individual buyers or sellers of sexual services. Work by Julia O’Connell-Davidson (1998; 2005, for example) is used periodically in the book to make that bridge, but it remains a point of ambivalence. The intersection of sexual identity, ethnicity, migration and economic status are more clearly argued, including the distinctions between migrant workers and victims of trafficking across national borders. International examples are sometimes included in passing, which can be problematic where a more developed understanding of culture and context is needed to draw an informed comparison.

Ambivalence is not a word that could be used to describe Julie Bindel’s book, *The Pimping of Prostitution: abolishing the sex work myth*. This is a work principally of investigative journalism but which engages with the same material of interest to students and scholars of gender, gender violence, prostitution and sex work.

At the outset, Bindel declares her understanding of prostitution and the global sex trade as “built on the exploitation of women by men, and that it could not exist without the institutionalised oppressions of gender, race and class” (p.xix). She relates as key early influences a possible encounter with the serial killer Peter Sutcliffe and her friendship with Emma Humphreys, a victim of prostitution (familial abuse and sexual violence) who had been imprisoned as a teenager for murdering her pimp, and later released following a public campaign.

Chapters 1 and 2 outline her critique of the term ‘sex work’ and the movement for sex workers’ rights and explain the history of abolitionist campaigning to eradicate prostitution. In Chapter 3 she relates her concerns about the mainstreaming and, as she sees it, ‘sanitising’ of the sex trade before addressing arguments about the benefits of legalisation. Chapter 5 considers the sex buyer (the ‘invisible man’) and in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, Bindel contends that different interest groups may claim to speak on behalf of sex workers and in the interests of human rights yet may, at the same time, be profiteering from the status quo. In Chapters 9 and 10, the author spotlights the politics of prostitution within academia and within LGBTQ groups, before finishing in Chapter 11 with stories of surviving the sex trade and a call to action.

Bindel travelled internationally to research this book, carrying out 250 interviews and drawing on existing academic, media and NGO research to inform her narrative. She is unflinching in her analysis of the machinations of alliance-building, schisms and no-platforming within and between different social movements in this field. The author is an outspoken critic of the sex industry and her analysis is internally coherent but also partial. There are no chapters describing the experience of individuals for whom selling sex is a career choice or a sideline to a professional day job or a short-lived period of sexual experimentation. If *Prostitution: Sex Work, Policy & Politics* does not sufficiently address the nexus between capitalism and masculinity, *The Pimping of Prostitution: abolishing the sex work myth* claims that paid sex can only be understood within the hierarchies primarily of gender, but also race and class. Bindel is not saying that there is never choice or consent but that prostitution is inherently harmful to women, whether or not that harm is directly experienced or perceived by those involved.

Both books illustrate the strength of feeling which characterises the study of prostitution and/or sex work in academia, politics and media broadly. Sanders et al. refer to the Nordic model as an “extreme” law and to its proponents as “radical feminists” or the “Christian right” (p.118). Bindel refers to academics who advocate for the sex work perspective as “powerful activists” whose “research’ defer[s] to the sex trade ideology and not academically sound evidence”, which has “detrimental consequences for women and girls, albeit positive consequences for those profiting from this regime of violence” (p.241). As I have written elsewhere:

The illicit nature of sex work and partisanship within the academic field has sometimes meant that, like the blind men and the elephant, our comprehension of prostitution has been extrapolated piecemeal from selective studies. (Mulvihill, in Lombard (ed.), 2017, p.231).

There are however points of connection. All authors agree that those selling sex should be decriminalised and Bindel describes an unlikely connection at a conference with the Swedish sex work activist Petra Östergren, where they reflect on their mutual experience of being targets for abuse for expressing their opinions.

Both books tend to use evidence that supports the authors’ interests and perspectives and both play down the value or impact of dissonant research. My recommendation would be to read both in tandem – read *Prostitution: Sex Work, Policy & Politics* Chapter 6 ‘Sex Workers, Labour Rights and Unionization’ or Chapter 9 ‘International Models of Regulating Sex Work’ and compare respectively with *The Pimping of Prostitution* Chapter 2 ‘The ‘Sex Worker’s’ Rights Movement’ or Chapter 4 ‘Realities & Consequences of Legalisation’. As well as learning about the contemporary sex industry, we can observe also how knowledge of this contested area is produced.

## Reference

Lombard, N., (ed.), 2017. *The Routledge Handbook of Gender Violence*. London and New York: Routledge.

O’Connell-Davidson, J., 1998. *Prostitution, Power and Freedom*. Cambridge: Policy Press.

O’Connell-Davidson, J., 2005. *Children in the Global Sex Trade*. Cambridge: Policy Press.