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Introduction: Sex, Consumption and Commerce in the Contemporary City

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Introduction: Sex, Consumption and Commerce in the Contemporary City

Abstract. Recent accounts of sexual commerce have drawn attention to the proliferation of online and sexual consumption. Yet the mediated exchange of sexual images and content folds into the spaces of the city in a variety of complex ways. Drawing on a variety of social science perspectives, this paper provides an introductory overview of a collection of papers exploring the changing contours of sexual consumption in the city and the distribution of sexual commerce across – and between - private, domestic and public, commercial spaces. Exploring the ways in which diverse LGBT and heterosexual identities are differently marketised, commodified and consumed, this introduction argues that over the last decade, contradictory moments of sexual emancipation and repression have changed where (and how) sexual consumption is visible in the city, shaping rights to the city in complex ways which need to be more thoroughly acknowledged in ‘mainstream’ urban studies.

Keywords: consumption, sexuality , queer studies , gender studies , sex work , planning

Introduction

Urban studies has long been noted as fairly squeamish about sexual matters, seeing these as somehow irrelevant to the modes of production and consumption, and associated waves of investment and disinvestment, that shape the cityscape. Beyond a few pioneering studies of ‘vice’ (some emerging from the Chicago School, such as Walter Reckless’ [1933] pioneering studies of prostitution), and one or two studies of ‘deviant’ gay scenes (most notably Laud Humphrey’s [1970] *Tearoom Trade*), it was not until the latter decades of the twentieth century that urban scholars began to acknowledge the importance of sexuality in any significant number. Here, work informed by ‘queer’ perspectives was particularly important in highlighting the assumptions inherent in mainstream (and apparently asexual) urban studies, with ‘sexuality and space’ studies from geography, planning, sociology, economics and law showing that the city is experienced in particular and distinctive ways by those whose sexuality differs from the assumed heterosexual, procreative, monogamous norm.

In this respect, when *Urban Studies* (volume 41, no 9, 2004) published a special issue entitled ‘Sex and the City: social and economic explorations in urban sexuality’ edited by Alan Collins, this was not only the first instance of the journal devoting a special issue to the intersection of sexuality and the city, it represented perhaps the first substantive collection of papers in any journal considering the wide range of ways that urban processes are shaped by sexualities. Pioneering in the sense that it did not restrict its discussion of urban sexuality to the location and production of ‘gay villages’ or sites of commercial sex and ‘vice’, the special issue has been well-cited in both its original and reprinted book form (i.e. as *Cities of*

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3 *Pleasure*) as a collection that explored the imbrication of sexuality and space as it is
4 expressed across a variety of sites, both urban and suburban. As such, it stands as an
5 important landmark in what has now become a more established tradition of writing on
6 sexuality and the city (e.g. see Doan, 2011, 2015; Hubbard; 2012; Johnston and Longhurst,
7 2010; Maginn and Steinmetz, 2014).
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10 This Special Issue is not just a follow-up to, but also a development of, that pioneering
11 special issue, and aspires to the same spirit of inter-disciplinarity that characterized it.
12 However, by focusing on the intersection of sex, consumption and the city, it represents a
13 more focused collection that considers how the contemporary city serves as a setting for
14 diverse forms of sexual consumption. Here, we use the term sexual consumption to include
15 the purchase of sexual services (and sex itself), as well as the way that other forms of
16 consumption are inflected by questions of sexual identity and orientation. While it perhaps
17 overstates the case to insist that all forms of consumption are bound into questions of sex
18 and desire, it is obvious that many forms of leisure and pleasure (e.g. going out to the
19 movies, for a meal, to a club or bar) are connected to the pursuit of sexual pleasure, whilst
20 fundamental decisions about where (and how) we live are also shaped by our changing
21 personal lives and relationships.
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24 Here, it is important to note that in the last decade or so, sociotechnical developments have
25 profoundly changed the relationship between bodies, space and sex, with mobile
26 technologies and geo-referenced apps like *Grindr* or *Tinder* allowing people to seek and find
27 sexualized encounter in even unfamiliar cities, while webcam sex work and online chat
28 rooms allow people to pursue mediated sex at a distance (Jones, 2016). While the
29 significance of new technologies – and the profusion of sexual content online – can easily be
30 overstated, there has clearly been something important happening here, with some of the
31 traditional boundaries between private and public, intimate and shared, suburban and urban
32 being inverted, with some of the forms of sexualized encounter once imagined to only to
33 occur in red light districts or twilight areas now just as likely – if not more so – to occur in the
34 areas once thought more straitlaced and polite. For some, this is evidence of the
35 *democratization of desire*, a process that has resulted in more diverse populations having
36 better access to sexual pleasure than ever before (McNair, 2002). As such, the city is
37 becoming more accommodating of women's sexual agency (something reflected in the
38 emergence of sex shops aimed specifically at women, for example) (Evans et al, 2010).
39 Another symptom is the increasing irrelevance of gay 'villages' as prime sites of sexual
40 consumption and identification among LGBT populations (Lewis, 2013), with LGBT venues
41 becoming more dispersed (albeit this is an observation that is more relevant in some cities
42 than others). The fact that in some jurisdictions sex workers can now legally sell sexual
43 services from commercial premises – or even their own home – in suburban areas also
44 reflects what can be seen as a sexual liberalization that has followed from sociotechnical
45 transitions and associated legal reforms (Hubbard and Prior, 2012).
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51 But none of these processes appear unidirectional, or apply universally. At the same
52 moment that there is liberalization, there is backlash. The divergence and dispersal of sexual
53 commerce is resisted: NIMBY sentiments can still be expressed when 'queer' forms of
54 commerce emerge in spaces still thought of as heteronormal; and municipal laws often
55 struggle to encompass new forms of sexual expression within existing understandings of
56 what rightly belongs where. Lap dancing clubs, gay saunas, sex shops, brothels, and sex
57 clubs all create employment and tax revenue, but they are frequently opposed by business
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3 and resident groups when they are proposed for areas with little tradition of sexual and adult
4 entertainment (Linz et al, 2004; Hubbard, 2009). Equally, moral panics about access to
5 pornography, or concerns about sexual violence, can provide a rationale for discouraging
6 domesticized forms of sexual consumption, despite the state's often expressed view that it
7 has no interest in what consenting adults do in the privacy of their own homes (Wilkinson,
8 2011). And even though businesses targeting LGBT consumers are now not necessarily
9 confined to 'gay ghettos', this does not mean that homophobic sentiments do not surface in
10 other spaces, or that LGBT businesses themselves are in any way inclusive or welcoming of
11 all expressions of LGBT desire (Held, 2015). Consumption is always tied into class, and
12 many spaces of sexual consumption in the 'neoliberal city' remain stubbornly off limits to
13 those on lower incomes (Taylor, 2016)..

16 This divergence and dispersal of sexual commerce, and the emergence of new forms – and
17 spaces - of sexual encounter is then indicative of important shifts in the relations between
18 bodies, pleasures and city-spaces. Noting that traditional divides between private and public
19 life (and home and work) are breaking down thanks to the the *layering* of socio-technical
20 forms of life in the city, this issue hence considers how new commodity forms are being
21 produced through the selective enfolding of bodies, images, objects, and rituals in cities, at
22 the same time that others are being repressed or devalued. This matters for urban studies
23 because sexuality (and desire) is one of the primary forces that animates cities, and in the
24 process bequeaths neighbourhoods and districts with different reputations and atmospheres.
25 Put somewhat differently, this matters because sexuality is fundamental to life itself, and any
26 consideration of urban studies that attempts to underplay the importance of sexuality is liable
27 to omit an important dimension of all of our lives – one that is arguably as important as
28 questions of class, age, ethnicity or gender in shaping our orientation towards particular
29 urban spaces.
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36 **Theorising sex and consumption**

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38 Though sexual consumption per se has been a relatively muted theme in many traditions of
39 urban studies, the connection between sex and consumption in cities has often been hinted
40 at discussions of both modern and post-modern cities. For example, themes of fetishization,
41 desire and display were prominent in some of the earliest accounts of the urban experience
42 in the modern age (e.g. Benjamin's, 2002, arcades project), with flâneurial accounts of the
43 city connecting the pleasures of walking the city to particular modes of scopic consumption
44 that were both gendered and sexed (see Buck Morss 1986). Sociological accounts have also
45 emphasized how the city can intensify sexual desire via the construction of a specific
46 'atmosphere' (through, for example, lighting that highlights the sensuous and ludic qualities
47 of nighttime as a space/time of sexuality encounter) (see, for example, Schlor, 1998). Here,
48 studies have not only focused on the commercial thoroughfares of the city centre, but also
49 those more marginal sites that might be eroticized through an association with ruination,
50 industry or the return of the repressed (e.g. nature, wildlife, weeds) (Gandy, 2012). However,
51 most accounts of the way desire circulates in the city have instead focused on the
52 importance of particular commercial sites as providing a locus for those with particular
53 sexual tastes or proclivities, with certain venues, bars and clubs becoming known or even
54 notorious for forms of sexualised encounter. Whilst sex itself might not always be performed
55 in such spaces, the association of particular premises with distinctive sexual identities has
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3 served to construct a moral geography in which certain neighbourhoods and areas become
4 'magnets' for those seeking particular forms of sexual encounter.
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6 Many pivotal ideas about the intersection of consumption and sexuality hence emerge from
7 studies of LGBT experiences of the city. Herein, a large number of commentators have
8 shown that 'gay villages' can be understood as spaces which take on value, and are hence
9 consumed, by many in the LGBT community who experience forms of homophobia and/or
10 transphobia elsewhere. This is not to say that all venues are accommodating of all in the
11 LGBT 'community', with many commercial spaces seeking to cultivate exclusivity by
12 exercising some limits on who is able to access these spaces (something that can be
13 particularly problematic for ethnic minorities, working class and older LGBT individuals) (see
14 Doan, 2015). Gay gentrification is then a frequent observed outcome of the commercial
15 processes that have ultimately integrated once marginalized sexual cultures into the
16 mainstream urban economy (Knopp, 1990). While such processes of assimilation have their
17 limits given some forms of sexual practice and identity continue to be excluded from formal
18 spaces of consumption, this points to the way that diverse sexual cultures, practices and
19 identities have been commodified via processes of urban investment and property
20 speculation. Marketing cities to LGBT consumers has become, in many instances, as vital to
21 city promotion as the selling of urban spaces as 'family-friendly' – albeit that this often relies
22 upon the construction of imagined boundaries between LGBT and straight spaces (Collins,
23 2004b). The outcome, according to some commentators, is a city characterised by different
24 sexual *fields*, each consisting of a pool of like-minded 'buyers and sellers' existing in different
25 neighbourhoods (Green, 2008).
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30 The implication here is that cities exhibit distinctive sexual geographies that overlay other
31 cartographies of taste, class and consumption, creating value in the process. But the idea
32 that the city is clearly striated on sexual lines, and that neighbourhoods are characterized by
33 distinctive forms of straight or queer sexual consumption (as implied by the sexual fields
34 idea), is perhaps too simple. This special issue hence develops – and critiques – such
35 theories about the sexual organization of consumption and the consumption of sex in the
36 city. It begins instead from the standpoint that attempts to differentiate LGBT, queer and
37 straight consumption are problematic in societies where 'sexual marketplaces' are not
38 discrete in space or time, and sexual identities are arguably more fluid than ever before..
39 Indeed, as recent studies of the gay village have shown (e.g. Nash and Gorman-Murray,
40 2014; Gorman-Murray and Nash, 2014), LGBT residence is rarely restricted to designated
41 'gay villages', with the boundaries of such areas being both mobile and permeable. In this
42 sense, it appears that the contemporary city is characterized by diverse, overlapping sexual
43 'marketplaces' (Laumann et al, 2004), with new technologies (e.g. mobile telephone apps
44 and geo-coded dating sites) allowing new forms of sexual consumption and encounter to
45 emerge in spaces which escape easy characterization as either 'straight' or 'gay'.
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50 Such brief observations on the fluidity and flux of sexuality, profit and consumption across
51 and within cities in the developed and developing world underlines that sexuality is more
52 than epiphenomenal or merely coincidental in the making of urban economies (Aalbers and
53 Deinema, 2012). Indeed, in a context where many societies across the globe proclaim to be
54 more open about sexuality, and more accepting of sexual diversity, the opportunities for
55 investors, developers, and retailers to profit through the promotion of commercial or
56 objectified sex appears higher than ever (Hubbard and Wilkinson, 2015). In the post-crisis
57 city, these observations are particularly significant given some conventional tactics of urban
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3 property development have been found lacking: not only does sex sell, it appears recession-
4 proof. The implication here is that the regulation of sex in the city – via licensing, planning,
5 policing, environmental and public health – is not simply about the repression of desire, but
6 concerns the production, and exploitation, of profitable forms of sexual consumption (Brown,
7 2000). Each and every act that regulates sexuality has a spatial outcome, and shifts the
8 visibility of sexuality in the city in ways that can transform notions of both profitability and
9 pleasure.

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12 From this point of departure, this Special Issue explores how sex and sexuality is differently
13 valued and commodified through urban processes. While not all sex in the city is paid for,
14 this special issue focuses on how the relation between the body, desire and the city – often
15 mediated by communication technologies – can be commodified and commercialized in
16 different ways. While these issues have been addressed previously – principally through
17 geographic studies of ‘gay consumption’ and the locations of sex work (see Brown and
18 Browne, 2016) – this issue notably extends across other disciplinary traditions in its
19 exploration of sex and consumption. The importance of economic contributions is a case
20 in point. In the previous special issue of this journal on sex and the city, Collins (2004a) set
21 out a detailed account of the intersection of sociobiological, social and economic theory that
22 helps explain why sexual desire is such an important influence on individual behaviour and
23 why this is important in explaining traditions, rites and practices relating to coupling in its
24 diverse forms. This suggested that sexual desire strongly conditions the intensity of use of
25 urban leisure opportunities. From this perspective, Collins (2004a) proposed a rational
26 choice economic model of urban sexuality drawing on the analytical framework of
27 ‘consumption technology’ formalised in Lancaster (1966a; 1966b). Purely for graphical
28 expositional simplicity, Collins (2004) condensed the entire range of recreational sexual
29 services into a single metric. Likewise, all aspects of marriage-type companionship were
30 condensed into a single metric. Individuals (whether single or partnered) were posited to
31 satisfy these two needs subject to various resource constraints. These constraints were (at
32 that time) contended to be determined, in large part, by different endowments of time and
33 wealth, physical attractiveness and various personality traits.

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36 Here, time-dependent search costs (for sex and companionship) were argued to be
37 significantly lower in urban settings than rural settings and were viewed likely to vary in
38 towns and cities of different sizes or orders. Various works in this collection of papers
39 indicate that technological progress and liberal social change has since intervened to
40 dramatically alter the character of the sexscape and also the technological scope for sexual
41 consumption across the urban-rural continuum. Essentially urban-rural divergences in time-
42 dependent search costs (and hence resource constraints) have likely diminished significantly
43 for many individuals and households. Greater tolerance of sexual dissidence and
44 widespread use of partner search apps on smartphones has likely helped mitigate the extent
45 of journey-to-leisure commuting and urban in-migration. Accordingly, it has theoretically also
46 contributed to substantial revenue diminution - and thus physical decline and re-
47 configuration - of some urban sexual spaces in both core and non-core city locations.

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50 Such physical decline and reconfiguration has also been deliberately accelerated and
51 exploited by neoliberal ‘regeneration’ in various economies, with urban policies appropriating
52 sexualised community spaces and sexualised public or quasi-public realms. Such
53 appropriation enables the transformation of such spaces into primarily private sector
54 dominions. In this vein, critical commentary has suggested that the city is effectively being
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3 'cleansed' in the principal interests of elite large capital-holding cliques and interests aligned
4 to politically conservative, heteronormative residential populations (see, for example,
5 Hubbard, 2004; Sanders-McDonagh et al, 2016). In some cases this 'cleansing' process has
6 been resisted in situ; in other cases such sexualised community and public realms have
7 been reconstituted in other less central urban locations (see Maginn and Steinmetz 2014 for
8 diverse examples of resistance and regulation of sex industries, and see Doan 2015 for case
9 studies of shifting LGBT landscapes and planning imperatives). Nevertheless, in turn, such
10 new sites may inevitably be subject to the same market dynamics of conflict with neoliberal
11 appropriative forces at some later juncture.
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14 The papers in this Special Issue explore these economic dynamics of investment and
15 disinvestment via case studies of sexual consumption in cities in different globalization
16 arenas, taking in both Western and non-Western cities. Though the methodological and
17 theoretical approaches taken are varied, a number of overlapping themes can be readily
18 discerned, namely: transformations in the evolution, location and visibility of both virtual and
19 real 'sexualised spaces' in the city (see, for example, the papers by Yue and Leung, 2015;
20 Gorman-Murray and Nash, 2016; Smart and Whittemore, 2016; Lewis, in press, this issue);
21 changes in the supply and demand for sexual services, goods and images in different urban
22 contexts (see, for example, the papers by Della Giusta et al, 2016; Chapuis, 2016;
23 Lindenblatt and Egger, 2016; Kong, 2016) and, finally, developments in the evolution and
24 regulation of the sexual economy of cities in the light of sociotechnical change and the
25 aftermath of the global economic crisis (see, for example, the papers by Kunkel (in press,
26 this issue); Maginn, Prior and Hubbard, 2015; Collins and Drinkwater, 2016; Crewe and
27 Martin, 2016). As such, this Special Issue directly contributes to ongoing debates concerning
28 the ways that sexual identities and practices create distinctive moments of pleasure and
29 leisure in the city, and, conversely, how cities create and even fetishize different forms of
30 sexual consumption.
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37 *Social and Cultural Change in LGBT Spaces*

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39 Five of the papers in this issue directly speak to the theme of social and cultural change in
40 LGBT spaces. These papers examine the shifting landscapes of LGBT consumption in a
41 range of national and urban settings – including cities and regions in the UK, the US,
42 Canada, Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong – and in relation to diverse land uses and
43 social networks – including real estate markets, leisure sites, neoliberal politics and new
44 networking technologies. The papers by Nathaniel Lewis (in press, this issue) and by Audrey
45 Yue and Helen Hok-Sze Leung (2015) both respond to the much-noted intersection of
46 creative city discourses with the social acceptance and material embedment of LGBT
47 populations in contemporary cities. Here, Lewis (in press, this issue) discusses the complex
48 locational and consumption choices (including residential preferences) of gay men in
49 Washington D.C. in relation to processes of neoliberalisation, homonormalisation and
50 creative city planning. Reading the decision-making processes of gay identified households
51 through new aspirational styles enables Lewis to offer a nuanced, critical interpretation of
52 neoliberalism and homonormativity in relation to gay urban cultures and consumption
53 patterns. As he notes, both working class and ethnic minority gay men are often
54 marginalised via such processes and find the much vaunted hypermobility of gay male
55 culture in Washington DC difficult to access. Focusing attention on Singapore and Hong
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3 Kong, Yue and Leung (2015) draw insights from critical creative industrial studies, queer
4 geographies and cultural studies, to examine the intersections of gay clusters, urban renewal
5 and social movements in these cities. Significantly, rather than default to 'Western'
6 paradigms and debates about the development of LGBT urban landscapes, they offer a new
7 theoretical perspective on the 'disjunctive' rise of the queer Asian city.
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10 The papers by Michael Smart and Andrew Whitemore, by Andrew Gorman-Murray and
11 Catherine J. Nash and by Alan Collins and Stephen Drinkwater critically consider changing
12 LGBT residential and commercial landscapes in the US, the UK, Canada and Australia
13 respectively. Smart and Whitemore's (2016) study of shifting gay and lesbian real estate
14 markets in Dallas over 1986-2012 identifies a circumscribed diffusion of 'gaybourhoods' – a
15 dispersal of gay and lesbian residence in a way that is creating new clusters adjacent to
16 long-standing existing gay and lesbian territory. They find a preference amongst gay and
17 lesbian homebuyers and renters to at least stay close to the traditional gay and lesbian
18 enclaves of Dallas (e.g. Oak Lawn). Albeit focusing on consumer landscapes in Sydney and
19 Toronto, Gorman-Murray and Nash's (2016) research takes a similar interest in de-
20 concentration, diffusion and 're-grounding' of queer consumption. They are concerned with
21 the relational geographies of 'traditional' gay villages and 'emergent' inner-city queer-friendly
22 neighbourhoods in these cities. Stressing the importance of sociable mainstream-LGBT
23 interactions in the constitution of new LGBT leisure sites, they tease out the differences
24 between the two cities, across the neighbourhoods within them, and between daytime and
25 night-time leisure spaces. Their conclusion is that orthodox readings of such consumer
26 spaces remain fraught with problems, noting that emerging leisure sites are paradoxical in
27 many ways. This noted, Collins and Drinkwater (2016) focus on gay villages and other gay
28 spaces in the UK, addressing the macro-level processes contributing to the reconfiguration
29 and possible decline of gay urban spaces. They train attention on changing social attitudes,
30 clusters of gay pubs and, importantly, new gay social networking apps. These social and
31 technological transformations appear to be reshaping gay landscapes in the UK,
32 encouraging fragmentation and the shift towards a 'post-gay' era of consumption.
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39 *Urban Market Dynamics of Sex Work*

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41 Beyond the fact that red-light areas provide urban geographers with a particularly vibrant
42 environment in which to examine the corporeality of metropolitan life and to document the
43 emergence of a distinctive 'subcultural' space, there is much that can be learnt about the
44 wider relations of sexuality and consumption in the city through overt examination of such
45 spaces of sex work. In particular, while it has been noted that the general quest for
46 hospitable, safe and sanitized inner cities has led to the effective disappearance of street
47 sex working in many contexts (Hubbard, 2004), as well as the gradual evisceration and
48 gentrification of some well-known areas of off-street sex working (such as London's Soho or
49 New York's Times Square), the rise of online modes of buying and selling sex suggests that
50 the dominant tendencies here are ones of spatial and temporal displacement, not the decline
51 of sex work per se as part of the urban economy. While there remain obvious and deep-
52 seated problems in obtaining reliable data about the extent of urban sex work – especially in
53 contexts where it is best described as 'survival' sex work and those selling it are doing so in
54 the context of precarious and complex lives – the use of 'data mining' methods means that
55 online data can be found which perhaps offer us some insight into these forms of
56 displacement and re-location.
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7 In this regard, Andreas Lindenblatt and Peter Egger (2016) use such online data about
8 advertised sexual services (and prices) provide a detailed account of regional differences in
9 female sex work in Germany. Here, they find evidence of higher prices and incomes for sex
10 work in former East Germany than in the former West, possibly a legacy of the luxury status
11 of commercial sex in the East, and established socio-cultural perceptions of risky/safe sex in
12 the 'shadow' of the former Iron Curtain. Such studies exploring the advertisement (and
13 supply) of sexual services are usefully complemented by those exploring demand, but there
14 is of course less known about who buys sex (and why). Focusing on this, Marina Della
15 Giusta, Maria Laura Di Tommaso and Sarah Louise Jewell (2016, this issue), use British
16 surveys of sexual behaviour to examine men's demand for paid sex in the UK, investigating
17 differences between rural and urban areas. Their conclusion that there are differences in the
18 likelihood of men of different religion, age, education and perceptions of risk to have bought
19 sex is perhaps less important in the context of this issue than their conclusion that London
20 represents a different sexual marketplace with different sedimented attitudes towards sex
21 work than found elsewhere in the UK. This implies that the norms surrounding sex work, or
22 the visibility of sex work in the capital, are different than those elsewhere, something that
23 suggests a complex interplay of supply and demand that remains place-specific even in an
24 era of virtualism and online sex work.
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29 A somewhat different perspective on the embedment of sex work in particular spaces is
30 offered by Amandine Chapuis (2016, this issue) in her ethnographic account of the tourist
31 consumption of Amsterdam's red light district. Noting this has become a site of extensive
32 and intense touristification, shaped with a diversity of touristic and consumption practices,
33 Chapuis nonetheless explores the affective and moral geographies of this touristified sexual
34 landscape and concludes that this space creates a norm that sex is recreational and
35 pleasurable. This does not necessarily normalise the idea of sex as commodity to be
36 consumed, but as she shows, positions sex work as central to the consumption of one
37 particular city destination (see also McDonagh, 2016b). Of course, in many other cities
38 experiencing spaces of is discoursed as less important to an authentic tourist engagement
39 with place, but this does not mean that prostitution is not significant in the forms of
40 'hospitality' on offer, merely that it is less obviously visible in a known red light district. For
41 example, in her paper focusing on Frankfurt, Jenny Kunkel (in press) shows that prostitution
42 is no longer contained in the 'traditional' district, and is more dispersed, being allowed to
43 occur in a wider range of neighbourhoods, albeit with the more gentrified and politer
44 neighbourhoods being more vigorously policed by the state and law in the interests of
45 avoiding confrontation.
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49 Shifting attention back to the sellers rather than those who consume sexual services, Travis
50 Kong (2016) attends to the case of 'money boys' in post-socialist China. These male sex
51 workers are rural-to-urban migrants whose movements from country to the burgeoning cities
52 of Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen are motivated through a mixture of sexual desires (i.e. to
53 be able to explore different identities and practices away from small rural communities) and
54 economic motivations (i.e. to avoid 'dead-end' or monotonous factory jobs). Locating urban
55 sex work within wider networks of migration and regulation (given the criminalisation of sex
56 work in China), Kong (2016) examines the paradoxical position of money boys in Chinese
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3 society, noting how they manage multiple stigmatised identities (as rural migrants, sex
4 workers and men-who-have-sex-with-men) in a context of neoliberal market reforms and
5 social transformation that places them in a potentially profitable position whereby they are
6 able to exploit and monetize their identities. This said, Kong concludes that there are many
7 barriers which prevent money boys becoming fully-fledged 'sexual entrepreneurs'.
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10 11 *The Regulation of Urban Sexual Consumption* 12

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14 The fact that the consumption of sexual services is constrained or enabled by different
15 modes of policing and municipal regulation is a theme that comes across in all four papers
16 on urban prostitution and sex work. Here, much can be said about policing and the
17 importance of vice legislation (as emphasised in Kunkel's paper, this issue): in contexts
18 where sex work (or the organisation of sex work) is illegal, sex for sale venues are much less
19 likely to advertise given fears of arrest and repression. Conversely, legality can encourage a
20 different modality of policing, with the focus on health and safety, emphasising protection of
21 sexual minorities rather than the repression of prostitution. The same is true of the visibility
22 of venues which offer opportunity for gay or lesbian sex on-premise in contexts where
23 homosexual acts remain subject to legal censure: in most contexts, gay villages have only
24 emerged to become visible and well-advertised features of the urban scene when
25 homosexuality has been decriminalised. But beyond such 'headline' changes in the way that
26 criminal law shapes sexual consumption, and the role of police action that can repress illegal
27 sexualities, an increasing focus in urban studies is on the municipal regulation of sexual
28 consumption, via by laws, environmental regulation, zoning and planning.
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33 Three papers speak directly to this theme: considering the way that cultural, social and legal
34 norms intersect to shape the legality and visibility of spaces of sexual consumption in cities
35 in England and Wales, Northern Ireland, and Australia. Paul Maginn and Graham Ellison's
36 paper examines the regulation of consumption of commercial sex spaces and services in
37 Northern Ireland, stressing the distinct approaches taken here as opposed to elsewhere in
38 the UK. They argue that commercial sex spaces have been the subject of intense political
39 and legal oversight, with religious values and moral reasoning influencing debates about
40 commercial sex spaces and their regulation. Here, it is shown that devolutionary tendencies
41 here allow sexual spaces to become particularly loaded spaces in debates about national
42 values, with such sites inadvertently sometimes caught up in a wider geopolitics. Notably, in
43 Belfast, a number of unlicensed sex shops have appealed directly to higher courts in their
44 attempt to secure their legality, but always failed. However, elsewhere in the UK, sex shops
45 are more routinely granted licenses, and in some cases become more visible in city centres.
46 Addressing this, Louise Crewe and Amber Martin (2016) explore not only the mainstreaming
47 of sex retailing but the emergence of female-oriented 'erotic boutiques' in city centres in
48 England and Wales. Here, they examine how the spatiality, design and marketing of erotic
49 boutiques differs from male-oriented sex shops and reflects the emergence of 'up-scale'
50 female spaces of sexual consumption. The fact that most of these spaces are unlicensed,
51 and hence not subject to any specific form of regulation means that they are essentially 'self-
52 regulated', marketing themselves in ways that conform with acceptable ideals of feminised,
53 normal but decidedly 'kinky' consumption.
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3 But the type of feminised sex shops that now sell sex toys and lingerie on the High Street
4 would have no doubt scandalised many in the past, and found their presence on the High
5 Street much more embattled. Social attitudes, and accompanying forms of legal control, shift
6 over time as dominant mores change. But, as Jason Prior and Phil Hubbard, these do not
7 always shift in synch with one another, and sometimes what seems normal and even healthy
8 still remains illegal in the eyes of the law. Obscenity laws are a case in point, with what
9 'normal adults' find offensive shifting markedly over time, often out of step with the
10 assumptions written into law. This is also manifest in the regulation of sexual spaces, and
11 Prior and Hubbard's (2015, this issue) paper describes the changes in the way commercial
12 sex premises in London and Sydney are regulated, noting the overwhelming shift from
13 control via policing to planning. Here, in an innovative analytical move, they examine the
14 varied temporalities at play in such processes municipal planning, and note that these
15 sometimes create ambiguity rather than certainty in terms of what forms of sex premises are
16 actually legal.
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22 Conclusion

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24 The focus on changes in the geographies of LGBT spaces, the dynamics of sex markets and
25 the regulation of sexual consumption provides an organising frame for this Special Issue on
26 sex, consumption, and the city. But collectively, the thirteen papers collectively straddle two
27 long-standing, distinct lines of inquiry in research in studies of sexuality and space – those
28 into the formation, experience and transformation of LGBT social relations and urban spaces
29 (on the one hand), and those into heterosexual subjectivities, practices and geographies (on
30 the other). Consumption – of spaces and of sex – offers a focused lens for exploring and
31 combining together the theoretical insights offered across a range of studies of sexuality and
32 space. As such, exploring the practices, representations and governance of sexual
33 consumption enables us to grasp the wider significance of sexual dynamics in the
34 constitution of cities. Indeed, whilst focused on consumption, the papers do not ignore or
35 overlook the relations of production. Production and consumption are considered hand-in-
36 hand in these papers – perhaps best conceived as a dialectic that continually (re)creates
37 and transforms urban spaces over time, encouraging the entwining, and sometimes
38 disentangling, of different forms of sexuality.
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42 This given, one profitable line of inquiry that might be taken forward is the changing
43 relationship between LGBT and heterosexual subjects, social practices and geographies.
44 With LGBT lives arguably becoming more visible in many countries through the extension of
45 normative rights such as marriage and family formation (while we acknowledge the
46 homonormalising critique of such legal changes), and with certain types of 'scary'
47 heterosexual relations (Hubbard, 2000), such as sex work, also becoming more visible and
48 diffuse, what implications might these reconfigurations have for the heterosexualisation of
49 space and the centring and privileging of certain forms of heterosexual relations, practices
50 and subjectivities in our cities? While there have been debates about the mainstreaming –
51 the homonormalisation – of certain LGBT populations and consumer practices to the
52 exclusion of others (see Duggan 2003; Binnie 2004; Richardson 2005 on the
53 heternormative), less has been said about the spatial implications of this for heterosexuality.
54 Are possibilities opened up for a broader range of heterosexual subjectivities to be emplaced
55 in the city; or are we seeing conventional heteronormative values defended and buttressed
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3 (Nash and Brown, 2015)? Or is there a more complex, patchy geography emerging here
4 where both tendencies are observable, albeit at different scales (think here about the
5 difference between virtual, online worlds, city neighbourhoods and domestic spaces).
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8 In this respect, a further range of both 'normative' and 'scary' heterosexual consumer
9 practices and subjectivities, which have not been explicitly studied in this Special Issue,
10 could be explored in greater depth in future work in urban studies. Such inquiries might
11 include the continuing consequences of the privileging of the nuclear family form in real
12 estate markets (Johnson, 2000; Frisch, 2002), the spatial effects of web cam and homed
13 based sex work (Prior and Gorman-Murray, 2014; Jones, 2016), the proliferating visibility,
14 marketing and use of pharmaceuticals to enhance sexual performance or reproductive
15 health (Del Casino and Brooks, 2015), the geographies of wedding and honeymoon tourism
16 (Johnston, 2006), the experiences of polyamory in public and private spheres (Johnston and
17 Longhurst 2010), and even the discursive and material spaces of 'romance' holidays, such
18 as Valentine's Day, as manifest in advertising, leisure spaces, retail and hospitality services.
19 Looking into these and other consumer practices might reveal the ways in which
20 heterosexualities are diversifying even while some configurations remain socially and
21 spatially marginal. This is not only about specific forms or packages of heterosexuality, it is
22 also about their intersection with notions of appropriate femininity and masculinity. Witness
23 here, for example, the backlash to male 'pick up artists' and the 'seduction communities' who
24 feel it is acceptable to approach women in public spaces (O'Neill, 2015), something
25 happening at the same time some women feel the need defend their right to be sexually
26 assertive via 'slutwalks' (Lim and Fanghanel, 2013). What do such controversies say about
27 the *value* of different heterosexual performances?
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32 At the same time, further research on LGBT urban geographies is clearly needed. While
33 there is increasing scholarly, media and public discussion about the decline of gay villages
34 and the fragmentation, diffusion and possible re-clustering of LGTB populations – explored
35 by various contributions to this issue – there still remains little research into the effects of gay
36 village decline for both LGBT and straight populations (Reynolds 2009; Brown 2014). How
37 are LGBT populations represented and made legible to other populations in the absence of
38 such spaces? And how might the 'creative gay' stereotype be changing as places of
39 intensive 'creativity' are selectively 'de-gay'd'? This is important given the continued links
40 made between gay villages, 'the creative city' agenda, and city marketing and planning has
41 fuelled overt attempts to commodify gay identities (for further evidence, also see Lewis,
42 2013, on the case of Ottawa, Canada, which created a gay village in 2011 – Le/The Village –
43 through city ordinances in the single-minded pursuit of investment). Gay village decline has
44 implications for urban planning issues, including business zoning and development, tourism
45 and marketing, heritage and historical preservation, and the local targeting of community
46 outreach and health services (Forsyth 2001; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2015).
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50 These future research directions have consequences for policy, planning and practice.
51 Certainly the management gay village decline and fragmentation of LGBT urban landscapes
52 connects directly to urban planning as well as the remit (and resources) of LGBT community
53 organisations. A broader concern, though, is how planning and policy might account for and
54 accommodate the increasing diversity – or at least increasing visibility – of sexualities and
55 sexual geographies. This is a question that reaches across social, economic and land-use
56 planning. Certainly there has been resistance to the extension of 'normative' legal rights to
57 same-sex couples (Browne and Nash 2014), so how might planning, policy and practice be
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3 deployed to mediate and ameliorate these tensions? Furthermore, as Crewe and Martin
4 (2016) indicate in their paper, new forms of sex-based business are emerging that evade the
5 'seedy' image of conventional sex shops. What questions do erotic boutiques or home-
6 based sex work pose for processes of urban governance? How it might planning or licensing
7 deal with different types of businesses and premises, and shape rights to the city? What
8 makes a sex premise a noxious land use, if anything? Clearly, not all sex premises or
9 spaces where sex is consumed fit neatly into aesthetic divisions between clean/seedy or
10 downmarket/gentrified, so how should municipal regulators deal with this? As Prior and
11 Hubbard (2015) contend in their paper, this might require a more nuanced appreciation of
12 urban temporalities as well as spatialities, and a sense as to what is acceptable when as
13 well as where. But these are matters that are bound into notions of profitability as well as
14 morality, and ultimately, the breadth of contributions in this Special Issue demonstrate that
15 sex and sexualities can be profitable indeed.
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