

# TRICKS and TREATS

*Sex  
Workers  
Write About  
Their  
Clients*



MATT BERNSTEIN SYCAMORE  
EDITOR

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About Their Clients*

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To Steve Zeeland,  
without whom this book might never have happened

For JoAnne (1974-1995)

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## ABOUT THE EDITOR

**Matt Bernstein Sycamore** is a widely published author and editor, an activist, and a whore currently living in New York City. He has been involved in the sex industry since age nineteen—starting in San Francisco, then continuing in Boston, Seattle, and New York—mostly as a callboy, but also as a stripper, a bodyworker, a street hustler, and a porn model.

Dedicated to direct-action street activism, Mr. Sycamore has been involved in numerous struggles for social and political change, including the fight against police brutality; AIDS activism; and a queer activism that focuses on fighting racism, classism, misogyny, and heterosexism. He has used his experience as a political organizer to compile *Tricks and Treats: Sex Workers Write About Their Clients*. Mr. Sycamore's writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *Best American Gay Fiction 3*, *Best Gay Erotica 2000*, *Obsessed*, *Flesh and the Word 4*, *The James White Review*, *Queer View Mirror* (volumes one and two), *LGNY*, *Harrington Gay Men's Quarterly Fiction* (The Haworth Press, Inc.), *Quickies*, *Black Sheets*, and *Women and Performance*, among others.



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To whores everywhere.

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## Tricks and Treats: An Introduction

My first published story, “How I Got These Shorts,” starts like this:

It’s my fifth trick. He calls around eleven, says do you go to Concord. I say a hundred an hour, two-fifty for the night, wash up, catch the last train, and of course he isn’t there. So I’m standing there waiting, thinking he’s not going to show up and there isn’t another train ’til morning and what the fuck am I going to do. Finally, this man comes up in Speedos and a windbreaker, says are you Tyler like there’s anyone else around with pink hair. Then we’re driving along, he’s pushing my head to his crotch saying *suck my cock suck my cock* and I’m sucking his limp dick, he’s doing Rush every few minutes and squeezing my balls and we’re driving in the pitch dark—I don’t know *where the fuck* we are. Tells me he’s been up all weekend on crystal, met these two straightboys and don’t I want to fuck those straightboys. I say yeah, I really want to fuck those straightboys. Says he gave the straightboys his Mercedes and they’re going to show up at his house, I’m thinking hell yeah the straightboys are going to show up with your Mercedes.

And the story ends like this:

I’m spacing out in the mirror and the straightboy comes in, looks both ways, locks the door and says shh. . . . Takes out his

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“How I Got My Shorts” was originally published in *Queer View Mirror*, edited by James C. Johnstone and Karen X. Tulchinsky (Milford, CT: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995), pp. 257-258. The story was reprinted in *Flesh and the Word No. 4*, edited by Michael Lowenthal (New York: Penguin, 1997), pp. 156-163.



cock and pretends he's gonna piss, starts jerking off. So I help him. He comes twice, says keep this between us okay. I say don't worry *honey*, go into the bedroom and the trick says did you make any progress with the straightboys. I say I just jerked one off. The other whore is trying on all this underwear, it's like everything from the *International Male* catalog and more. He's trying on this leopard print metallic thong, swinging his hips in front of the mirror, saying things like shhhwank. And that's when I put on these shorts.

In between the beginning and the end of the story, I do ecstasy at the trick's house; make cocktails for a straightboy and suck his dick (but then he turns out to be another whore); do more drugs; and hide from the trick. The funniest part actually happens after the story's end, after I get the shorts, but before I wear the shorts to perform "How I Got These Shorts." Seven a.m. comes around and the trick says he has to go see his patients (he's a psychiatrist), and then somehow I end up with a check for a hundred dollars. Now, don't ask me how I end up with—first of all—a check and—second of all—only a hundred dollars.

All this goes to prove that every trick is just desperate to become a story. Sometimes the story is the arrangement of toiletries in the bathroom, and sometimes it's the trick running into the hallway in his underwear, but, trust me, there's a story going on every time. Originally, I would tell friends about my tricks, but I didn't see these tales as fit for "writing." Thankfully, my friends thought otherwise, and I'm especially grateful to Andy Slaght, who consistently reminds me that it was he who told me I needed to write down the story about my fifth trick. In fact, "How I Got These Shorts" was the first piece I ever wrote directly about my life. I wrote the story just like I told it to my friends and to my journal, a casual conversation piece.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) the fact that everything in "How I Got These Shorts" was true, it was first published as fiction. Most people thought that it was too outrageous to be true, at least not all of it. I laughed when people asked which parts were true—any of it? Clearly, these people had never met a whore because everyone knows that a whore has stories.

Sex workers tell one another our stories—it's our form of history, our way of remembering (or forgetting), our way to communicate. When we talk to one another—or to our friends—we don't explain ourselves; we just go with it. That's what I did with "How I Got These Shorts": I forced the reader to enter the story on my terms. There's no translation, no play-by-play explication.

I put together this anthology, *Tricks and Treats: Sex Workers Write About Their Clients*, to compile the tales of other sex workers, *on our own terms*. You will find very little explanation; these stories are written as if we are talking among ourselves. This is a window into sex workers' lives, *as we see them*, and a window from our lives into the lives of the people we encounter.

This anthology takes sex work as a given, a vantage point from which to view tricks, the sex industry, and society as a whole. This is not the pathologized, sensationalized, or glamorized version of sex work that we usually see perpetuated by outsiders in the media. This is sex workers taking charge of the scrutiny.

Sex workers are sick and tired of being analyzed and abused by tricks, therapists and social workers, talk show hosts and evangelists, politicians and policemen. In this book, sex workers turn our attention to the outsiders who endlessly rework our lives in the public eye. This is our turn to shift the gaze, to put tricks under the microscope.

Priscilla Alexander, not a sex worker herself, but a renowned academic on sex work issues, once said to me, jokingly, that she didn't know anyone who wasn't a sex worker, that she just wasn't interested in anyone but sex workers. For me, it seems as if every few weeks another friend enters or reenters the sex industry in one form or another; sometimes this overwhelms me. I remember one time I had to throw a certain friend out of my car because he was making shady comments about street workers. The next week, he was on the block. Whenever another friend starts doing sex work, I ask myself whether that person is ready. Was I ready? Is anyone ever ready?

Sex workers must constantly negotiate the perilous intersections between sex, power, money, intimacy, and all the other grand issues that are intertwined in everybody's lives. But for sex workers, this is our livelihood, so we develop a unique way of looking at the world,

a critical distance that can't be imitated. Our gazes instantly deconstruct. Sure, our clothes, our mannerisms, and our culture can be commodified and reproduced as lifeless accessories for the relentlessly chic, but our gazes aren't something you can buy at the Gucci boutique.

In some ways, it surprises me that this is the first book to focus specifically on clients rather than sex workers. However, our clients generally hold access to the power mechanisms that keep their identities (as the purchasers of sex services) hidden. In a world that deeply stigmatizes sex workers, clients cannot freely reveal their identities without fear of repercussions. But, just as one cannot analyze race without examining whiteness, the unquestioned (and often invisible) construct that underlies race, one cannot fully analyze sex work without looking at tricks. This book seeks to open up the shades, the locked doors, the gated subdivisions that hide the identities of the buyers of sex.

People are generally too busy gaping at the hookers to scrutinize the tricks, but sex workers do it all the time. We share tips and warnings, we bitch about the scammers, we brag and complain about our earnings, and we laugh and cry about the crazies. This anthology moves these conversations into the public domain. Here, sex workers reveal our commercial, cultural, emotional, sexual, (il)legal, and even spiritual relationships with our tricks. We take out our flashlights and illuminate them. Camera's ready; prepare to flash.

I didn't conceive of this book, however, only to further the study of sex work. Just as important, I wanted to read the stories of other sex workers to see if anyone else had their tricks figured out. Because, in five years of turning tricks, I still don't understand my tricks. It's likely that I'll always have questions. Why the hell don't I get enough regulars? Or, when I do get regulars, how come they always have to be the tricks I can't stand? Every sex worker has a formula, a worldview that explains everything, a worldview that is constantly collapsing and reforming. I embarked on this project to try to figure out my tricks (though I still haven't).

I include as broad as possible a selection of sex workers in this book: street workers, escorts, strippers, porn actors, masseurs, dominatrixes, a phone sex operator—even a video store clerk, an

outreach worker, a sex educator, and a sperm donor. This book includes stories by male, female, and transgendered sex workers from different backgrounds in terms of race, class, gender, education, origin, and sexuality. Sometimes these differing backgrounds prevent sex workers from exploring our commonalities and our differences. Here, all types of sex workers tell our stories, side by side. We are an extremely diverse group, but our stories demonstrate a shared culture.

In the marketing of nonfiction anthologies, different genders are often treated as different species. I don't know of any other book that includes male, female, and transgendered sex workers. There are several good books on female sex workers, especially *Whores and Other Feminists*, edited by Jill Nagle, and the groundbreaking *Sex Work*, edited by Priscilla Alexander and Frederique Delacoste. In *Whore Carnival*, Shannon Bell interviews female—and a few male—sex workers and manages successfully to collapse the boundaries between interviewer and interviewee, making her book especially entertaining. And *WHOREZINE*, edited by Vic St. Blaise, is an indispensable collection of dish, dirt, and news.

As far as books on male sex workers, there isn't one I've found satisfying. John Preston's *Hustling* is a useful how-to book, though it only focuses on escorts. In books about sex work, transgendered sex workers are usually either ignored entirely or placed uncomfortably alongside male sex workers. A book that fully explores transgendered sex workers' lives rather than fetishizing or pathologizing the trans or sex work aspects is sorely needed.

*Tricks and Treats* enforces no hierarchies among the different types of sex workers. I make no attempt to decide who the "real" sex workers are (i.e., Is someone who offers his or her body for a fuck more or less of a sex worker than someone who coos a client to orgasm over the phone?). In my call for submissions, I encouraged contributors to think of the categories of "sex work" and "trick" in the broadest possible manner. Thankfully, I received several submissions that expanded my definition of sex work. In "The Porn Queen," Jo Anne C. Heen writes about how the customers at the adult video store, where she worked behind the counter, treated her like a whore. In "Payment by Donation: Every Sperm Is Sacred,"