

follow. This is unfortunately compounded by a couple of editing errors and this had me occasionally wondering whether my inability to draw a coherent sense of meaning, was to do with me or the text or the meaning! Overall the book is a valuable and insightful contribution to theories of identity and community and to cultural histories of sexuality and gender. It would make an exemplary postgraduate text and could be used to inform the work of researchers, activists and community and social movement historians. The mapping of the field and synthesis of a range of contributors makes it a text that could also be useful to selected undergraduate programmes.

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**Taking it off, putting it on: women in the strip trade**

Chris Bruckert, Women’s Press, Toronto, Canada, 2002, ISBN: 0-88961-405-9, £16.50 (Pbk)

Bruckert’s book is a deep and subtle account of the reality of strip clubs in Ontario, which succeeds in the difficult task of remaining critical and self-critical within a debate – the one surrounding sex(ualised) work – which is characterised by harsh divisions. Her confident use of various different approaches – symbolic interactionism, neo-Marxism, discourse analysis – and her political positioning *vis à vis* feminism are fresh and capable of politically engaged research and realistic, un-nostalgic politics. One only wishes that her writing was less didactic.

Her work is grounded in the Ontario skin trade world. Her knowledge comes from her own work experience as a dancer at the end of the 1970s and a bartender in a club in the late 1990s, and from in-depth interviews with 15 women working as dancers. ‘Strippers tell us they are at work; this book is about that work’ (p. 16). A work, however, which is not like any other. Existing on the margins, stripping blurs the boundaries between private and public, presentation and identity, work, and leisure. The author appropriately compares it to other kinds of work performed by women, particularly by working-class women. At the same time, she shows how the specific sexual(ised) character of stripping makes it close to other stigmatised practices and identities (such as non-hetero sexualities).

The author is able to place the Ontario skin trade in a larger social and economic context by simultaneously paying attention to labour and sex cultures. The strip clubs have been changed by the shift toward a model of ‘self-account’ work, a model that began in the 1980s in the market of direct personal services. The changes are de-skilling for workers and push them closer to prostitution in terms of both the sexual and emotional labour required and the social stigmatisation

involved. And yet more ambivalent dynamics are also at work. In particular, the demand for workers has grown, access to stripping is easier, and, interestingly, there has been an erosion of the management's ability to control labour. Under the present regime, employers do not pay dancers directly: dancers exchange labour and bar fees for access to customers with employers, and earn their money by soliciting the customers to purchase 'champagne-room' sessions (private dances in separate rooms). Part of the analysis that Bruckert develops on the strategies of resistance by strippers in Ontario may be valid for a larger population in times or places where the paradoxical situation of being a worker and an entrepreneur destabilises traditional class solidarity and alliances. These transformations are sometimes invisible not only to those who condemn sex(ualised) work altogether but also to those women involved in the strip industry in the 1970s who do not sympathise with the new practices of what has become a service and not any longer an entertainment industry.

If class position has to be taken as always contradictory in Bruckert's work, it nonetheless counts as a recurrent explanation: that is, she exposes the widespread (feminist) condemnation of strip clubs as based on middle-classist assumptions regarding what a satisfying job should be, and regarding moral inferiority of working-class approaches to sexuality.

The lack of attention given to ethnic diversity and migration in the research is at odds with her ability to treat class and sexuality as axes of difference.

As she herself in part recognises being a white Canadian woman has contributed to a superficiality in her analysis of how such aspects shape the strip industry. She ends up making reference to race only in terms of active discrimination, which emerges as absent in Ontario strip clubs.

Otherwise, Bruckert shows a special sensitivity to issues of stigma, and its negotiation, whether in relation to poverty, sexuality, stripping, or prostitution.

Furthermore, she explores with particular lucidity the contradictions underlying processes of emancipation as they exist in the practice of sex(ualised) work – but similar considerations may be applied to gendered services in general. The point is that the alternative scripts that are developed by the workers – that is, the dancers' conception of themselves as workers and of the customers as objects – are subversive precisely because they make explicit the public transcript of sexual (or gendered) relations, but have to some extent to remain hidden in order for the dancers' work itself to exist. This seems absolutely plausible within the club context: the customers' illusion of the 'female available to men' cannot be exposed, since this is what they pay for. However, I would argue that in the public domain, in the collective moment, there is no specific necessity for the alternative dancers' script to remain hidden in order for clients to keep buying sex(ualised) services. It is possible to think that customers are not so strongly attached to the authenticity of the sexual activity they buy: after all their desire is precisely for an

experience that is not 'real sex'. The rethinking of a possibility of clients' collusive position in dancers' script subversion and emancipation might actually be a new starting point for the reflection on the politics of sex(ualised) work.

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### **Sex tourism, marginal people and liminalities**

Chris Ryan and Michael C. Hall; Routledge, London, 2001, ISBN: 0-415-19510-1, £19.99 (Pbk), 0-415-19509-8, £75.00 (Hbk)

*Sex tourism* is based on some interesting theoretical arguments that are presented in the preface. The authors acknowledge that in tourism studies – their field of research – the role of sex is almost ignored. They turn to feminist political and theoretical contributions in order to develop a model of research open to accounts of sex workers and to the authors' (and the reader's) own self-reflection. The project critiques the too-simple definitions of sex tourism used by Western media and law – as well as by many Western political activists – that situate sex tourism 'over there', in a different (Third) world, in which poverty and patriarchal culture on the one hand, and pedophilia and violent instincts on the other, provide a self-containing explanation which depoliticizes the debate. The authors address the contradictions that sex work for tourists create in the societies in which it is practiced. Sex tourism is often simultaneously repressed and promoted by the state. The book tries to place sex tourism, and trafficking in sex tourism, within larger social settings (Chapter 6) and within military and economic global trends (Chapter 7).

Chris Ryan and Michael Hall explicitly define their point of view as that of New Zealanders – their country of residence and work – and refer mainly to New Zealand, Australia and South-East Asia, with a few references to British academic literature. They rely upon relationships with informants involved in the industry as workers and clients, with members of the gay community, and upon their own reflective processes. They repeatedly state their intention of being as clear as possible as far as their own political involvement and personal investments in the subject is concerned. The authors go as far as to admit the pleasurable nature of their scopophilic desire for informants and for the sex tourist's world. However, the connection between this position and the theoretical framework they propose is not fully worked out. Some central points of their argument are also questionable. For example, while they recognize that sex workers are not victims of some fated necessity, but are oppressed by a series of specific conditions that can and should be changed without taking the