[Book review of:] Camming: Money, Power and Pleasure in the Sex Work Industry. By Angela Jones
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writing practices they employed to rephrase Du Bois’s 20th-century sensibilities into 21st-century vocabulary. When reading his work, I am always struck by Du Bois’s strongly judgmental tone in commentary on Black working-class communities. How do we put Du Bois in his historical context as we read? Itzigsohn and Brown’s concluding manifesto makes it clear, however, that these are questions for us to answer, not them, because the road toward a Du Boisian sociology “is an aspirational and collective endeavor” (p. 185).


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Where to begin thinking with a book claiming to provide a “sociology of pleasure” (pp. 7–12)? Angela Jones’s *Camming* offers a roller-coaster ride through the often and, according to mainstream norms, necessarily hidden world of online erotic performances and relationships, camera-guided sex work, and the joys and downsides of its many professional possibilities. The research is based on a multimethod approach, in which critical and qualitative methods provide the depth for an honest and convincing story of problematizing camming as part of a global industry. Some quantitative data serve to picture the vastness of the field and the difficulty of pinpointing categorizations where these are not appropriate, for example, in terms of gender binaries or ethnic and transnational distinctions.

As Angela Jones observes, why is it that in major works about sexuality, real sex, sexual narration, and explicit language are often absent? *Camming* provides an amalgam of real, embodied, and performed sex as a human condition in all its diversities. In tandem, we find a grounded-theory analysis of experiences, views, power relations, and in-depth exploration of norms, taboos, and—not least—the downsides of not being explicit about sexualities: exclusion, ignorance, frustration, and, most of all, persistent reproduction of stigma. Jones’s book provides a lens through which we can witness what happens on both sides of cameras in the (online) sex industries as well as contemplate our taken-for-granted norms and biases about sexualities, as triggers of both consumption and discrimination or exclusion (e.g., via criminalization).

In terms of contents, the book neatly guides us through the world of online performances and relationships and their concomitant struggles of power and interest, of “American dream” careers in an ever-expanding industry of sexuality, desire, fun, and fierce competition. As mentioned before, this is all contextualized by the endeavor of developing a “sociology of pleasure.” Pleasure has historically been subject to power regimes for exerting normative societal control and for feeding sense making into realms of what
is acceptable and desired, or forbidden and taboo. Drawing on the works of Gale Rubin, Michel Foucault, Epicurus, and John Stuart Mill, Jones argues how categorizations of acceptable and unacceptable pleasures serve as normative markers to regulate societies. Established norms serve religious and political authority and societal interests; normativity divides the (Western) world into those who do and do not seek pleasure as virtue and as vice. In sum, “our political institutions require the sacrifice of pleasure for citizenship” (p. 39). All dimensions of the diversity debate emerge in that context: gender, racism, background/class, ableism, and lookism.

Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the world of online pornographic performances, explaining how digitalization enabled expansion of the sex industry into infinite networks of digital supply, demand, and relationships. Or maybe not quite so infinite, as the economic growth paradigm of the branch follows multinational and capitalist rules. It turns out not all pleasurable possibilities are evenly divided across the globe, certainly not where money making and general access to online forums are at stake. We learn how the camming market expanded into an industry with a well-known “task division.” Stakeholders, entrepreneurs, professional managers, and camming models do not always receive equal pay for their hard work. Camming thus convincingly demonstrates how creative entrepreneurship provides a very good living for some and exploitation for others. The fact is that camming, differing from other forms of sex work, does provide freedom of working times, relatively safe working conditions (even under COVID-19), and the involvement of emotion and creative forms of embodiment that are rare in most contexts of professions that do not have to navigate the fine lines of legal acceptance.

Gradually, a rhythm in the style of argument becomes clear. All chapters set out with enthusiastic and engaging information, revealing worlds that indeed are not so common for the average sociologist; and then we face downsides, exclusion, exploitation, and the odd activism. In chapter 4, we learn about global difference in sexual preferences that all too often mirror racist and biased inclinations and unequal access to camming across the globe. In chapter 5, we find in-depth narratives of enjoyment and risk during work (“being paid to have orgasms”), revealing how people become resilient and creative in contexts of danger, aggression, and semi-illegality. Chapter 6 deals with the bonding of people (the camily) under sometimes dire working conditions and transnational competition. And camming requires performance. In chapter 7 we find out about the real art of navigating between expressions of sexual embodiment and customers’ fantasies and demands. Chapter 8 stands out as it explicitly deals with an elephant in many rooms: the positioning of black models—reflecting a mixture of racist and fetish preferences, while at the same time revealing how the character of the work as “hidden” triggers risk, enjoyment, and exploitation. Chapters 5, 7, and 8 were published as journal articles in slightly different form. However, finding these chapters in the context of the full book reminds us of the importance of elaborate and varied insights that are only possible via a volume like this.
The concluding chapter, as may be expected, takes an unorthodox form. It does not provide a summary but—refreshingly—deals with the inevitable impact of the study in its activist and emancipatory undercurrent. How do current norms, policies, and politics require revision in order to maintain the industry as one of liberation? Not only in terms of sex work expressing pleasure and representing real work under equally real capitalist conditions, but as a world that mirrors the lack of freedom for pleasure and persistence of stigma in our societies. Ongoing criminalization implies not only exclusion and discrimination of professionals; in fact, the (further) tabooing of the sex industry under capitalist, “free” market conditions shows how information about our sexualities is being kept away and necessarily rendered unmentionable. Margaret Atwood’s Gilead world in the making.


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The heart of George Lawson’s ambitious new book _Anatomies of Revolution_ is a series of narratives and analyses of several revolutions, failed revolutions, and quasi revolutions: the English Civil War and Glorious Revolution; the Cuban Revolution; the crises in Chile in 1973 and 1983–86; the Iranian Revolution; the antiapartheid struggle in South Africa; and the “revolutionary coups” of 2004 and 2013–14 in Ukraine. This long section is followed by a chapter that examines, rather more succinctly, the “negotiated revolutions” in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and the uprisings that began in 2010 in a number of Middle Eastern and North African countries. Interestingly, Lawson does not discuss these contentious histories in strictly chronological order, but in an analytic order: He looks first at England and Chile (three centuries later) to explore how revolutionary situations arise (or not). He then turns to Cuba and South Africa to better understand “revolutionary trajectories.” And he examines events in Iran and Ukraine to better comprehend the outcomes of revolutions.

Some readers may find this a rather odd assortment of cases. But Lawson quite intentionally wishes to examine and compare an incredibly diverse set of cases of contention, including cases that fell short of full-blown revolutions. The point is not of course to show that all revolutions are essentially alike or have the same causes or consequences. Rather, Lawson wishes to demonstrate that cases that are otherwise hugely different can nonetheless be productively analyzed in terms of the same small set of “causal configurations” or “critical configurations,” as he calls them.

Lawson’s approach is formally similar to the dynamics of contention (DOC) perspective on contentious politics. No two episodes of contention are exactly alike, according to this perspective, but there are a number of