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Journey into Sexuality: An Exploratory Voyage

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Flanagan's Boys' Home, discuss the positive role of the mass media in creating awareness, setting agenda, changing attitudes, imparting information and promoting action. Unfortunately, they do not discuss the negative role of media in sensationalizing maltreatment or reinforcing stereotypes. Sullivan and Scanlan touch on this, but I would have liked more in the chapter devoted to mass media. The section on working with the media, however, is excellent, particularly the part on preparing for an interview.

Overall, the articles are clear, concise and readable. The major contribution of this book is the extensive review of literature on child abuse in general, sibling and adult aggression, neglect within and outside the home, and the abuse and neglect of handicapped children in particular. A bibliography is included at the end of the book for easy reference. The secondary contribution is the practical aspect of the book. A number of authors present detailed suggestions for both prevention and intervention, suggested materials and relevant addresses are presented in the appendix.

Because of the emphasis on structural rather than psychological factors, the book should be of interest to class-room sociologists, as well as researchers, clinicians, and other professionals who work with handicapped children. Because of its readability, it is also a book that would be useful for parents of handicapped children as well as other lay persons who come in contact with these children and their families.

Journey into Sexuality: An Exploratory Voyage, by Ira L. Reiss. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1986. 282 pp.

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The author states his purpose in writing this book at the outset: to offer a societal-level interpretation of human sexuality (p.1). The ensuing chapters are, indeed, devoted to an explanation of the social structural forces that relate to sexual practices in a society. For those of us who have tired of psychological, biological, or culture-specific explanations of human sexuality, this book presents a truly sociological approach.

The first two chapters set the framework. The search for cultural universals that reflect social system properties yet permit cross-cultural variation leads to a definition of human sexuality as "those scripts shared by a group that are supposed to lead to erotic arousal and . . . produce genital response." Two key elements of sexuality, physical pleasure and self-disclosure are linked to this definition. The case for these definitions as a starting point is built by a discussion of the approach, research examined, theories considered, and the route to

the conclusion, including conceptual doubts and data limitations. Even if the reader does not agree with the formulations, it is a reasoned presentation; that alone makes it valuable and enjoyable.

Once the assumptions and definitions are specified, the next three chapters identify three dimensions of the social order that the author believes influence human sexual behavior: the kinship system, the power structure, and the societal ideology. From each of these three broad dimensions the author extracts a crucial aspect that represents the direct link with sexuality. Within the kinship system, sexual jealousy is the crucial aspect; within the power structure it is gender role definition; and within the ideology of society it is the definition of the normal. Each aspect is discussed separately to document the premise that sexual behavior can be explained by societal-level variables.

Marital sexual jealousy is examined first as a boundary maintenance mechanism within the kinship system. It protects the union of sexuality and marriage and is necessary to the kinship structure that defines the institution of the family within any society. Individual sexual behavior is universally bound by these elements, but may show wide variation since the content of kinship structures is not universal.

Several dimensions of sexual jealousy are explored and the causes of a husband's sexual jealousy are contrasted with the causes of a wife's sexual jealousy in a path analysis diagram. Variables presented as influences on sexual jealousy are: importance of property, importance of marriage, extent of male kin groups, and extent of female premarital sexual permissiveness. The author works hard, and with reasonable success, to demonstrate that societal-level variables can explain the sexual behavior of individuals. As he points out throughout the book, he is presenting an "exploratory journey," not a confirmed arrival. The chapter accomplishes that goal.

The next two chapters are not as full of insight. The power differential in gender role definition is well documented. That this difference is reflected in the sexual behavior of men and women is not surprising. Interesting explanations of the development and support of A. the belief in female inferiority and B. the link between gender roles and kinship use societal level variables and are worth reviewing. However, the direct links between power, gender role definitions and sexuality, especially sexual rights and permissiveness, are not new.

The argument on cultural ideology and its tie to definitions of normality is a clinically useful chapter. Major societal ideologies are linked to particular sexual ideologies. A typology of gender and sexual equality is also presented. Together these give a perspective on social change which would be helpful in understanding and treating individuals who are having difficulties due to rapidly changing definitions of normative sexual behavior for men and women. The "problem" of premature ejaculation is skillfully used as an illustration of the normality analysis. Normality is judged by the extent of integration of the act

within society. In a clinical sense this perspective encourages the practitioner to view many client problems as conformity problems not psychiatric disturbances. This therefore results in a sociologically based intervention strategy.

The next two chapters deal with the application of the three linkages, kinship, power, and ideology, to the specific cases of homosexuality and erotica. Since both areas are heavily value-laden within American society, the ideological focus is emphasized. Cross-cultural variation is documented. A look at class stratification, male dominance, and infant involvement as causal variables in homosexuality again supports a societal level explanation of sexual behavior. Most material will be familiar to readers who have studied the nature of homophobic societies.

The erotica chapter is the stronger of the two illustrative chapters. There is a detailed examination of the evidence, or lack of evidence, linking erotica and violence. This is followed by cross-cultural material, a brief societal-level explanation of rape, and concludes with the links between gender role definitions and differing erotic fantasies among men and women. This chapter does not support the feminist analysis of erotica and its link to violence against and degradation of women. Certainly the author views erotica as relective of the society, but does not view its removal or control as a useful tool in rendering the society more egalitarian. Regardless of the reader's perspective on these issues, there is much useful information in this chapter.

The final brief chapter organizes the theory into a unified whole. The propositional structure of the theory, the basic assumptions underlying the propositions and a summary narrative statement of the theory are presented in one place. However, it would be difficult to overlook earlier chapters and still comprehend the summary. It would be helpful if that were possible. It is an abstract discussion and even the experienced reader could benefit from more integration. The theory is, as the author notes, in the early stages of development and will need empirical support and refinement. The theory is a well-structured starting point.

One of the strengths of the book is its coherent movement from beginning to end. Rarely is it possible to find a book that opens with a clear explanation of its goals and how those goals will be reached, and then proceeds toward the goals in a way that moves the reader through a journey. The voyage is in the first-person, making the thought processes of the author evident. The structure of presentation is a model of the clarity needed in theoretical exploration.

Additionally, the empirical support is well documented. The principle support came from the data files of the Ethnographic Atlas and the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. Other research data and conclusions are frequently noted and referenced. Problems with the data or research methodology are cited. The author gives his full explanation of the methodology employed in the Appendix, permitting the narrative to flow smoothly for the average reader and locating in

one area the issues of the most concern to the more sophisticated reader. Each chapter has abundant references and comments. The extensive glossary in a non-text is a continuation of the author's commitment to fully define terms within the narrative. While the material is very much sociological, one does not have to be a sociologist to comprehend the message.

This book is useful, in different ways, to the three most common audiences in our field: the clinician, the instructor, and the researcher. Some clinical uses have already been identified. This is not a book on intervention techniques or the physical aspects of human sexuality. It is, however, an excellent book for gaining a sociological perspective on human sexuality. This vantage point opens new possibilities for applied strategies. While the book as a whole would not be read by the average client, certain content areas could be modified for discussion, with the goal of freeing clients to see their behavior within its societal context. The book needs to be read and reread by practitioners as a refreshing reminder that a sociological perspective is crucial in an area of human interaction that has been dominated by other approaches.

Any human sexuality instructor would find this book a valuable resource for lecture presentation and for identifying material to pursue in more depth. This is obviously an extension of the value of the book. It has been difficult to locate a concise and well documented discussion of social structural influences on sexuality. Students often find this viewpoint difficult to comprehend and to believe. Now, instructors have the support needed to accomplish this task. The book could be used as a supplementary text in an advanced senior seminar or graduate course. In any case, it is highly recommended reading for anyone teaching a human sexuality course or facilitating skill training or personal development groups.

The value of the book to a researcher should be evident. The theory is in the developmental stage. The concluding chapter is a veritable smorgasbord of research possibilities. Methodological explanations appear throughout the book. The references would assist a literature review and the book represents a model for how to present a theoretical position for consideration by others in the discipline.

In summary, the book is a solid addition to the field. Some chapters are stronger than others. Some positions will not appeal to all readers, and some additional work may be needed to clarify the theoretical statement in the final chapter. These limitations are minor compared to the value of the book and the societal level explanation of human sexuality it affords. The journey is worth taking.