

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

\$PREAD

The Best of the Magazine that
Illuminated the Sex Industry and
Started a Media Revolution

EDITED BY

RACHEL AIMEE
ELIYANNA KAISER
AUDACIA RAY



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“Most magazines tell their readers how to live, what to buy, and who to be. *\$pread* magazine, like the best forms of media and art, shows us ourselves—in ways we have not before recognized. This anthology is diverse, hilarious, intelligent, resilient, vulnerable, and sometimes frightening.” —MELISSA FEBOS, author of *Whip Smart*

“*\$pread* is a phenomenal resource for sex worker self-determination and renegade social change. From Mumbai to Mexico City, New Orleans to New York to Phuket, this anthology examines sex work through the politicized lenses of worker solidarity, communal care, and intersectional feminism. Expansive in its range and incisive in its analysis, *\$pread* shows the ways in which sex workers build relationships and analysis across borders, expanding the possibilities for everyone.”

—MATTILDA BERNSTEIN SYCAMORE,
author of *The End of San Francisco*

A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

When we launched the first issue of *\$pread* magazine in 2005, there weren't many places for sex workers to tell their own stories. Media made by sex workers consisted of a few books, mostly academic, and mostly focusing on the idea of sex work as empowering. We recognized the need for a space where sex workers could write about their own experiences in an accessible format—something lightweight and fun to read, that could easily be distributed among sex workers from a variety of backgrounds.

We wanted *\$pread* to look and feel like a “real” magazine, and we had fun coming up with recurring features such as “Indecent Proposals,” in which sex workers detailed their weirdest requests from clients, and “Positions,” a point-counterpoint column in which two sex workers debated questions like, “Can we justify working for pimps?” Since we wanted *\$pread* to be by and for all sex workers, regardless of their perspectives, we resisted taking an editorial position on any issue, even issues that seem like no-brainers to many sex worker activists, such as, “Should prostitution be decriminalized?”

Although none of us had any publishing experience or any funds to start a magazine, we taught ourselves step by step and succeeded in publishing four issues a year for five years. The letters we received from fans around the world kept us going when things were hard and illustrated how important *\$pread* was to sex workers:

“After reading the first issue I started to cry because I saw that there were others out there like me” —REMY, Minnesota

“Reading *\$pread* is like finding one person who speaks your language in a foreign country.” —FAE, San Francisco

Eventually the all-volunteer staff got burned out, and *\$pread* ceased publishing in 2011. *\$pread* leaves behind a legacy of making space for the voices of people who have been silenced. Today, sex workers are telling their stories and connecting with one another in online spaces such as community blogs and online forums, as well as in real life.

We're excited to be bringing our favorite parts of the magazine back to life with *\$pread: The Best of the Magazine that Illuminated the Sex Industry and Started a Media Revolution*.

—RACHEL AIMEE, ELIYANNA KAISER, and AUDACIA RAY

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NOTES ON AN EXCERPT



STRIPPING WHILE BROWN

Mona Salim

ISSUE 5.4 (2011)

Why "brown"?
how is using "brown" different than
"Indian" or "Asian"? is it?
are there different political
connotations? What's the
history of the usage of the term?

* can it ever be
non-sexual?
can it ever be
just aestheticization?
· fantasies
· stereotypes
· gaze

When I was first hired to dance, the DJ asked me where I was from. "India," I said. He told me that he would have guessed "South American or Middle Eastern," and that the club had never had an Indian girl before. "You're going to do well. You're exotic and that's going to be an asset for the club."

It's been almost two years since that day, and every day, I am confronted with just how prominent our racial and ethnic identities are on the job. People talk about stripping as a form of sex work. I want to talk about it here as a form of race work.

A gentlemen's club is not just gendered, it's deeply racialized. And classed. Race is an essential dimension of how the strip club is experienced by dancers and customers.

As a woman of color, I've been made hyper-aware (by customers, management, and coworkers) of the fact that my racial identity isn't secondary to my identity as a woman. I'm not even sure I can separate those dimensions of who I am. In the literature I've read on stripping, it seems that all too often race gets "added on" to a larger discussion of gender and sexuality. I have trouble trying to compartmentalize pieces of my identity; now I'm Muslim, now a woman, now middle-class. The reality is, all of those pieces are imbricated, inextricable, and inflect themselves in my work and my life. Bringing race to the center of my analysis is a way to displace

EXOTIFICATION:
sexualization(?)
of difference,
racial or otherwise
- treating otherness
with desirous
intentions
- mythologizing
fictions of
identity

also, look
at "Black
Tale" on
pg 113

OTHER THINGS TO READ:

- Unequal Desires (2010),
by Siobhan Brooks
- The Black Body in
Ecstasy (2014),
by Jennifer Christine
Nash
- The Feminist Porn Book (2013),
edited by Taormino, et al.

* bodies, ideas of the body, politics, and politics of the body can't be separated.
 → the body is always political.
 * What does this mean when it comes to popular media and cultural depictions?
 When it comes to policy and legal definition?

the dominance of gender and sex in popular discussions of sex work. It's an exploration of what exactly transnational feminists mean when we talk about intersectionality.

Strippers don't just sell beautiful smiles, perky breasts, thick hair, and great conversations. We sell racial fetishes. We fulfill fantasies of the exotic. We comply with certain notions of racial purity.

The work that sex workers do ultimately gets relegated to the realm of the "body," of sexuality and physical beauty. But all of our bodies already exist within the world of politics, politics that have rendered our bodies thin, curvy, dark, fair, desirable, or flawed. It's important to know that our sex and race are written onto our bodies by deep contours of history and politics. We can't talk about our bodies without talking about how they've been ordered, arranged, and labeled by structures larger and older than any of us.

The strip club is actually a perfect site for challenging this mind-body duality. A strip club is a place that is explicitly commodified and exotic. At the same time, it's deeply intimate. To demonstrate what I mean, I share with you here some commonplace experiences from work:

I exit the stage into the dressing room. Three other girls are back there, smoking and fixing their makeup. I sort my stage tips and bundle them into a rubber band and then put on my dress. "Girl, do all Indians have a body like that under all their clothes?" one of them jokes. I laugh. "No," another girl chimes in, "I lived in Jackson Heights and all the Indian girls were skinny and had no ass. You sure you don't have any black blood in your family?"*

look at \$pread, pg 116:
 "Pornography works hard to create a fantasy for predominantly male spectators... these images tend to reflect their desires and fears of the sexuality of people of color."
 - MIREILLE MILLER-YOUNG

think about:
 · intersectionality?
 · erasure?
 · identity?

- like when Audre Lorde identifies as "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet"

Why is this recognition important?
 what might happen if you try to separate/prioritize them?
 historical examples of this?

DOCUMENTARIES + MOVIES:

- Live Nude Girls Unite! (2000)
- Buying Sex (2013)
- Whores' Glory (2011)
- P.O.P. Web series
 Magic City Strippers

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) The founders of *\$pread* defined the magazine as a community-building tool *for* sex workers *by* sex workers designed to destigmatize the sex work industry. How does the format of the *\$pread* anthology support the original mission of the magazine? In other words, who is this book for and by?
- 2) This anthology is organized into seven parts—Workplace, Labor, Family and Relationships, Clients, Violence, Resistance, and Media and Culture. Each of these parts contains humor, personal narrative, academic study, and activism. Which engaged you the most and why? How did the pieces featured work/not work together?
- 3) What were your perceptions of the sex work industry before you picked up *\$pread*? How did you define “sex work,” for instance, and why did you think people got involved in the industry? Did *\$pread* change these perceptions?
- 4) A couple essays in this anthology—notably “Healthy Hooker: Condoms 101” and “Menstruation: Porn’s Last Taboo”—discuss how both the sex work industry and the public’s perception of sex workers are directly influenced by the visibility of sex in our classrooms and in the media. How is talk about sex in these spheres changing the experiences of sex workers and how “sex work” is defined?
- 5) *\$pread* features many essays that move beyond US borders—“The City’s Red Lights” is set in Mumbai, “Empower: In Defense of Sex Tourism” in Thailand, etc. What did this global context add to your understanding of the sex work industry? What do sex workers from different countries have in common, and what do they experience differently?
- 6) As discussed in the introduction, there are many words associated with sex work, including “victim,” “pimp,” and “john.” How is this language and the exploited/exploiter dynamic it implies complicated by the voices featured in *\$pread*? In other words, how does *\$pread* complicate the idea of who is a victim of sex work and who is empowered by sex work?
- 7) One of the most important aspects of *\$pread* is its inclusion of the many voices in the sex work industry. Keeping in mind how each sex worker has a different experience of class, race, gender identity, and sexuality in their work, what sorts of policy changes seem most necessary for the destigmatization of sex work and the safety of sex workers?

THE FEMINIST PRESS

The Feminist Press is an educational nonprofit organization founded to advance women's rights and amplify feminist perspectives. We publish classic and new writing from around the world, create cutting-edge programs, and elevate silenced and marginalized voices in order to support personal transformation and social justice for all people.

As an independent publisher, the Feminist Press is able to provide a personalized experience for the universities and professors that adopt our books through close attention in dealing with all aspects of utilizing books in classrooms, from providing desk and exam copies, bulk sales, programming, and more.

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