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Sexography: Sex Work in Documentary

Nicholas de Villiers

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The turn of the twenty-first century has witnessed an eruption of nonfiction films on sex work. The first book to examine a cross-section of this diverse and transnational body of work, *Sexography* confronts the ethical questions raised by ethnographic documentary and interviews with sexually marginalized subjects. Nicholas de Villiers argues that carnal and cultural knowledge are inextricably entangled in ethnographic sex work documentaries.

De Villiers offers a reading of cinema as a technology of truth and advances a theory of confessional and counterconfessional performance by the interviewed subject who must negotiate both loaded questions and stigma. He pays special attention to the tactical negotiation of power in these films and how cultural and geopolitical shifts have affected sex work and sex workers. Throughout, *Sexography* analyzes the films of a range of non–sex-worker filmmakers, including Jennie Livingston, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Shohini Ghosh, and Cui Zi'en, as well as films produced by sex workers. In addition, it identifies important parallels and intersections between queer and sex worker rights activist movements and their documentary historiography.

De Villiers ultimately demonstrates how commercial sex is intertwined with culture and power. He advocates shifting our approach from scrutinizing the motives of those who sell sex to examining the motives and roles of the filmmakers and transnational audiences creating and consuming films about sex work.

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