

**British Sociological Association
Philip Abrams Memorial Prize
Shortlist 2007**



**John Bone
*The Hard Sell: An Ethnographic Study
of the Direct Selling Industry***

John Bone's penetrating study of direct selling in the home improvements industry takes us into a world that makes a mockery of the principles of rationally ordered bureaucracy. This is booty capitalism: irrational, anti-structural, and fixated on short-term gains. Offering a wealth of ethnographic material, Bone's study is a major contribution to our understanding of the dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

Alan Aldridge, University of Nottingham, UK

In *The Hard Sell* John Bone takes a hard look at the social world of direct selling organizations. The book offers a detailed ethnography, based on four years of insider research, of two home improvement companies selling fitted kitchens, double glazing and conservatories. These organizations are revealed as loosely ordered and internally competitive collectives whose sole aim seems to be to maximize short term profits through sales strategies that routinely employ the calculative exploitation of consumer norms and expectations.

Bone uses his findings to argue that amid the wave of increasing deregulation and liberalization that has supplanted the planned and regulated form of capitalism that predominated until the 1970s, such conditions are now becoming prevalent in mainstream contemporary organizations, threatening to unleash a latent disorder that underlies the rationality of modern business. Bone also suggests that a broader consequence of this form of short-termist and predatory capitalism is a general erosion of trust and interpersonal empathy within the economic sphere, which, over time, holds the potential to infect wider social relations.

In addition to offering a fascinating insight into the murky world of the hard sell, Bone's account is highly revealing of the sociological advantages, the ethical dilemmas and the risks of participant observation.

John Bone is Lecturer in Sociology in the Department of Sociology, University of Aberdeen, UK. His research interests are in global social change, economy and society, identity and social theory. He is the co-author (with Karen O'Reilly) of *Key Concepts in Ethnography*, London: Sage (forthcoming).

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