
BOOK REVIEWS

A Good Teaching Tool: Some Assembly Required

Adolescent Sexuality: A Historical Handbook and Guide. Edited by Carolyn Cocca. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006, 188 pages. Hardcover, \$59.95.

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In my classes, I am often looking for ways to teach undergraduates about adolescent sexual development and the antecedents of contemporary sexual attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. I was pleased, therefore, to see that Carolyn Cocca, editor of the volume *Adolescent Sexuality: A Historical Handbook and Guide*, had collected a good deal of useful theory and research in the field of adolescent sexuality, focusing particularly on how adults historically have constricted the right of young people to develop sexually.

Cocca has constructed a book with three interlocking parts. Part One consists of five essays covering theories about teen sexuality, statutory rape laws, teen pregnancy, sex education, and teen sex on television and in movies. Part Two offers a unique companion to these essays: Included here are the primary sources that were discussed in Part One. This inclusion of original texts—either in their entirety or excerpted—offers the reader the rare opportunity to read influential pieces, such as Freud's theories of sex or an opinion of Justice Rehnquist's, and to think for themselves about the relationships between history and current interpretations of these writings. These primary sources encourage students to trace how fundamental thought influences contemporary attitudes, laws, and everyday practices. Part Three offers a bibliography for each essay, allowing the reader to easily look for more information based on his/her area of interest.

The volume sets out to provide a great deal of information. The goal of the text is to be, "the first comprehensive, historical, and multidisciplinary account of how discussions about adolescent sexuality are about far more than just the biological ages of young people. . ." (p. xiv). This is a big task—perhaps too big. While there are useful and interesting discussions throughout, there are some important gaps in the structure and the content of the book.

In her introduction, Cocca highlights her overall aim:

This volume discusses adolescent sexuality as encompassing a range of sexual activities by teenagers as well

as -sexualized representations of teenagers. In doing so, it examines the ways in which adolescent sexuality has more often than not been constructed as dangerous and deviant and the ways in which it has been repeatedly linked to broader structural changes in the United States. (p. xiv)

This opening sets the bar high, and taken as a whole, the essays largely follow through with Cocca's promises. While Cocca sets out to present adolescent sex as other than deviant and dangerous, however, she falls into the trap of choosing topics that highlight the deviance and danger of teen sex (i.e., rape and teen pregnancy). There is, in fact, very little about adolescent sexuality itself, but instead the focus is on adults' restrictions of and attitudes toward adolescent sexuality. Danger is a theme throughout. While the authors may not be repeating the same fear-based language, and largely are critiquing the danger narratives often associated with young sexuality, counternarratives are not introduced. As a result, danger and deviance still play a major role in the volume.

The volume's subtitle promises a lot: *Historical Handbook and Guide*. A subtitle such as this encourages the reader to expect the breadth of historical analysis, the comprehensiveness of a handbook, and the practical application of a guide. It would be unlikely that any single book successfully could deliver on all three counts. While history plays a part in each of the essays, there is great variability in how well the authors analyze and make use of the historical trends they include in their essays. In addition, the book is not nearly as comprehensive as the subtitle of "handbook" implies. The term "guide," it seems, is meant to refer to the structure of the volume and its inclusion of primary source material, which, while innovative, requires some (re)assembly on the part of the reader to be of use.

The five essays in the first part of the book approach the topic of adolescent sexuality from some fairly standard positions: rape, pregnancy, sex education, and pop culture. The first essay introduces a wide survey of historical data concerning the history of how adults have approached sexuality in children and adolescents. For example, we learn that in the eighteenth century, children were considered "naturally wicked" and that the function of education was to modify or control their erotic urges (p. 7). This type of historical insight can be useful for those who are just learning about adolescent development. In the short space of an essay, however,

it is nearly impossible to adequately present historical data and have enough latitude to explore patterns or meanings that developed over time and persist today.

The third essay concerning the history of teenage pregnancy and the fourth essay on the history of sexuality education are by far the strongest. In these essays, the authors present data that both teach us something about the history of their topics and link this history with contemporary practices and attitudes toward young adult sexuality in the United States. For example, Reed and Spurlock discuss how rapid social changes associated with urbanization provided young women with the right to “choose mates on their own terms” and opportunities to be away from the close supervision of their families. These new social arrangements inspired a “vast didactic literature to guide youth through the dangers and temptations of freedom” (p. 32), signaling the dawning of sexuality education (and the moralistic tone we still see in the field today).

Through tracing specific practices and policies, authors enable students to critically engage history in powerful ways. One of the most interesting themes in the book is the discussion of how adults throughout history have differently imagined the capacity of young people (to work, to have sex, to procreate, and so on). Subsequently, adults alternatively have attributed or taken away responsibilities and rights of young people based on the prevailing model of adolescent capacity. This is a provocative idea and one that students are always interested in discussing; they have excellent insights into the ways they have seen their own capacities questioned. The third and fourth essays provide excellent windows into this discussion and have the potential to teach students how to critically engage this topic using historical data and texts.

The overall intent of the book—to link critical essays (Part One) with primary source material (Part Two) and bibliographies for future reading (Part Three)—makes for a potentially useful teaching tool. This structure offers a sort of paper-based hyperlinking system for readers to directly refer to texts and theories when they are referenced in the five original essays. I only wish the editor had made the linkages between these three sections more explicit. To an informal reader, the three sections do not automatically look to be in concert with one another. The five threads that run through the book (theories of childhood sexuality; rape laws; teen pregnancy; sex education; and teen sex in movies and on television) are not organized as individual discrete units, but, instead, are arranged by the type of data they offer (the essays with the essays, the original historical texts with the other historical texts). As a reader and as a teacher, I would rather have seen the essay followed by its primary sources, and these two followed by the relevant bibliography. This structure would have better encouraged a critical reading and incorporation of these important historical pieces into discussion.

The naming conventions of the book also make it more difficult to understand how the chapters relate to one another. The essay on sex education, for example, is titled, “Facts of Life and More: Adolescent Sex and Sexuality Education,” but its corresponding chapter in Part Two is titled, “The Age of Consent and the Protection of Females” (and is combined with sources from the essay on teen pregnancy). In addition, the bibliography that contains reference information in Part Three is titled, “Sex Education and Writings About Sex for Teens.” It is not clear to the reader that these three chapters have anything to do with one another.

Overall, the book would have greatly benefited from more analysis and synthesis among the three sections. For example, Part Two includes the primary historical texts with a brief description of each and a bibliographic reference. I would love to have seen, at the very minimum, the sentence from the essay in Part One where the primary source material was cited so that I could easily make the connection between the two. This would have been a ripe opportunity to draw readers’ attention to how researchers use primary sources in their writing and how analysis emerges from careful and critical readings. The tease of information that a primary source offers is terrific. It has the potential to interest the reader just enough to begin his/her own search and reading of the material; a more substantial framework for these pieces to hang from would have helped this process immensely. In addition, reading questions would have been a very useful addition to Part Two and offered a way to link the essay in Part One with the text excerpted in Part Two.

Finally, I think an important addition would have been an editor’s introduction to the bibliography that would allow the reader to know, for example, how these bibliographic references were chosen. Are they meant to cover the subject comprehensively? Do they pertain to a certain time period? I also wondered why the bibliography was not annotated. A list of references is useful, but to be useful to students and researchers alike, an annotated bibliography would have warranted being a section unto itself.

In summary, this text would make a good teaching tool, but it does not seem to have been conceptualized as one. Therefore, it lacks some of the basics that are needed to fulfill this role, such as reading questions or a structure that more intuitively moves a novice reader from commentary directly to historical texts and back again. The tone and level of writing is accessible for undergraduates, but it is overly simplistic for more advanced readers. With some creative thinking, a teacher would be able to use the three parts of the book to encourage students to think about how history has shaped them and their sexualities. Students who become intrigued with the content presented in the essays will have the unusual (and highly undervalued) opportunity to follow up immediately with the primary sources and

bibliographies that are included in the book. The inclusion of these pieces encourages students to think critically about the development of ideas and norms that they may take for granted (like their own sexual development). This is not only good for them; it is good for all of us.

Sex Research as Serious Work

An Insider's View of Sexual Science since Kinsey. By Ira L. Reiss. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006, 237 pages. Softcover \$27.95.

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It is rare that any scientist explores and reviews his life's work. In a highly personal and easily readable conversational tone, deservedly well-respected sociologist Ira Reiss from the University of Minnesota does just that. For the budding scientist as for the casual reader, this review of thinking and actions over a professional career provides insight into aspects of the developing field of sexology as they appeared to this involved critical observer. Of particular value for the sociologically minded is how assumptions are challenged and proof is demanded of otherwise unquestioned beliefs, to strengthen theory formation. Using not only memory recall but also regular journal entries, names, and dates, the author offers incidents that flush out those early years that brought sociology to join other disciplines such as medicine, biology, psychology, and public health in forming and enhancing the field we today recognize as sexology. Reiss explores all this and adds a good touch of ethical, philosophical, and political considerations that, in themselves, are a lasting contribution.

This book covers the period extending essentially from the end of World War II to the present. The incidents and issues discussed resonate with this reviewer since I, while a decade younger than Reiss, essentially experienced many of the same personal forces and professional issues and challenges. This I know because Reiss begins his book with the chapter, "Know Your Author." I can, thus, in many ways compare my own "insider's view" to his, and judge how we agree or differ. Others of about our age (seventies and eighties) probably can do the same, regardless of being professional sexologists. Younger readers and those with any other professional association can do likewise, considering their own experiences as background, given that all fields of study and investigators have to deal with many of the same issues covered in the book.

In his introductory chapter Reiss describes how incidents and factors of his life impinged on his views and on the approaches that might have modified, biased, or influenced his work. In doing so, he reflects for others how this might influence a life's perspective and

approach to data and purported evidence. Scientists of all disciplines would be wise to similarly explore how their life experiences and global and sectarian views might color their work. The chapter sets the stage for understanding and evaluating all the writing that follows.

Various items from the book are worthy of particular comment. Perhaps one of the most significant is Reiss' repeated search for meaningful efforts to extract workable and testable theories and explanations of sexual behaviors. Much of the early sociological research could be characterized as heavily descriptive and searching, but lacking in awareness of what was most important to know or why. Reiss counts the early Kinsey reports in this category. While he credits them with providing a monumental body of work comparing one group with another, and certainly exploring areas never delved before, he criticizes Kinsey for providing little insight into why the differences existed or even discussing why some phenomena were worth probing and others, not.

Kinsey (and his collaborators Gebhard, Pomeroy, and Martin) without stating so, however, did consider it important to distinguish sociological parameters of sexuality. This is obvious in their categorizing sexual behaviors into premarital, marital, and extramarital and recording activities for different religions, educational levels, and economic classes. Reiss himself explored such different classifications when he studied sexual experiences and how they might be related to different types of relationships. In this regard, toward understanding one of the areas for which he is best known, Reiss wrote,

My study of premarital sexual permissiveness had to be an exploratory study because there was no developed theory upon which I could build. I designed my questionnaire to cover the five broad areas of social life that I felt might be influencing changes in the acceptable level of premarital sexuality. The five areas I explored were as follows: (1) general background factors like social class, religion, gender, and so on; (2) dating experiences and love concepts of the respondents; (3) sexual experience and guilt reactions; (4) perceived sexual permissiveness of one's parents, peers, and close friends; and (5) family characteristics, such as age of children, being divorced, and so on (p. 70).

To Reiss' credit, he was among the first to stress the importance of emphasizing the development of sociological investigation and theory to go along with description.

Simultaneously, I must say I believe there also is merit in providing accurate data without theory, so topics are unfettered by preconceived notions of why and how. Kinsey himself was proud of his attempts to *describe* and neither prescribe or proscribe. Different investigators, without prejudice, can then mine objective data and the factors that might be associated with them.

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