

Establishing an Australian Office of Technological Assessment to review technological options, whilst not a bad idea, will, if US experience is anything to go by, merely add another voice to the babble of medical and other experts expressing their views on the costs and benefits of particular technologies. But the actual ways in which medical technologies are even partly assessed and resources allocated to them are barely studied in Australia. In fact, this accounts for the difference I have mentioned between the first and second parts of this book — the first asks a series of very specific and stimulating questions about emerging medical technologies; the second half then re-examines them in a very general way. The existing organisations in Australia which have some responsibility for various aspects of health-care technology assessment are not mentioned. Nothing is said, for example, about the debate over Certificate of Needs legislation (see *Medical Practice*, 1984); there is no mention of Australia's National Health Technology Advisory Panel (NHTAP), set up by the Federal Department of Health in 1982. (Its first report was in April 1983 on Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Imaging and it has been involved in the debate over whether Australia should have its own cyclotron.) NHTAP's influence so far has hardly been great and it is unlikely that such an organisation could, by itself, measure up to the challenges posed in this book; but some comment on it is surely not out of place in a book on medical technologies in Australia.

But maybe we need another book to develop the arguments Erica Bates and Helen Lapsley have admirably highlighted? We certainly need to know more about (to present a list in no particular order): a wider range of technologies, covering not just the most visible, individually expensive medical machines, but also those that in the longer term have possible more significant effects on health-care provision (new path tests and such things as medical artificial intelligence) the industrial sociological effects on health-care workers; cross-country comparisons of the changing institutional responses to assessment and allo-

cation problems; what kind of economic and social assessments can be made of new technologies in relation to the whole health-care system, rather than just one-off pieces of technology; and last, but not least, the strategies of medical equipment companies.

But even if such knowledge of the state of medical technology in Australia were known we would still be faced with the problem of knowing what to do with it. As the authors conclude:

It has become urgent that we should regularly, frequently and publicly discuss how we are going to use our powerful technologies, whether they provide benefits we really want, and whether we really want to go in the direction in which they are leading (p. 229).
Over to the Commission for the Future?

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BEING A PROSTITUTE.

Roberta Perkins and Garry Bennett.
 Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1985.
 318 pp. \$18.95 (cloth), \$14.95 (paper).

Constant media coverage and popular concern about prostitution, recent changes to legal and administrative regulations gover-

ning prostitution in its various forms in several States, and the emergence of organised groups to represent the views and interests of prostitutes in public discussions and to influence policy formation ensure that the subject retains a high level of visibility and social significance. At the same time there have been remarkably few empirical studies of prostitution in Australia and our knowledge is largely confined to sensationalised reports of criminal cases and media exposés. So a book giving detailed accounts of the perceptions and experiences of a variety of prostitutes, male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, of different ages and background, and covering the diversity of forms of occupational types and organisational settings of prostitution at the present time would seem to be timely. Both the authors have extensive personal knowledge of the current nature of prostitution in Sydney, one as a worker with gay youth and the other involved in work with transsexuals and in the campaign for prostitutes' rights.

The data they collected included both survey material and in-depth interviews and the book focuses on 21 individual cases. The authors say the 'study speaks the minds of prostitute women and men and tells the truth their way' (p. xvi). As is now common sociological practice, prostitution is treated as an occupation rather than a sexual practice or a form of deviant behaviour. The cases were carefully chosen to highlight differences between male and female prostitutes of various types, females providing heterosexual sex and males both homosexual and heterosexual sex though chiefly the former, and both groups containing individuals whose own sexual preference was either homosexual or heterosexual or bisexual. Some were working in brothels and parlours, some on the streets and others as call-girls or boys; some were owners or managers, some employees, some independent operators, and some were 'casuals'. The major contribution of this book is its systematic comparison between male and female prostitutes and the analysis of gender in relation to how prostitution is differently perceived and practised by men and women and by heterosexuals and homosexuals. On many

dimensions (for example relationships to clients, freedom of movement and autonomy, degree and forms of risk and hazard, time in the occupation) the major differences lay between male and female prostitutes. This reflects the differences between men and women in the wider society with respect to power, resources, sexual and moral standards, and vulnerability to various modes and degrees of exploitation. On other dimensions, a distinction based on sexual identity for male prostitutes is far more significant and results in an overall division between gay and bisexual male prostitutes on the one hand and heterosexual male and all female prostitutes (whatever their sexuality) on the other hand. This affected attitudes to clients, self-perceptions, reasons for entering the occupation, and degree of emotional and/or sexual involvement in whatever sexual activities the job entails.

Only this kind of in-depth study can provide the basis for an analysis of sex and gender differences in sexuality and sexual politics within prostitution and certainly some interesting findings are reported. However, the focus on subjective accounts of individuals, a favourite research strategy of sociologists of deviance, also has certain limitations. There may be some justification in confining the study to prostitutes alone in this instance in view of the lack of current published material that uses prostitutes' own experiences, perceptions and evaluations. But the decision to supplement general survey data with in-depth case studies and a commitment to allow prostitutes a voice, given limited resources, meant that only one view of a multi-dimensional phenomenon (that of the prostitutes themselves) could be covered. Other categories of individuals involved in the particular activity, in this case clients, police, brothel and parlour owners, among others were not included though their perceptions and actions form part of the social phenomenon in question. Hence however valuable the material, the analysis remains at a descriptive level. Unavoidably this places limits on the kind of interpretation that can be offered. As sociologists of deviance have argued, the study

of forms of behaviour that are socially disapproved and subject to various types of social regulation requires equal attention to be paid to both the people engaging in such behaviour, their attitudes, motivations and understandings; and to the social control and personnel processes with which they are forced to deal. With respect to prostitution, we still lack such a study.

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**MASS MURDER:
AMERICA'S GROWING MENACE.**

Jack Levin and James Alan Fox.

New York, Plenum Press, 1985. 252 pp.

£US16.95 (paper).

Somewhere out there, if we will but work hard enough, are sets of clues and common denominators, which could, ultimately, permit us to recognise and define potential homicidal extroverts before they strike. The ultimate remedy for disease is not to cure it when it appears, but to vaccinate against it before it takes hold (x).

The degree of faith in such naive empiricism displayed by the authors of this work is exceeded only by the degree of intractability of their data. Certainly no one could criticise the energy of the authors of this hunt for the clues which, like the killers, are lurking 'somewhere out there'. Their accounts of the sickening and distressing violence wreaked on men, women and children are carried out with considerable literary energy and no bloody excess is too gory or heartrending to deter them from describing it in detail. Indeed, reading this book led me firmly to the opinion that the authors were journalists and that the book review editor had erred in forwarding such a work. However, the dustjacket disillusioned me: both are professors at Northeastern University in Boston — one in sociology, the other in criminal justice.

This being the case, one could sensibly

apply criteria of sociological adequacy to the book's approach, methods and findings. On such criteria it fails abominably. To begin with, while the book is subtitled *America's Growing Menace* and argues that mass murder is a phenomenon of rapidly increasing frequency in the USA, (and is claimed to have appeared as a regular event only in the past two decades) no evidence is presented to support the assertion. It is certainly not the case that mass murders are a recent phenomenon *per se*, since one can readily bring to mind Chicago-style gang warfare (the St Valentine's day massacre), and racist slaughters in the last century. Nevertheless the pattern of relative or absolute numerical frequency of such murders over time is a matter about which we are left completely in the dark. Moreover in the case of some of the postwar instances discussed — notably the My Lai massacre, and the Jonestown mass suicide — the event was not in the United States at all. This leaves the distinct impression that the authors were actually running short of cases to discuss in depth, and is suggestive of the fact that since mass murders are extremely rare events, any thesis of growth is likely to be based on very small fluctuations in tiny absolute frequencies. All of this seems to imply not only that the 'growth' thesis is suspect, but also that the authors are trying to create a moral panic rather than pursue a sociological problem.

A second major methodological problem is that no clear rationale is given for the aggregation of the many and varied killings under a single concept of 'mass murder'. On general sociological assumptions, it would not seem rational to group together a military operation, a mass-suicide, killings by a black muslim murder squad, a race riot and the depredations of a series of individual killers, some of whom struck only at their family members, others only at random strangers. Of course, it has to be recognised that important sociological insights do emerge from typological groupings which violate common sense. However, in such cases there has to be some theoretical rationale underlying the particular pattern of categorical inclusion. Except for a background expectancy that some clues will emerge about