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Review of What's money got to do with it? Risky behavior in commercial sex work in Managua, Nicaragua by Alys Willman, Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag, 2009.

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Before reading Alys Willman's six-chapter *What's money got to do with it?*, it is easy to dismiss new publications on risk-taking among sex workers as unlikely to offer anything novel on the topic. But this trim volume, intended as a thick analysis and commentary on risk-taking among sex workers in Managua, Nicaragua, is an opportune reprimand to this inclination. Willman does not really attempt to shift attention from matters of disease, victimization, and violence, which she rightly admits remain the mantra in contemporary sex work literature. However, she does offer a grounded unpacking of and deeper probe at the centrality of economic motivations in the everyday indignities and vulnerabilities which female erotic laborers face in a context where prostitution is decriminalized. This is particularly important because it adds to a fairly stout body of research on risk-taking among sex workers, the vast majority of which is based upon data gathered from contexts where prostitution is illegal.

The book utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data collected with a range of methods including surveys, extended interviews, and observations among sex workers to tackle two central questions: How do sex workers make decisions about risks to their health, safety, and economic wellbeing? And how do workplace conditions shape the risks sex workers take, and the compensations they can demand or get for taking risk? For Willman, existing answers to these queries ignore the structural constraints and power dynamics in sex work and pay little or no mind to the dissimilar contexts in which sex workers ply and operate. For these reasons, she casts doubts upon existing assumptions that risk-taking among sex workers is a function of rational choice, utility maximization, and misjudgment or miscalculation of future preferences and needs.

Willman makes the point that risk-taking among sex workers reflects the contradictions of power, consent, and constraints in

decision-making; the segmentations and networks that characterize sex work; as well as sex workers' negotiations with the myriad systems of privilege, opportunities and disadvantage that surround their particular type of work. Based on data from her research, she shows that while health risks are a major concern for sex workers, the risk of violence weighs more heavily in decision-making, such that they more often take risks to their health than to their immediate physical well-being. Essentially, the sex workers she studied were more eager to prevent physical violence than infections. However, although sex workers worry about getting physically hurt, it is economic pressures rather than the premiums they get for having potentially harmful sex that lead them to take risks. Willman further contends that the tradeoffs that motivate risk-taking among are also often a longer-term risk of disease and the loss of immediate income. For the sex workers in her study therefore, it was largely a choice between disease and hunger, or as a Nigerian sex worker once told me "violence and hunger kill fast, but AIDS only kills after many years". While those familiar with the literature on risk-taking among sex workers may find nothing vividly profound about these findings, I am deeply persuaded that they will be comforted by Willman's authoritative deployment of different data sources to weave a compelling account of the linkages between risk-taking and contexts, power, opportunities, and economic desperation among Nicaraguan sex workers.

Willman's exploration of the theme of risk and reward in sex work in Chapter 5 acknowledges and demonstrates segmentations in the sex work market and how these divisions present sex workers with risks as well as opportunities for averting them. Her model of the labor market divides sex work sites into: the Managed Upscale segment, where formal managers regulate the transactions, the Freelance Connected segment, where sex workers operate in informal networks without managers, and the Low-end Freelance segment, where sex workers negotiate their own transactions, but must pay a share of their earnings to room owners. In many respects, this model is clearly problematic. While assuming the

fixity of both workplaces and the women who operate in them, it glosses over the ease with which sex workers' in a society where sex work is lawful can particularly traverse different worksites. Yet using these models of the sex work market in Managua, she ably supports her thesis on the uneven distribution of rewards, hazards, and opportunities for averting risks across workplaces. Willman's data suggest that in segments where earnings and premiums are high, sex workers showed less likelihood to take risks. In the different sex work sites which she identified, diverse network dynamics were also present and had implications for sex workers' safety and health. Formal networks characterized the Managed upscale segment and tended to protect business profits rather than the sex workers. But in the Freelance connected and Low-end freelance segments were informal networks, which focused more on the protection of sex workers. *What's money got to do with it?* concludes with a simple message for policymakers: money has everything to do with sex work and the risks it entails.

In many respects, *What's Money got to do with it?* is an interesting book. But it also has a number of obvious flaws. Besides a few typographical errors that I stumbled upon, I found that a certain level of ethnographic thinness pervades the book. This, clearly, comes from the author's heavy reliance on what sex workers told her rather than what she observed about them. Given that Willman only spent approximately five days observing in the field, this is expected. There is also the surprising absence of the voices and views of the men who purchase sex workers' services and who patronize different segments of Nicaragua's sex markets. All male clients do not present sex workers with the same levels and types of risks. The lack of a sustained sense of who these male clients are and why they operate in or prefer particular segments of the prostitution market leaves one wondering whether Nicaraguan commercial sex worksites, can, by themselves, be risky without the men who visit them in search of erotic services. Also lingering in the book is a lack of clarity about what the next research steps should be.

Although a long list of recommendations is offered for policymakers, there are no suggestions for future research from the study. The author should have zeroed in on her findings to suggest topical areas and themes for moving forward academic inquiry on money, segmentation, networks, and risk-taking in sex work. These limitations notwithstanding, I am persuaded that there is a legitimate place for *What's money got to do with it?* in the libraries of scholars, policy-makers, and indeed all those who have something to do with sex work or who are keen to learn more about it.

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