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Hlavka, Heather R., and Mulla, Sameena. *Bodies in Evidence: Race, Gender, and Science in Sexual Assault Adjudication*. New York University Press, 2021. pp. 299. \$30.00 (paperback). ISBN: 978-1479809646.

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What can the unique perspective of sexual assault advocates teach us about the courtroom experience? Heather R. Hlavka and Sameena Mulla, both academics with personal experience serving in the role of rape crisis advocates, explore conceptions of victimhood, credibility, and expertise in criminal legal sexual assault narratives in their stunning book *Bodies in Evidence: Race, Gender, and Science in Sexual Assault Adjudication*. Hlavka, an Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Sciences at the Klinger College of Arts and Sciences at Marquette University, brings previous experience researching forensic evidence at child advocacy centers (Hlavka 2013, 2014, 2017). Meanwhile, Mulla, who is an Associate Professor in the Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Emory University, provides contextual background through prior ethnography of sexual assault forensic evidence collection in the setting of hospital emergency rooms (Mulla, 2014).

This groundbreaking text highlights observations gleaned from 688 court hearings and appearances involving 364 different defendants that Hlavka and Mulla witnessed at Milwaukee County Court since beginning this project in May 2013. *Bodies in Evidence* features a robust mixed-methods qualitative research design that utilizes qualitative data from ethnographic fieldwork, pre- and post-court observations, archival documents, and semi-structured interviews in coordination with a wide variety of different courtroom actors, ranging from attorneys, judges, and jurors to victim-witnesses and expert witnesses. In considering the roles of race, class, and gender in dispensing justice, Hlavka and Mulla reveal the distinctive individual and community trauma that is the sexual assault trial, calling into question its continued use in our sociolegal worlds.

Bodies in Evidence reveals the rampant abuse of popularized myths surrounding forensic science, evidence, and interviewing in sexual assault adjudication, resulting in the racialization and sexualization of all participants that especially targets the victim-witness. According to the authors, the sexual assault trial "is a site of recalibrating culturally animated truths about sexual violence,

evidence, and race” (Hlavka & Mulla, 2021, p. 18). As the title of the book suggests, a major theme throughout the text is the objectification of the victim-witness and the reduction of their physical body to evidence in the courtroom, a thing subject to both scrutiny and debate based on culturally pervasive and erroneous rape myths. Members of both the prosecution and the defense simultaneously resist and welcome these rape myths at every stage of adjudication in service of their own legalistic goals in a case despite being so well positioned to debunk such misconceptions about sexual violence. Hlavka and Mulla structure their book according to the typical chronology of a sexual assault trial, including chapters that focus on jury selection as well as witness testimony from key characters like victim-witnesses, police officers, sensitive crimes detectives, sexual assault nurse examiners, forensic scientists, and finally, the defendant. The introduction of each new witness once again calls into question the victimization of the victim-witness, reinforcing social preferences for corroboration and highlighting the omnipresent skepticism towards the expertise of sexual assault victims in narrating their own life and bodily experiences. No matter the court’s disposition, Hlavka and Mulla expose the sexual assault trial as a site of universal social harm where only the state can ever emerge victorious.

Bodies in Evidence contributes to an already impressive set of literature surrounding topics of adversarial court systems, intersectional feminism, abolitionist feminism, and more. The book is an analytic exploration of the culminating step in the prolonged and arduous criminal legal process that survivors navigate. Most extraordinary, though, is the personal experience that both authors contribute in terms of their prior service in the role of rape crisis advocate, with Mulla having volunteered providing rape crisis services in Baltimore in conjunction with her ethnographic fieldwork and Hlavka providing on-call advocacy services through the Marquette University Sexual Violence Advocacy Network. The unique expertise gained from providing rape crisis advocacy services is flawlessly woven throughout the book via the critical stance that these authors take against what they depict as an inherently unfair judicial process, and I argue that such distinctive experience gives Hlavka and Mulla insider knowledge that affords them the unique ability to systematically show through *Bodies in Evidence* what so many sexual assault advocates learn through years of engagement with criminal legal systems: the benefits available to survivors are minimal if not entirely nonexistent, and these institutions are designed to offer neither healing nor accountability.

Although *Bodies in Evidence* makes important evidentiary contributions to discrediting carceral feminist perspectives, the authors nonetheless suggest some hesitancy to label themselves as abolitionists and to fully incorporate abolitionism throughout the text, opting instead to leave these arguments somewhat underdeveloped by mentioning them only briefly in the very beginning and end of the book. Instead, the authors opt to leave their abolitionist agendas more open-ended, concluding their critiques of the existing structure with an invitation to readers to consider abolitionist alternatives without offering any specific concrete solutions. The evidence presented in this text truthfully belongs alongside more explicitly political feminist abolitionist arguments that, like *Bodies in Evidence*, highlight the gendered and sexualized violence that is inherent to sexual assault trials themselves. Despite this weakness, Hlavka and Mulla provide an exemplary display of the state’s institutionalized complicity in and perpetuation of sexual violence via the sexual assault trial, highlighting its failure to dispense justice at both the individual and community levels. *Bodies in Evidence* is a revolutionary must-read for academics, activists, and all those in search of more equitable remedies to sexual violence beyond the courtroom.

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