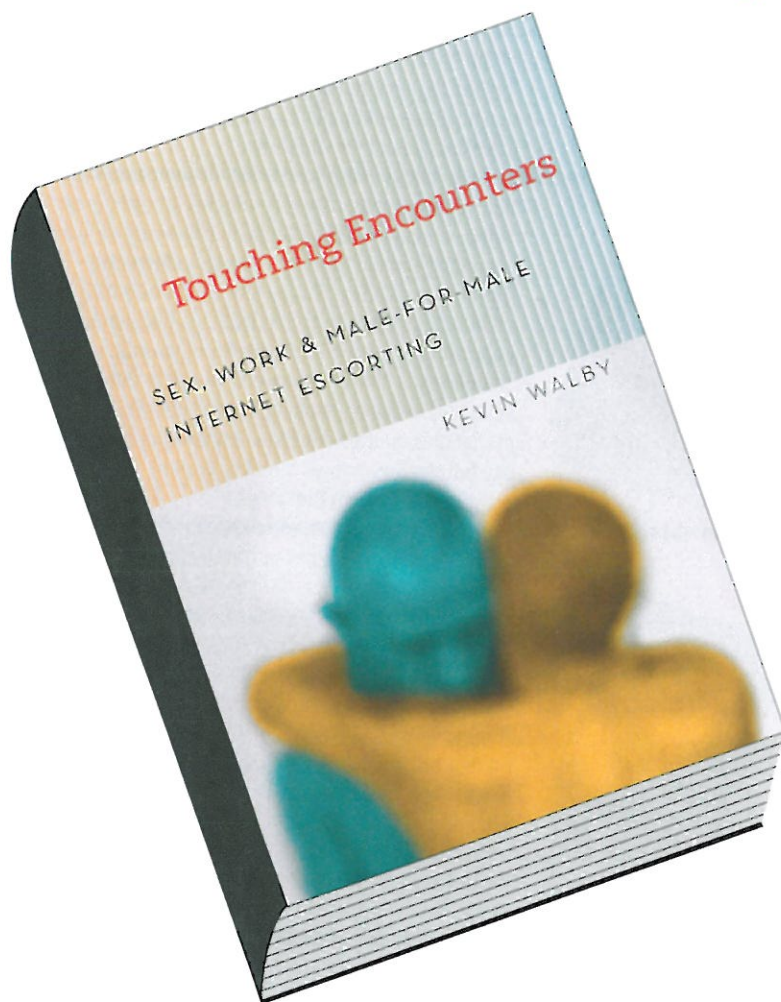


Call boys and online matches

Victor Minichiello hails a study of secret desires that challenges heteronormative notions of masculinity



Touching Encounters: Sex, Work, and Male-for-Male Internet Escorting
By Kevin Walby
University of Chicago Press
232pp, £48.50 and £16.00
ISBN 9780226870052, 70069
and 70076 (e-book)
Published 24 September 2012

Two people mutually agreeing to get together to share an intimate moment is generally seen as normal human behaviour – nothing out of the ordinary. But two men, with one of them a male escort, mutually agreeing to share sexual intimacy raises many questions. Why? Explanations, as Kevin Walby points out, cannot rely on the conventional and out-of-date psychoanalytical and criminological accounts of prostitution, deviance and moral regula-

tion. The postmodern view is that sexual pleasures are self-sufficiently erotic acts and interactions, and that the connections between sexualities and power are not always bound by repression. By drawing on the insights on sexualities provided by Michel Foucault and the work of interactionist scholars such as Erving Goffman and Herbert Blumer, *Touching Encounters* offers insights into how male escorting unfolds and evolves as part of people's lives, and how we can better conceptualise men's bodies and sexual intimacy between men.

There are many positive features of this book, and one of the particular strengths of Walby's research is the refreshing and novel storyline that what escorts and clients do is not just

sex and an economic exchange but also involves human interactions, often not publicly aired, "camaraderie" and "temporary companionship". So the concept of "touching encounters" emerges in the male escort literature: a relational (as opposed to solely commercial) encounter, with rich discourses about sexuality, gender and human interactions. What makes the book a good read is its presentation of escorts' frank narratives about unexpected creativity in such encounters, and the affective nature of relationships with some of their clients.

Technologies have created an open forum for a recreational model of sexual intimacy to flourish between men

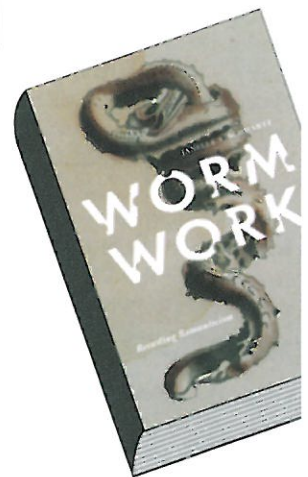
I enjoyed many of the insights this work has to offer about men – for example, the discussion of how these men use their bodies to provide pleasure for other men, a topic frequently associated with women but seldom with men. The sexualisation of men's bodies receives much-needed critical attention in this research. Using Foucault's concept of "technologies of the self", we are offered rich illustrations of how men use "body reflective practices such as plucking, cutting, trimming, preening, waxing, pumping and shaving" to achieve "sexual performances expected from the male escort bodies". Trust me, it makes interesting reading. As a gerontologist, I was particularly interested in the notion that the ageing male escort body can be less touchable and the fallible (read non-erect) penis can lead to "desexualized touching".

I was impressed to learn about how internet technologies have created opportunities for escorts to engage in entrepreneurial self-employment. I could not help but reflect on the way that such technologies have created an open forum for a recreational model of sexual intimacy to flourish between men. It was interesting to read about the labour overtones in Walby's discussion of what internet escorts say about what they do. For example, to gain a competitive advantage in the "market", escorts engage aesthetic labour in the presentation of their bodies to clients,

targeting "niche markets" "global cities". There is a full argument here: that sex work offers a "research lab" to study secret desires and confessions about the self, challenging heteronormative understandings of masculinity. One thing is clear: reading this book will challenge the view that male escorts are all "young, dumb and full of cum".

On a final note, no book is perfect. If there is an area I would have liked to see in depth, it was in regards to the concept of "body trouble", is, how escorts negotiate changing sexual risk intentions either their own or those of their clients.

Victor Minichiello is professor and chancellor and dean of the College of the Professions, University of New England, Australia. A sociologist and public health researcher, he has published widely on sexualities, men's health, the male sex industry and sexual health.



Worm Work: Recasting Romanticism
By Janelle A. Schwartz
University of Minnesota Press
296pp, £61.50 and £20.50
ISBN 9780816673209 and 73216
Published 22 September 2012

Beginning with its enjoyable introduction, *Worm Work* promises to be entertaining. Its topic is one of the lowly forms of life, the worm, and Janelle Schwartz aims to bring these creatures to our attention as they wriggle into view in the literature of the Romantic period.

The book is predicated on some very persuasive argument that the worm is the human's opposite in its size and horridness and as it is the species most unlike humans, attention to it there-