

## **AWFULLY DEVOTED WOMEN**

Cameron Duder  
Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010

**REVIEWED BY DANIELLE COOPER**

*Awfully Devoted Women* examines lesbian history in Canada from 1900-1965. The book is neatly divided between two distinct temporal periods, with an underlying goal to render visible previously ignored groups of same-sex desiring women. The first part, "Awfully Devoted Odd Women," focuses on upper-middle class women in the early twentieth century. Drawing from five collections of personal papers, Duder examines how women who desired other women located others like themselves in an era prior to lesbian visibility. Duder convincingly argues that these relationships are locatable within the history of same-sex relationships because: they existed outside of heteronormative bounds, had erotic undertones, and represented long-lasting partnerships. His choice to devote considerable content to "physical sexuality" as a way to move beyond tired debates about proving "genital sexuality" is particularly provocative. Duder also effectively situates his research within the larger debate surrounding romantic friendship. Most notably, his source material suggests that romantic friendship underwent a period of transition, but still persisted into the twentieth century, incorporating distinctly erotic subject matter and the newer medicalized discourse on sexuality.

The second part, "Lesbian Lives After the Second World War," draws on 32 semi-structured interviews of women who experienced same-sex desire between 1950 and 1965. This section's focus is a deliberate departure from the emphasis on working class butch/femme bar cul-

ture and the homophile movement that dominates mid-twentieth-century lesbian histories. In order to do so, Duder draws on interviews of lower middle-class women from the period just prior to homophile organizing in Canada. Due to their lower middle-class status, these women were either unaware or unwilling to participate in working class bar culture. Themes addressed include: childhood experiences, information about sexuality imparted as children and young adults, same-sex sexual practices and relationships, and community. In doing so, Duder not only addresses a previously underrepresented group of same-sex desiring women, but also challenges common conceptions that this generation was more sexually aware than their predecessors. Duder's informants reveal that for lower middle-class women in the mid-twentieth century, same-sex desire remained a largely unknown topic with experience acquired primarily through personal experimentation.

*Awfully Devoted Women* includes discussion from two distinct class groups and time periods while operating under the premise that these discussions share the underlying argument that women's same-sex desire included erotic and physical elements in eras lacking lesbian identity and an accessible lesbian community. Although this argument is dutifully addressed throughout book, it remains an insufficient justification for the book's sharply divided focus. The book's artificial division is exacerbated by the differences in source material drawn upon in each section (archival documents versus interviews), which results in distinctly different narrative structures and topics addressed.

*Awfully Devoted Women's* appeal ultimately remains in the details: a reader can easily get lost in the first-hand accounts, the tender excerpts from love letters and twentieth-century photographs (particularly of the dreamy Dr. Freida Fraser). Un-

fortunately, these details do not add up because Duder situates the book within a number of the major debates within lesbian historiography with mixed success. For example, he argues against lesbian history's tendency to be too abstract, and by extension, that focusing on bodily contact is important because "lesbian history is about real people with real bodies and real desires." Yet, his explicit refusal to engage with lesbian identity debates significantly weakens his choice to use the term "lesbian" to describe women who did not self-identify as such.

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## **SEX SLAVES AND DISCOURSE MASTERS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRAFFICKING**

Jo Doezema  
New York: Zed Books, 2010

**REVIEWED BY ELYA M. DURISIN AND EMILY VANDER MEULEN**

"What is trafficking in women?" asks Jo Doezema in the opening line of her new book, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking*, a question that becomes the central thesis of her pioneering new text. In it, Doezema proceeds to challenge much of what we have been told about trafficking in women. With an analysis that employs the concepts of myth and consent, her text draws a genealogical relationship between historical debates on white slavery and what she argues is its

contemporary incarnation, trafficking in women.

What makes her text and her arguments so compelling is the innovative and multifaceted methodology she utilizes to unearth the production and construction of the “trafficked woman.” Doezema explains that the majority of research on trafficking has made attempts at description or quantification; however, the results of such research indicate that trafficking is a phenomenon resistant to both definition and measurement. Most often, studies on trafficking pose the questions: who is being trafficked, by whom, to where, and for what purpose? Rarely has research sought to uncover the ways in which the answers to these questions become interpreted as “legitimate knowledge.” It is precisely this discursive process that is examined in *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*. By locating “trafficking” as a particular discourse, Doezema centers her analysis on “how certain definitions of the problem become dominant, ... whose knowledge is accepted and whose sidelined, and ... the social practices involved in constructing and legitimating knowledge.”

In the opening chapter, Doezema situates her analysis of “trafficked women” in relation to myth and ideology, concepts that she uses to interrogate knowledge produced about white slavery and trafficking in women. Chapters two and three contain a historical exploration of the myth of white slavery in Britain and the United States, which lays the groundwork for the parallels drawn in the upcoming chapters. Chapter four examines early international agreements on white slavery, the first of which was signed in 1904, to be followed by further agreements throughout the first half of the twentieth century up until 1949, when the abolitionist position on prostitution was fully embraced in international law. Doezema explores how these agreements established a discursive dualism between the suffering body of the “forced” prostitute and the threatening body of the willing

prostitute who is a bearer of disorder to the nation, one that continues to be evident in the contemporary agreement. Chapter five contains an in-depth analysis of the protracted process of negotiations that led to the United Nations Protocol on trafficking, focusing on the relationships between sex workers and anti-trafficking activists.

*Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters* advances new conceptualizations of transnational migration, sexual labour, and consent through drawing parallels between “white slavery” and “human trafficking.” Doezema demonstrates that narratives about white slavery and the concept it is grounded in—prostitution—rely on ideologies surrounding sexuality, race, and gender for their significance. The text draws out the critical insight that debate around white slavery was formulated in the context of empire and concerns about supposed threats to the nation posed by immigrants—insights overlooked in the dominant discussions surrounding “trafficking” today. This oversight has resulted in an under-appreciation of the ways in which governments can use “trafficking” as a vehicle to advance unrelated policy goals, for example the criminalization of consensual adult sex for pay, the cessations of funding for health and human rights programs targeting HIV/AIDS, or the increased securitization of borders. Doezema also illuminates the ways in which anti-trafficking policies adopted with expressed intention of “helping” sex workers often end up (re)producing repressive and harmful consequences.

Accessible to a diverse audience of laypersons, students, researchers, and policymakers, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters* is a significant and groundbreaking addition to the field of research on trafficking in persons and to the international literature on the topic. This text comes highly recommended.

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*Canadian anti-trafficking policy and practice. Elya is a board member at Canada's oldest sex worker-run organization, Maggie's: The Toronto Sex Workers Action Project.*

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## **SEX WORK MATTERS: EXPLORING MONEY, POWER AND INTIMACY IN THE SEX INDUSTRY**

Melissa Hope Ditmore, Antonia Levy and Alys Willman, Eds.  
New York: Zed Books, 2010

**REVIEWED BY NAOMI DE  
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*Sex Work Matters* aims to bridge some of the current divides in scholarship on sex work/ers, which, according to the editors, revolve around divisions within feminism, across disciplines, and between academics and activists. Largely influenced by U.S. policy that demarcates “sex trafficking” as the most pressing aspect of the sex industry, *Sex Work Matters* challenges dominant narratives that focus on violence, abuse, and coercion. It offers alternatives to standard “mainstream” research projects that all too often frame sex workers as women who have sacrificed their good moral standing or as agentless victims and dupes of exploitative systems.

Not only do such existing accounts erase the myriad of choices people (of any and all genders) make to engage in sex work, but moralistic frameworks