

FEMINIST SURVEILLANCE STUDIES

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ANTIPROSTITUTION FEMINISM
AND THE SURVEILLANCE OF
SEX INDUSTRY CLIENTS

UMMNI KHAN

For far too long, the social control, surveillance, and criminalization of sex work has focused on the figure of the “prostitute” as the deviant, the *femme fatale*, or the immoral transgressor.¹ The participation of sex-industry clients was often excused based on gendered narratives that cast them as helpless to their libidos or to the seductive wiles of sex workers. In the last few decades, however, increased attention has been paid to clients as subjects of research and objects of criminalization (Lowman and Atchison 2006). Though such research and criminalization are still not as prevalent as the study and arrest of sex workers, clients in the Global North are emerging as a category of social deviance to be surveyed, analyzed, and disciplined.

On a state level, this surveillance and discipline manifests in criminal justice and police initiatives that target suspected clients, including street sweeps, publication of names, vehicle seizure, and rehabilitative “john schools” that endeavor to deter men from buying sexual services. Client targeting, however, is not only happening at the state level. One sector of the feminist movement is also actively involved in the surveillance and construction of clients as deviants: antiprostitution advocates who couch all sex work within the terms of “violence against women.” I (and many other sex-worker-rights advocates) refer to this sector as prohibitionist

feminism because of its reliance on criminal prohibition as a key strategy to eradicate the sex industry (van der Meulen, Durisin, and Love 2013, 14). While prohibitionist feminism rests on a solid bed of essentialism, its adherents have also generated social science “evidence” to empirically substantiate their anti-prostitution claims.

In this essay I focus on one prohibitionist group, Prostitution Research and Education (PRE), to analyze how its empirical reports participate in surveillant logics, reify clients as deviants, and legitimate intensified state surveillance and criminalization. Founded in 1995, PRE is a U.S. nonprofit organization committed to establishing the harmfulness of prostitution and advocating for state solutions, including alternatives to prostitution for the workers and punitive responses for the clients. I focus on PRE’s U.S. document, *Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don’t Buy Sex* (Farley et al. 2011), but also refer to three other publications produced in collaboration with PRE: *Challenging Men’s Demand for Prostitution in Scotland* (Macleod, Farley, Anderson, and Golding 2008); *Men Who Buy Sex: Who They Buy and What They Know* (Farley, Bindel, and Golding 2009), which focuses on men in England; and *A Thorn in the Heart: Cambodian Men Who Buy Sex* (Farley, Freed, Phal, and Golding 2012).² Despite regional differences, all four texts draw on interview data with male clients and construct the men as distinctly misogynist, deviant, dangerous, and sexually violent. PRE closes each report with a call to strengthen criminalization, surveillance, and stigmatization of sex clients.

My analysis of PRE’s reports first situates social-science discourse—specifically surveys, interviewing, statistics, and the narrativization of data—within the ambit of surveillance. Second, I problematize the methodology and interpretation, delineating how PRE’s client reports are deeply flawed and patently distortive, even on their own positivist terms. This refutation of PRE’s empiricism demonstrates the faulty foundation of its prohibitionist ideology, which is important given that PRE’s executive director, Melissa Farley, is a key spokesperson for antiprostitution, and her testimony is frequently used to “prove” the harms of prostitution in legal and policy arenas.³ Third, I examine how prohibitionist feminist social-science discourse can be understood as a surveillant practice in alliance with state surveillance and as exhibiting a carceral mentality. In particular, I consider how PRE’s recommendations bolster the policing of the sex industry, endorse surveillant biometric strategies, disproportionately impact racialized and working-class men, and justify prison sentences as a means to discipline clients.

I posit that part of the project of feminist surveillance studies is to take a critical look at how surveillance is being used in the name of feminism. In particular, I invite the reader to consider how feminist prohibitionist discourse participates in the “surveillance of sexuality,” which constitutes the deviance it purports to merely record (Walby and Smith 2012, 54). While the feminist prohibitionists at PRE may intend to name, confront, and eradicate violence against women in the sex industry, their method rests, in part, on constructing the desire to purchase sexual services as fundamentally deviant. This deviantized desire is gendered masculine for two reasons: the majority of people who purchase sexual services are men, and the small female demographic is almost completely ignored in the scholarly literature, particularly in the feminist prohibitionist literature (Weitzer 2005b, 225). This gendered construction of masculine deviance relies on a social-science approach to surveillance and on empirically unsound data which dehumanizes clients and supports the punitive state. Elizabeth Bernstein has named this approach to equality “carceral feminism,” involving “a sexual politics that is intricately intertwined with broader agendas of criminalization and incarceration” (2010, 51). As with many criminalization agendas, those with the least social capital disproportionately suffer from this form of sexual politics. Nonetheless, all male clients, including privileged men, are vulnerable to surveillance, shaming, and criminalization (see, for example, Zennie 2013). I suggest that feminist attention to gendered oppression and issues of surveillance should include consideration of the surveillance and criminalization of nonnormative male desires.

The Study of Prohibitionist Feminist Surveillance

Kevin Haggerty defines surveillance as a dynamic that involves “monitoring people or things typically as the basis for some form of social intervention” (2009, ix). Surveillance studies usually focuses on state or corporate actors, and considers aspects of architectural design, technological systems, digital interface, impersonal observation, panoptic effects, and consumer analysis or media communications. Much critical scholarship is dedicated to exposing how new technologically advanced surveillance strategies touted as objective are deeply ideological apparatuses that disenfranchise those who are most marginalized. This is urgent work. At the same time, the glitz of high-tech surveillance should not prevent us from also paying critical attention to surveys as a traditional form of (and ety-

mologically connected to) surveillance. Using surveys of people as a technique of social control has occurred since at least as far back as the nineteenth century (Converse 2009, 13). Survey research that involves human subjects, by definition, reduces and objectifies complex subjectivities into data. Whether quantitative or qualitative analysis, research exposes its subjects to the violence of interpretation, which includes the questions that are asked of them, the words that are reproduced or omitted, the numerical translation of the answers, and, of course, the rhetorical framing of the final report. In this way, as Haggerty states, "Surveys and statistical analyses that measure, quantify and numerically characterize populations are epistemological modes linked to the rise of a surveillance society" (2002, 12).

I build on Haggerty's interlinking of surveys and surveillance. Of course, there are differences to note between low-tech surveys and high-tech surveillance. The surveys and statistics I examine represent discrete periods of data collection undertaken by an NGO, as opposed to systematic surveillance procedures implemented by governmental or corporate actors. To generate truth claims, survey-generated surveillance does not require state-of-the-art instruments; the observation and recording of data during interviews happens on an interpersonal level without the need for technological devices. Nonetheless, old and new surveillance strategies can share many problematic features. Both frequently rest on a positivist ideology that constructs numerical representation as "hard facts" and perpetuates the notion that scientific empiricism will deliver reliable truths. Both often begin with particular assumptions about risk, opportunity, and behavior. Both elicit only some kinds of information based on the theoretical premise and political commitments of the surveyors. Both can work as a form of social sorting that "obtains personal and group data in order to classify people . . . according to varying criteria, to determine who should be targeted for special treatment, suspicion, eligibility, inclusion, access, and so on" (Lyon 2003, 20). Given these overlapping characteristics and functions, new techniques of surveillance can be understood as an extension, elaboration, and sophistication of the traditional survey.

From this broader perspective, PRE's surveys thus participate in the project of surveillance, generating data that constructs clients as posing specific risks to women and thereby justifying special (criminal) treatment. To advance their prohibitionist truth claims, the client reports

draw on quantitative and qualitative methodologies, using questionnaires, as well as structured and semi-structured interviews. I outline some of the most blatant examples of bias and distortion from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. In doing so, I understand that social-scientific representation of "truth" can never be ideologically neutral. However, given that PRE is working within the epistemic framework of positivist truth, and that these reports are used to affect legal and policy outcomes, it is important to look beneath their surface, to expose and consider deeply problematic elements that undermine their persuasive value.

The scope of this essay does not allow for a comprehensive critique of every qualitative or statistical claim. Rather, I seek to highlight some of the most obvious weaknesses in PRE's methodology, approach, interpretation, and conclusions, to set the stage for my final critique of the invasive and punitive criminal sanctions PRE recommends for clients. My critique is guided by Ronald Weitzer's incisive articles "Flawed Theory and Method in Studies of Prostitution" (2005a) and "Rehashing Tired Claims about Prostitution" (2005c). Joel Best's helpful books *Stat-Spotting* (2008) and *Damned Lies and Statistics* (2012) provide further tools to recognize distortive empirical practices. I also turn to feminist-methodology texts to understand the extent to which PRE has failed to learn from the critical insights feminists have brought to the production of knowledge through quantitative and qualitative interviews and questionnaires. Most helpful in this regard are Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber's extensive anthology *Handbook of Feminist Research* (2012) and Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland's *Feminist Methodology* (2002).

Methodological Flaws and Distortions in the PRE Reports

All four reports were generated by PRE in conjunction with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and volunteers who share a negative view of prostitution. As stated, PRE is a nonprofit organization dedicated to disseminating antiprostitution truth claims in public debates. As Weitzer (2005a) argues, its founder, Farley, produces writings and presentations that perpetuate a totalizing view of prostitution as exploitative, as violent, and as an expression of male domination. This is exemplified on PRE's webpage entitled "Prostitution and Trafficking—Quick Facts," where prostitution is defined by the following (Farley and Butler 2012):

- A) sexual harassment
- B) rape
- C) battering
- D) verbal abuse
- E) domestic violence
- F) a racist practice
- G) a violation of human rights
- H) childhood sexual abuse
 - I) a consequence of male domination of women
 - J) a means of maintaining male domination of women
 - K) all of the above

PRE conflates a multitude of issues, origins, and causes in its grab-bag attempt to establish prostitution as inherently heinous. The webpage also cites dozens of other antiprostitution advocates, including some big names in radical feminism, such as Andrea Dworkin ("Male dominance means that the society creates a pool of prostitutes by any means necessary so that men have what men need to stay on top, to feel big, literally, metaphorically, in every way" [1997, 2]) and Sheila Jeffries ("The sex industry markets precisely the violence, the practices of subordination that feminists seek to eliminate from the streets, workplaces, and bedrooms" [1997, 267–68]). In the acknowledgments section of *Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don't Buy Sex* (hereafter *Comparing Sex Buyers*), the reader gets more information about the political commitments of those involved in the research. The report is funded by the Demand Abolition Project, which "focuses on eliminating men's assumption of the right to prostitution which would thereby eliminate the institution of prostitution" (Farley et al. 2011, 5). Based on this political goal, it is clear that the funders have a literal investment in the production of social-science knowledge that would justify their antiprostitution stance.

Best refers to such projects as "advocacy research" because they are implemented by activist groups who already have a committed opinion of the topic under study and whose primary purpose is to produce data to convince others to adopt their opinion (2001, 47). Accordingly, there is a strong indication that PRE's research will be vested in producing evidence that supports the construction of prostitution as a violent institution. Of course, from a feminist and critical-theory perspective, there is no such thing as a completely objective approach. As Ramazanoglu and Holland say, "The notion that political commitment is an inextricable part of the

process of social investigation, and is compatible with knowledge of social realities, even if this knowledge is partial, is central to feminist methodology: 'detachment is not a condition of science'" (2002, 54, citing D. E. Smith 1988, 177). Knowledge is thus always shaped by the researcher's experiences, belief systems, background, community, and identity, and is interpreted within a sociohistorical context. The fact that PRE has taken a stand on the issue of prostitution and is an advocate for its abolition, in part through the criminalization of clients and third parties, does not mean the knowledge it produces is without value, but it does mean that an evaluation of its reports should look for the ways in which this perspective may color the methodological choices and knowledge claims.

When evaluating the reliability of a survey-based research project, one of the first issues to consider is the sampling group. For each of its reports, PRE interviewed 101–133 men the NGO identified as "sex buyers." For *Comparing Sex Buyers*, PRE also interviewed 100 men who claimed they did not buy sex, in order to generate data on the differences between the two groups of men. From these small samples, PRE generalized about the characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of all male sex buyers, and from the additional interviews of non-sex buyers, they sought to differentiate clients from the general male population.

For three of the surveys—*Challenging Men's Demand for Prostitution in Scotland*, *Comparing Sex Buyers*, and *Men Who Buy Sex*—the majority of the men were recruited using newspaper advertisements. For *A Thorn in the Heart*, the men were recruited via a snowballing technique that began with interviewers asking their neighbors and acquaintances to participate in the study. These methods are called "convenience samples" by social scientists doing fieldwork and are nongeneralizable because the group is not a random selection of sex buyers (or non-sex buyers) (Weitzer 2005a, 938). Such samples can be skewed for a number of reasons. For example, regarding the newspaper-recruited male subjects, the advertisement reached only readers of that particular periodical. Furthermore, the kinds of people who would answer an advertisement and wish to discuss their sexual practices and attitudes may not be representative of all sex buyers or non-sex buyers. With regard to the snowballing technique, the resulting sample group was by definition narrow, since interviewers had begun with people with whom they were already acquainted. Since PRE is an advocacy group that aligns prostitution with violence, how this belief might have influenced who was selected for the study must be taken into

account. It should be noted, too, that it is impossible to conduct a random sample of sex buyers. Given the taboo, criminalized, and secretive nature of the trade, access to the sex-buying population is always challenging. PRE's reports, however, do not qualify or nuance their knowledge claims based on the limitations of the samples; rather, they generalize and recommend serious criminal sanctions based on a nonrandom sample of men. Out of the four reports, the only one to recognize the limitations of the research was *Comparing Sex Buyers*. Toward the end of that report, the authors acknowledge that men who respond to such advertisements "may differ in unknown ways from the general population of men, including sex buyers" (Farley et al. 2011, 41). Nonetheless, this section concludes that sex buyers are likely much worse (in terms of undesirable criminal behavior) than the report indicates, because subjects in self-report studies tend to respond in ways that they perceive to be socially desirable: "We assume with some confidence that the numbers reported in this study are conservative and are likely underestimates of many of the attitudes and behaviors we were assessing" (Farley et al. 2011, 41). This assumption plays on what criminologists refer to as the "dark figure," the proportion of crime that goes unreported (Best 2012, 33). As Best argues, "Activists usually believe that the problem they seek to bring to public attention is both large and largely unrecognized, [so] there is a substantial dark figure of hidden cases" (ibid., 50). PRE ends its section on the limitations of the research not only by using the power of the unverifiable "dark figure" to suggest that the numbers are reliable as an indicator of male sex buyers' unsavory and criminal characteristics, but also by implying that such men are probably even worse in this regard than the study can verify. There is no mention of the crucial fact that data from the small nonrandom sample are not generalizable.

Another area of interest in considering the reliability of the PRE studies are the questions used to gather data. As Best argues of advocacy research, "Advocates word questions so as to encourage people to respond in the desired way" (2012, 47). The PRE reports are based on self-administered questionnaires and interviews. While the reports describe the topics covered by the questions, none of the actual questions are included, despite the fact that the reports are posted on the PRE website and thus presumably not subject to space constraints. This lack of transparency is problematic. Weitzer has noted this methodological flaw in studies authored by Farley and ones by Jody Raphael and Deborah L. Shapiro, researchers who frame prostitution as violence (Weitzer 2005a,

939). In response to this criticism, Raphael and Shapiro contend that Weitzer should have asked to view the survey before making assumptions about its potential bias (2005, 967). As I agree that it is incumbent on the researcher to provide the wording of key questions without compelling the reader to chase after them (Weitzer 2005c, 972), I decided to be proactive. I emailed PRE on 2 October 2012 to request a copy of the questions used to generate the reports. Farley responded within a few hours, stating she would "consider" my request, and asked about my view on the issues. She also inquired whether I had published in the subject area. I responded that I was interested in evaluating whether the questions in the PRE reports may have shaped the kind of data produced, and I attached three articles I wrote that touched on the issue of sex work (email correspondence, 4 October 2012). Farley ultimately did not share the questions. In an email dated 24 October 2012, she explained that PRE has shared the questionnaires with psychologists, but suggested that nonpsychologists have had difficulties with the interpretation, analysis, and comparison with norms. Farley thus sidestepped the issue of research transparency by drawing on disciplinary distinctions. Furthermore, there are no indications that the questions used involved complex psychological theories or concepts. In any event, Farley does not elaborate on her justification for concealing the questions.

Whatever Farley's intentions, by withholding the questions from the reports, PRE prevents the reader from analyzing how ideological beliefs may have influenced the wording or encouraged particular kinds of answers. It also prevents replication of the study, which would allow other researchers to test or extend the results. This methodological subterfuge is troubling enough, but the fact that Farley inquired about my own perspectives on the issue while considering my request further adds to concerns about PRE's research methods. Since her reason for not sharing the questions—my status as a nonpsychologist—came only after I shared my views on sex work, it seems likely that the real reason she denied my request was because of the perspective expressed in my publications, which calls into question the academic integrity of the reports. From a feminist perspective, this refusal signals a troubling reluctance to recognize and dialogue across difference (Reay 2012, 627). Ultimately, without the actual questions being available for analysis, the knowledge generated in the reports is highly suspect.

Another misleading practice used in the reports was the selective but decontextualized inclusion of quotes. For example, PRE peppers the re-

port *Comparing Sex Buyers* with little snippets from their interviews of “Sex Buyers” and “Non-Sex Buyers.” While there is some diversity in each group, the sex buyers’ quotes are often more crude in tone than are those of the non-sex buyers, and the non-sex buyers often sound like committed radical feminist men. Take, for example, two quotes from sex buyers: “Just stick your dick in”; “Being with a prostitute is like having a cup of coffee—when you’re done, you throw it out” (Farley et al. 2011, 3). Then take two quotes from non-sex buyers: “I am a sexual being, but it’s not a turn-on for me, knowing that the other person needs to be coerced”; “I would say you are better off masturbating. Prostitution is a degrading thing for both parties” (ibid.). The quotes are taken out of context, so the reader cannot assess how statements that may have come before or after might frame the quotes in a particular way. While this weakness in methodology is not unique to PRE, the decontextualization is heightened since none of the quotes are assigned to a particular subject—pseudonyms are not used. In table 1 for example, eleven quotes are attributed to “Sex Buyers” and eight quotes to “Non-Sex Buyers,” but none of the quotes in each category are further differentiated. Because of this, potentially, all eleven of the sex buyer quotes indicating a crude attitude toward sex workers could be from a single interviewee, and all eight of the non-sex buyer quotes indicating an understanding of prostitution as exploitation could likewise be from a single source. Yet, the way the quotes are presented leads the reader to believe each quote is from a different person—which it might be, but the reader has no way to confirm this one way or another. Compare this choice with the way Teela Sanders cites the interviewees in her study of fifty clients, *Paying for Pleasure* (2008). After each quote, Sanders provides a pseudonym, and in an appendix she lists all the men by their pseudonyms along with biographical data such as the subject’s age, occupation, and marital status. Not only does this practice allow the reader to differentiate quotes from different men, but the pseudonyms and biographical information humanizes the men, allowing the reader to imagine the subjects as individual people without compromising their privacy. PRE’s practice of unidentified quotes has the opposite effect: the decontextualized quotes make the subjects appear one-dimensional and homogenous. This reductionist approach allows PRE to more easily stereotype sex buyers as a deviant category of men deserving condemnation and, more important, criminal sanctions.

Due to the problems outlined above—the committed antiprostitution stance which drives PRE’s research; generalizations based on convenience

samples; inattention to the limitations of such research; exploitation of the “dark figure” to suggest sex buyers are worse than they will admit; withholding the survey and interview questions used to create the reports; Farley’s seeming unwillingness to share the questions with scholars who oppose her essentialist antiprostitution perspective; and the lack of differentiation between excerpted quotes—serious doubts emerge about the reliability of the qualitative and quantitative data.

Comparing Sex Buyers also distorts statistical data to create a pejorative picture of sex buyers. Advocacy research often takes recourse to this kind of data, as it holds much traction in sociopolitical debates. As Haggerty argues, “Rhetorical uses of statistics can do more than provide support, they can also perform a type of social magic by giving political claims a degree of urgency and aura of scientific truth that they might otherwise lack” (2002, 8). I expose the methodological and semantic tricks behind PRE’s “social magic.” To do so is important because PRE justifies its recommendations for expanding and strengthening the criminalization of clients, in part, through the persuasive power of statistical data. While combing through each statistic is beyond the scope of this chapter, I point out a few blatant manipulations of numerical data that demonstrate the weakness, if not the downright deceptiveness, of PRE’s statistical claims.

At the beginning of the document, PRE provides a “Summary of Findings and Recommendations,” where it professes that “sex buyers engaged in significantly more criminal activity than non-sex buyers” (Farley et al. 2011, 4). This statement is not qualified, and the tabulation of criminal activities is based on self-reporting, so there is no way to know if any of the men have accurately reported their activities. As PRE itself notes, interviewees may consciously or unconsciously hide facts to present in socially desirable ways. PRE discusses this concern in relation only to “sex buyers.” Yet one might reasonably consider that the men who were willing to admit to “buying sex” might have been more forthcoming about their illicit activities than were the other men interviewed. In comparison, the men who claimed they did not purchase sexual services may have been particularly vested in coming across as upstanding citizens and might not have been willing to share information regarding any criminal activity in which they may have been involved. Furthermore, a close examination of the information contained in table 16, “Crimes Committed by Sex Buyers and Non-Sex Buyers,” shows the extent to which the differentiation between the two groups is contrived. For instance, PRE inflates the association of criminality with sex buyers by including bizarre—even comical—

“crimes.” Under “property crimes,” for example, PRE lists “selling balloons without a permit” as an offence committed by one sex buyer. The inclusion of such a minor infraction in PRE’s evidence of the deviant nature of clients suggests an attempt to stretch the numbers.

This number stretching also occurs in PRE’s categorization of crimes, which illustrates its efforts to create an indelible link between sex clients and violence against women. In the section “Summary of Findings and Recommendations,” PRE states, “All of the crimes known to be associated with violence against women were reported by sex buyers; none were reported by non-sex buyers” (Farley et al. 2011, 4). Taken at face value, this statement suggests a stark and significant difference between the two groups of men. But, if the reader looks at the fine print in table 16, which lists the crimes, the difference between the two groups appears disingenuous and forced. The types of offences PRE categorizes as “Violence Against Women or Typically Associated w/VAWA” are “impersonating a police officer; violating a restraining order; indecent exposure—public urinating; intimidating witnesses; lewd and lascivious behavior; destruction of property” (Farley et al. 2011, 35). None of these offences necessarily signal violence against women, and no explanation is offered as to why such offences are “typically associated with” violence against women. While there *may* be an association between these offences and violence against women—for example, violating a restraining order might be related to stalking—without more details with regard to the specifics of each crime, the connection remains open to interpretation. In any given instance, public urination could be more directly related to the criminalization of poverty, as homeless people risk arrest when they engage in basic survival activities (D. M. Smith 1994, 492). Conversely, from such a broad perspective, other offences that PRE lists under separate categories might also have been classified as being “associated with violence against women.” For example, “carrying a concealed weapon” was included in the “weapons” category, and “assault but charges were dropped” was included in the “assault” category, yet both could easily have been included in the “Violence Against Women” category, at least according to the vague terms of the report. Significantly, however, these offences happened to have been committed by non-sex buyers. Categorization here carries out important ideological work: if these offenses were included in the category of offences “associated with violence against women,” PRE would not have been able to make the claim that non-sex buyers had not engaged in criminal activities associated with violence against women.

PRE’s categorization of offences under separate headings in table 16 is problematic in other ways as well. For example, not only does PRE define, without explanation, the crime “destruction of property” as typically associated with violence against women, but it chooses not to include that particular offence in the category “Property Crimes,” which would arguably be its proper classification. Similarly, urinating in public might better be categorized under the subheading “Crimes Against Authority—Disorderly Conduct,” which appears on the next page and includes activities like “disturbing the peace” and “drinking in public.” PRE offers no explanation for how it organized categories, but it is hard not to suspect ideological motives to skew the report in particular ways. By placing select activities that might *potentially* relate to violence against women under a heading that defines the activities as *unequivocally* related to violence against women, PRE constructs and then inflates the statistical connection between “sex buyers” and violence against women (despite the fact that the activities are nowhere in the document proven to specifically indicate violence against women).

PRE’s rhetorical strategy is clearly to present its data in a dramatic fashion via the category “Violence Against Women or Typically Associated with VAWA.” The careful reader, when looking at the fine print under this heading, will note that with regard to the 100 sex buyers interviewed, only six associated “criminal” incidents are noted—and they correspond exactly to the six offence types PRE chose to list under this category. In addition, because PRE does not differentiate between sex buyers, it is possible that a single person committed all six of the crimes that PRE listed as associated with violence against women. But even if, for the sake of argument, we assume each criminal incident was committed by a different sex buyer, this suggests that, at most, a mere 6% of sex buyers self-reported activities that PRE associates with violence against women. Yet, PRE’s summary converts this statistic into a dramatic narrative: “All of the crimes known to be associated with violence against women were reported by sex buyers; none were reported by non-sex buyers” (Farley et al. 2011, 4). PRE chooses not to present their own data in percentages or numerical terms, instead using the terms *all* and *none* to present a certain story about the implications of the statistic. Best refers to such narrative translation as the packaging of a statistic in the most impressive format: “Quantities can be expressed in different ways, and we ought to be alert for packaging choices that inflate the importance of figures” (2008, 65–66). It is obviously more impressive to state that “*all* of the ac-

tivities known to be associated with violence against women were committed by sex buyers” than to state, somewhat anticlimactically, that six out of 100 sex buyers engaged in acts that PRE associates (for unknown reasons) with violence against women. PRE thus manipulates not only the qualitative but also the quantitative data to bolster an essentialist view of prostitution as violence and sex buyers as deviant, and to deliver the empirical goods to its funder, the Demand Abolition Project.

Deterrents and Policy Considerations: Surveys as Carceral Projects

Unfortunately, not only does PRE frame the data ideologically to reinforce its antiprostitution stance, the organization’s primary goal is to advance a carceral agenda through state apparatuses. The carceral, as defined by Michel Foucault (1995) and taken up by Bernstein (2010) in her theorization of carceral feminism, denotes not just the use of incarceration as the privileged means of social control, but also the proliferation of carceral mechanisms that survey and discipline outside of prison walls. Under the sections “Deterrents to Prostitution” and “Policy Considerations” in *Comparing Sex Buyers*, PRE advocates a multilayered carceral strategy to punish, survey, stigmatize, and deter clients. PRE encourages neoliberal, right-wing approaches to crime control which construct deviant populations and use public resources to expand the prison industrial complex and the powers of criminal justice.

Several of PRE’s suggested strategies specifically advocate for panoptic and synoptic surveillance. In addition to jail time and increased fines, suggested punishments include placement on sex-offender registry lists, public shaming in newspapers or billboards, and DNA collection. Constructing clients as sex offenders who must be put on registries not only further reifies and expands this demonized category, but also individualizes and decontextualizes sexual violence while deflecting attention from the systemic causes of violence against women. Furthermore, as Erica Meiners argues, “The expansion of SOR [sex offender registries] contributes to the criminalization of public space and participates in producing public feelings (disgust, fear) that work to legitimate surveillance and incarceration technologies at the core of the PIC [prison industrial complex]” (2009, 51). Officially denouncing clients by publishing their names in newspapers and billboards calls on the community to participate in public-shaming rituals, a strategy that relies on what Mathiesen (1997)

calls the “synoptic” community gaze, whereby the many watch the few (1997, 218). Through this “synoptic” dynamic, sex clients become the object of penal voyeurism, which is gratified by disgracing the stigmatized men.

While the advocacy and support of sex-offender registries and public-shaming strategies evidences PRE’s carceral feminism, *Comparing Sex Buyers* concentrates primarily on persuading the reader of the need to forcibly extract DNA samples from arrested sex buyers. An entire section of the report is dedicated to advancing these arguments: “Given the criminal history of sex buyers documented in this research, one would anticipate that other criminal activity including sexual violence might occur in the future. Obtaining DNA samples from arrested johns may be useful to consider matches with evidence obtained in past and future crimes. DNA samples would be predicted to serve as a deterrent to buying sex since most people who commit crimes do not want their DNA taken” (Farley et al. 2011, 42). Again, PRE performs a rhetorical sleight of hand. Setting aside the report’s various methodological and statistical problems, even PRE’s own data does not support the generalization that sex buyers are likely to have a “criminal history,” since only a minority of the sex buyers they surveyed had been convicted of crimes, and none of the crimes listed had any documented relation to sexual violence or violence against women. PRE’s study provides no empirical reason to anticipate that sex clients, whether they have a criminal record or not, will engage in sexual violence. In addition, PRE apparently has no interest in due process, bodily autonomy, or the rights of the accused. Obtaining DNA samples of arrested—not convicted—clients for the purpose of deterring potential clients either presumes that all arrested men are guilty or, even more troubling, that whether such men are in fact guilty is irrelevant. Furthermore, as Melissa G. Grant argues in her critique of DNA collection of arrested clients, “By threatening people with the possibility of being marked for life in a government database, these well-funded campaigners—with allies in law enforcement, including the Department of Justice—are using a questionably legal policing practice, a combination of ‘scared-straight’ strategies that became a signature of the war on drugs and the extension of the surveillance state propelled by the war on terror” (2012, para. 1).

Table 20 in *Comparing Sex Buyers* evidences PRE’s carceral feminist alliance with the punitive state, which lists fourteen people who support PRE’s arguments for DNA testing of arrested sex buyers. The supporters

include not just people working for NGOs, but people associated with law enforcement and prosecutorial offices, three of whom are also quoted elaborating on the benefits of DNA testing. The FBI special agent Roger Young justifies collecting DNA samples by making extreme claims about the harms posed by johns: "If it were known that DNA samples were obtained from all arrested johns then it would assist in the prevention of prostitution and the very harmful effects prostitution causes with every aspect of society, morally, socially, economically—and our national security" (Farley et al. 2011, 43). This statement signals a classic moral panic, whereby those associated with an unpopular activity—in this case, buying sex—are objectified as a dangerous class of persons, as "folk devils," in Stanley Cohen's words (2011, 2). Agent Young's characterization of the pervasive threat that sex clients pose to society recalls the construction of gays and lesbians in the 1950s, which also deemed "deviant" sexuality a threat to national security (Kinsman and Gentile 2010). In both cases, sexuality outside of a heteronormative relational context is categorically demonized and the "moral entrepreneurs" who attempt to regulate sexual activity are not required to provide any evidence of wrongdoing.

The supporting quote provided by Alice Vachss, a prosecuting attorney, further reveals the deeply conservative commitment to social justice through penal policy that is embraced by PRE and its allies. After concurring with PRE's advocacy for DNA databases for clients, Vachss states, "But one warning: the testing backlog is already so severe that any legislative addition to the DNA sampling list must provide for funding the testing process or else it compromises the existing system" (Farley et al. 2011, 43). This reveals how the push to criminalize and surveil clients is inextricably linked to increasing financial support for neoliberal carceral strategies of social control. Significantly, *Comparing Sex Buyers* never considers how funneling money into invasive biotechnologies and the prison industrial complex may divert public funds from social welfare, employment training, housing, and health care for those most at risk of engaging in survival sex work. As Bernstein argues, such instances of antiprostitution feminism are based on casting "carceral politics as gender justice" (2010, 65).

Furthermore, the racism of this carceral politics is made evident when PRE attempts to inflate the number of people who would agree with their DNA collecting strategy while disregarding the concerns of those fighting racialized oppression in the criminal-justice system. The report states,

Several people who are involved in work against violence against women did not agree to be put on this list—not because they object in principle to taking DNA samples from arrested johns. They understand that the criminal justice system is racist and is currently so biased against men of color that they fear this practice would disproportionately and unjustly harm men of color. Sadly, we understand this reasoning. Since we have no evidence that men of color buy sex any more or less frequently than white European-American men, the proportion of all men who are arrested for buying sex (and thus whose DNA we propose would be sampled) should be in proportion to their numbers in the population at large, and should not exceed—or be less than—the population percentage of those men. (Farley et al. 2011, 43)

PRE pays lip service to concern that men of color will be disproportionately harmed by such policies, but nonetheless persists in its call to action. While PRE is correct in stating that there is no evidence that men of color buy sex more frequently than do white men, there is ample evidence that men of color are disproportionately criminalized (M. Alexander 2012), including disproportionately criminalized for buying sex (Brewer, Muth, and Potterat 2008; Wortley, Fischer, and Webster 2002). Despite their performance of understanding issues of disenfranchisement, PRE does not retract their advocacy of carceral biotechnologies.

PRE's disregard for the specificity of racialized state violence is dramatized in the concluding paragraph of *Comparing Sex Buyers*. In describing the goals of the prostitution "abolitionist" movement, PRE analogizes African American resistance to slavery and white supremacy to "prostituted women's enduring resistance" to subjugation. In listing support for this analogy, PRE cites a blog entry from *AfroSpear*, which describes itself as "A Think Tank for People of African Descent." There is nothing in the cited blog entry that addresses sex work, yet PRE capitalizes on the rhetorical power of antislavery struggles to advance its antiprostitution stance. Not only does this appropriation decontextualize the blog entry, it elides the specific violence of white supremacy and institutional slavery. Further, PRE exploits this analogy, despite the fact that the report's recommendations seek to strengthen the carceral state, which effectively furthers a legacy of slavery that continues to disproportionately dehumanize African American people, particularly in the United States (Wacquant 2002).

Conclusion

I have explored how PRE's survey research operates as a form of surveillance, how its data are distorted to reify clients as deviants, and how its prohibitionist stance on sex work is in alliance with the carceral state. As we engage in critical surveillance analysis, it is important to consider not just how the government, corporations, employers, or individual stalkers engage techniques of monitoring, categorizing, and spying in ways that dehumanize and target vulnerable bodies, but also how social-science research techniques can be complicit in these reifying processes. In the case of PRE's client reports, this reifying process legitimates and intensifies the dehumanization and oppression of those most targeted for criminalization and police surveillance. In particular, the construction of clients as deviants bolsters and legitimates the criminal-justice system, where the usual suspects—racialized and working-class men—are disproportionately rounded up and criminalized in the service of the prison industrial complex. Moreover, this criminalization further strengthens the hegemonic association of such men with sexual danger and perversity.

In addition, it is not just male clients who suffer when buying sex becomes criminalized. Female sex workers are victimized by prohibitionist sociolegal discourses. When prostitution is defined as an antisocial and criminal activity, sex workers continue to be stigmatized. As Lowman argues, "The prohibition and stigmatization of prostitution are the main obstacles to creating safer working conditions for prostitutes" (2000, 1007). In Sweden, where the buying but not the selling of sex is criminalized, sex workers continue to be victimized (van der Meulen 2011). Police sweeps of clients still displace sex workers, forcing them to seek out clients in remote and isolated areas, where they are more vulnerable to violence. This dislocation also makes it harder for sex workers to access health and social services. Moreover, in a legal scheme where buying sexual services is criminalized, some clients will seek sexual services in indoor settings. For street sex workers, fewer clients means increased competition, and the resulting pressures to agree to less safe sexual practices, including not using condoms or servicing men who are intoxicated.

Singling out sex clients as a deviant class and celebrating those who do not buy sex as good sexual citizens contributes to veiling the violence that happens to women in private, sanctified settings. After decades of feminist research that has sought to expose the ways marital sexual relations sometimes occur within a context of economic exploitation or vio-

lence, the vilification of clients can work against feminist challenges to the idealization of marriage and monogamy. Indeed, the entire goal of *Comparing Sex Buyers* is the production of difference between sex buyers and non-sex buyers, as is evidenced by the report's subtitle: "You Can Have a Good Time with the Servitude' vs. 'You're Supporting a System of Degradation.'" The juxtaposition of the two quotes—the first from a sex buyer who appears to enjoy the sex worker's supposed servitude, the second from a non-sex buyer who understands prostitution as a "system of degradation"—idealizes men who condemn prostitution within prohibitionist ideology. Yet, as feminists have pointed out for decades, often the man who poses the most sexual threat to a woman is a husband, boyfriend, or family member. By applauding men who prefer sexuality within a long-term relational context, PRE obscures the violence that frequently occurs between intimate partners.

Prohibitionist feminism is fundamentally antifeminist. It is up to intersectional feminist scholars—who recognize the links between sexual normativity, neoliberalism, surveillance practices, and penal responses to social injustice—to expose the flawed methodology and problematic theory behind reports like those authored by PRE, and to challenge the carceral strategies that they explicitly foster. In this way, we can demonstrate how men, as well as women, can be subject to gender injustice, especially when they exist at the intersection of multiple forms of marginalization.

Notes

1. See Jeffrey and MacDonald 2006; Pheterson 1990; Pheterson 1993.
2. See, respectively, Farley et al. 2011; Macleod, Farley, Anderson, and Golding 2008; Farley, Bindel, and Golding 2009; and Farley, Freed, Phal, and Golding 2012, all available at the Prostitution Research and Education website, <http://prostitutionresearch.com/>.
3. For example, Farley was an expert witness for the Canadian government in the *R. v. Bedford* case, to support the criminalization of prostitution. See "Affidavit of Dr. Melissa Farley," <http://myweb.dal.ca/mgoodyea/Documents/Canada/Farley%20affidavit%20April%2008.pdf>.