

Book Reviews

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JOHANSSON, THOMAS. *The Transformation of Sexuality: Gender and Identity in Contemporary Youth Culture*. Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited. 2007, 151 pp., \$95.99, hardcover.

Reviewed by Josh Languedoc, Grant MacEwan College, Edmonton, Canada.

This book provides an up-to-date look at how males and females construct their gendered identities during adolescence. This study was conducted primarily in Sweden, and using interviews and surveys of male and female youths ranging in age from 16 to 19 years, from different classes, neighborhoods and backgrounds. The purpose of this study was to find variables that influence gender construction and then link the conclusions to gender issues present in other industrialized international societies, including Canada. Johansson seeks to convince us that gender is a much more complex problem than researchers currently suggest, and argues specifically that sexuality and sexual behaviours are key ingredients in the construction of gendered identities. The book begins by briefly summarizing the key findings, followed by an in-depth analysis of the data presented. Johansson next highlights the points relating to the commonality of the processes an individual goes through in order to construct a gendered, sexual, and differentiated identity in relation to others.

Throughout the chapters, the author takes us on an historical journey, showing how variables such as science, religion, and industrialization all help to silence and shape sexual acts. Social theorist Michael Foucault becomes Johansson's prime theoretical focus, particularly Foucault's work on *The History of Sexuality*, but he also borrows from other theorists such as Sigmund Freud and Jean Baudrillard. Put briefly, as forms of power changed in society, sexuality was forced out of the private sphere and into the public sphere, making it a central sociological problem to study. Furthermore, Johansson also highlights the fact that males have typically had the power in society, whereas females were taught to be powerless and permissive. Johansson argues that this common view is a stereotype and is where most research becomes limited in its use.

Book Reviews

In particular, this myth has led to contradictory results, produced by two flaws: 1) the researchers are not taking into account deeper gendering processes; and 2) gender itself has a great many contradictions. Drawing upon statistics, interviews, quotations, and discussions from other sociologists, he concludes that masculinity gets enforced through the maintenance of friendship boundaries. For example, he finds that homophobia exists as a tool in maintaining these boundaries. With regard to femininity, he sees a rejection of the status quo through feminist movements such as the Cunt Club and self-chosen lesbians. Very simply put, both are in opposition to one another: masculinity is not what femininity is, and femininity rebels against what masculinity is. The defining variable Johansson regards as the cause of overlap is sexuality - when youth begin to get interested in one another romantically and sexually. It is here where Johansson argue his central point: it is sexuality that has the single strongest impact on gender identity, and creates an insecure balance of power for both people.

Johansson also indicates that ethnicity and class are important to the process of sexuality. Ethnicity tends to categorize people into different groups. People are allowed to have sexual relations with particular people, but are deviantly-typed if they have sexual relations with others. Interviews reveal that sexual and romantic relationships between “Swedes” and “immigrants” results in rumours being spread, mostly about the girl, coupled with “a fear of getting a bad reputation...” (91) Ethnicity’s effect is therefore instating power and control over sexual acts. The issue of class, or more specifically location of neighborhood, further contributes to the controlling of sex. For example, in his interviews, he found that male youth would pretend they were from certain neighborhoods to get a better reputation and meet different types of girls, thus giving them a sexual advantage. Likewise, there were certain neighborhoods that promoted unlikely or “bad” sex partners, and these young males distanced themselves.

The final link in forming a gendered sexual identity is insecurity. Every human, male or female, wants to learn who she or he is, how to complete her or his journey of life discovery and how to get along with one another. As one travels through life, new experiences create uncertainty about right and wrong. Through trial and error, we form gendered identities through finding the best way to make friends, finding the perfect partner, and determining how to act with these people to maintain that identity.

Book Reviews

Johansson argues that this is particularly important for men, as there is a strong societal belief that they must initiate and find the right way to approach women they are interested in. Females, therefore, have the power to choose. This gap allows society to see women as strong gendered and sexual beings needing to find the 'perfect' man. Most men recognize this and, if they feel they do not live up to the expectations, are subjected to teasing. Men begin to feel a lot of pressure put on their shoulders. Johansson argues this does happen to females too, but more so to males.

This book has a strong premise by covering a wide range of gender identities, from transvestites, to homosexuals and heterosexuals of both sexes. Since this study focuses on analyzing the gender constructions of youth, the age range of 16 to 19 years also was very appropriate, as that is late adolescence and entering into emerging adulthood, a time of much discovery. It is around that age that most youths are engaging in new activities and trying to discover their identities, through sexual activities, partying and finding the right peers. Perhaps my favorite part of this book was its fresh perspective when considering the concept of gender. Johansson's study challenges researchers to think outside of physical everyday differences and focus on the processes leading up to why these differences exist. By focusing on gendered insecurities, particularity in males, we can understand an often-ignored process of pain, insecurity, and uncertainty that goes into creating a gendered and sexual self. In other words, this book offers a very humanistic look at the issue of gender.

However, some of the variables that were used were too broad. Johansson gives very clear macro examples, such as power, and a few meso and micro examples, such as peer solidification, but he fails to examine a greater number of micro factors that play an important part in gender and sexual identity construction, such as the influence of family. The family has an important role to play as a mediator, and family could have very easily influenced some of the respondents' beliefs. Socialization into gender roles and gendered attitudes towards sex should have also been examined. Also, he tends to center the research solely on men; at times I found it too male-focused. Conducting more interviews and research on females would have made an important and beneficial contribution to this book.

Lastly, this book has a wide audience. It could easily be read by not only non-

Book Reviews

scholarly individuals who wish to obtain a different scope on the world and themselves, but also by students in sociology courses or in courses related to men's studies. The book is well-organized, and most importantly it offers the potential for discussion on further research into gender development issues.

Book Reviews

ANDREA O'REILLY (Ed.). *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering*. Toronto, ON: Women's Press, 2004, 441 pp., \$49.95, paper.

Reviewed by Joanne Minaker, PhD, Grant MacEwan College, Edmonton, Canada.

Mother Outlaw? This must be a contradiction in terms; surely all mothers are not *outwith*, but *within* familial norms and socio-cultural feminine scripts. Don't mothers routinely emulate ideologies of the "good mother," "good wife" and "good woman" and thereby reproduce the institution of motherhood? Feminist scholarship has cast aspersions on the patriarchal grip of motherhood, examined how the family oppresses women, and called attention to narrow images and confining and conflicting messages about being a mom that penetrate women's experiences as mothers. Feminists have underscored how the reality of women's lives is not consistent with the image of the breastfeeding, self sacrificing, one dimensional woman who devotes all her time and energies to, and subsumes her self within her children and (her presumably male) spouse. Yet feminist discourse has considerably more to say about sexual assault or the wage gap than it does about the relationship between feminism and motherhood. In other words, understanding mothering through a feminist lens appears subsidiary. *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* is a notable, valuable exception. Given her impressive scholarship, O'Reilly is well positioned to edit the collection.

At first glance, outlaw would seem like an anti-feminist pejorative slight – as fitting only to chastise women who fail to embody the good, self sacrificing mother. In this path breaking book mother outlaw is imbued with very different meanings. Scholars of motherhood acknowledge a distinction between *motherhood* and *mothering*, which recognizes motherhood is "not naturally, necessarily, or inevitably oppressive" (O'Reilly, 2004: 2). When mothering is freed from the institution of motherhood it may become a site of empowerment and/or location of social change. The book holds that "mothers, in order to resist patriarchal motherhood and achieve empowered mothering must be 'bad' mothers, or more precisely, "mother outlaws"" (O'Reilly, 2004: 2).

Andrea O'Reilly, and the 23 scholars who join her, return to Adrienne Rich's (1976) seminal work *Of woman born* to locate their quest for empowered mothering. Rich (1976: 194-5) believed women could be "conspirators, outlaws from the institution of

Book Reviews

motherhood.” Herein she found a possibility for women to experience the institution of motherhood in a non-patriarchal, less oppressive way. O’Reilly’s exhaustive and excellent introductory chapter examines the conceptual framework of empowered mothering. She explores how Rich contrasts the male-defined, controlling, and oppressive patriarchal institution of motherhood with “women’s experiences of mothering which are female-defined and centred, and potentially empowering to women” (O’Reilly, 2004: 2). It struck me how my own journey into mothering and experiences being “Mom” are not wholly constraining and oppressive; nor always rewarding and exciting. The book meets its central aim: to develop, by way of theory and practice, a definition of empowered mothering.

The book is organized into 5 sections, each focusing on a style of empowered mothering: Feminist, Lesbian, African-American Mothering, Mothers and Daughters, and Mothers and Sons. Empowered mothering – captured so well herein as counter narratives – might be accomplished in practice very differently depending upon who is doing it. In this way, motherhood may be *both* a political site to transgress and challenge or to reinforce and reproduce traditional patterns of childrearing. Each author provides some clues about what makes an empowered mother, among these are diverse and plentiful examples of ways to resist patriarchal motherhood, among them:

- Women who successfully negotiate the tensions between motherhood and feminism (Fiona Green) and combining motherhood with feminist careers (Junanita Ross Epp and Sharon Cook).
- Mothering that involves both resisting and complying with dominant discourse (Erika Horwitz).
- Feminist practice of gender socialization (O’Reilly).
- Making visible and destabilizing traditional categories that define lesbian sexuality and motherhood (Jacqui Gabb).
- Co-mothers’ struggles to be recognized as parents (Dawn Comeau).
- African-American mothering as a counter-narrative of empowered mothering (O’Reilly, Erica Lawson).
- How women interweave motherhood and other aspects of their lives (Njoki Nathani Wane).

Book Reviews

- Mothers and daughters constructing a politics of empowerment through motherline (Naomi Lowinsky).
- How to raise relational boys within and against boy culture (Cate Dooley and Nikki Fedele).

If, as O'Reilly argues, the discourse of “good motherhood” denies a mother authority, autonomy, authenticity, and agency to determine her own experiences of mothering, this raises another significant issue about control, choice and agency under different conditions. The chapters demonstrate women exercising agency *as mothers*. The *place of power from which to mother* is intriguing, given that women mother in different social contexts. What role do structural forces play to constrain or enable a woman's choices as a mother? The collection does well to explore distinct groups of mothers, which raises the question: to what extent do race, class, age, sexuality, (dis)ability, and other power relations influence the “authority and agency [any mother has] to determine her own experiences of mothering”? (O'Reilly, 2004: 11). A group notably absent from the discussion is mothers outside of the labour market who take primary responsibility for their children (i.e. “stay-at home mothers”). Since in many ways (at least on the surface) they are supporting ideologies of patriarchal motherhood, how can they simultaneously be “mother outlaws?”

Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering makes a significant contribution, as it goes beyond merely conceptualizing what empowered mothering is not (patriarchal motherhood) and sketches an alternative discourse of mothering that gives women agency, autonomy, authenticity, and authority *as mothers*. Alternative mothering practices, however, are welcomed/celebrated in some sites, while regulated, demonized and criminalized in others. With the neo-conservative backlash against both feminism and mothers, which calls for patriarchal motherhood, and neo-liberal rationalities and practices responsabilizing families (read “mothers”) and holding mothers more accountable for a child's problems (an issue addressed by Paula Caplan in *Don't blame the mother: Then and now*), outlaw mothering is both desperately needed and extremely difficult to do. This appears especially the case for poor women, women of colour and young mothers whose behaviour is more heavily scrutinized and regulated than their older, economically and culturally privileged counterparts.

Book Reviews

The 441 page text illuminates an incredible breath of experience, analysis, and encourages critical engagement with empowered mothering as theory and as practice. Although the book was published four years ago, in reviewing it I hope to renew interest in this very significant area of teaching, research, academic scholarship, political activism – and of course, lived experience. I am left with a very significant personal/professional quandary, *am I a mother outlaw?*

Book Reviews

SUSAN C. BOYD & LENORA MARCELLUS (Eds.). *With Child: Substance Use during Pregnancy: A Woman-Centred Approach*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2007, 136 pp., \$17.95, paper.

Reviewed by Lindsay Wodinski, Grant MacEwan College, Edmonton, Canada.

With Child brings to the forefront the challenges and outcomes of developing and maintaining innovative social programs in clinical settings. Within a Canadian context, this book describes and examines the contributions of theory, research, and application, as well as the socio-cultural and institutional forces, related to women who use substances during pregnancy.

The book is organized into three sections; the first, 'Making Sense of Theory' (Chapters 1-3), addresses past moral panics in society and their influence on clinical approaches to treating women with substance-related pregnancies. It also provides a detailed explanation of feminist theory, while introducing key concepts such as harm-reduction methodology, and the 'maternal-fetal' relationship. The consequences of specific substances that are considered to be harmful to human health are defined and discussed in relation to stages of pregnancy and subsequent child development.

In Chapter One, Susan Boyd indicates that in the past, authoritative figures and the media have propelled drug panics and moral scares, which exacerbated the already marginalized status of lower and working class pregnant women, who were associated with immorality and social deviance. More often than not, such authorities and moralists attributed the phenomenon of maternal drug use to a mother's lack of self-control and negligence, ignoring factors such as poverty and the practice of using opiates to calm infants. Susan Boyd also states that as social interest regarding maternal drug use grew, reproductive processes increasingly underwent public enquiry; this led to birth control and abortion laws, and a stronger medical emphasis placed on the fetus and childbirth over the mother's personal rights, sexual autonomy, and well-being.

In Chapter Two, Lenora Marcellus discusses the theoretical framework behind women-centered approaches to treating substance related pregnancies. The foundation for a woman-centred methodology rests on a feminist ethic, which recognizes and seeks to overcome social barriers, such the lack of education, social networks, income, and

Book Reviews

individual abilities to cope with the negative implications of these social problems. The contributions of Lenora Marcellus and Kimberly Kerns in Chapter Three focus on the effects of teratogens and social conditions that can have potentially harmful effects on mothers and their babies. Social determinants of health, as well as specific drugs, such as, tobacco, cocaine, alcohol, and amphetamines are discussed in detail.

The second section, 'Innovative Woman-Centred Practice' (Chapters 4-7), reports on the impact and efficacy of current practices and programs that have been successfully implemented in British Columbia. The trials and successes involved with the development and improvement of women-centred programs are acknowledged through in-depth personal accounts from both workers and patients. This section also describes the extent to which social factors influence women's experiences with family and childbirth.

In Chapter four, Sarah Payne addresses particular strategies used by woman-centred practitioners, including withdrawal and detoxification treatments, drug therapy, as well as parenting and life skills counselling. Consistent worker-patient interaction that is supportive, accommodating, collaborative, and caring in nature has been shown to be an effective way to improve fetal and infantile development, as well as maternal health. This approach has demonstrated lasting positive effects in the areas of personal growth and meaningful mother-child attachments, and suggests that innovative woman-centred programs are necessary and effective resources for women in need of social support.

In Chapter Five, Alice Forsyth, Dawn Pomponio, and Laurie Robinson present their personal accounts with a particular patient named Anne. Anne presented a complex case for healthcare workers in a pregnancy outreach centre. Her story has had a significant influence on the ways in which healthcare teams can effectively respond to the specific needs of individuals who experience multiple troubles during pregnancy and increased risks of child apprehension. In Chapter Six, Sydney Weaver addresses such current policies and practices of state intervention, hospitals, courtroom proceedings, child protection agencies, and social work. Margaret Leslie, Gina DeMarchi, and Mary Motz present 'three voices' of women who have experienced drug-related pregnancies in the seventh chapter. Each individual essay within this chapter offers a long-term account of women's childhood experiences, personal relationships, circumstances surrounding

Book Reviews

substance abuse and pregnancy, and later life outcomes.

Finally, the last section, 'Future Directions' (Chapters 8-9), emphasizes the need for current reproductive policymakers and the healthcare system to adopt a more empathetic and caring approach toward women. Carolyn Schellenberg, in chapter eight, calls attention to policy makers and health care authorities to acknowledge the need for a more holistic approach to treating infants born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). In addition to relying on biological indicators in determining a FAS diagnosis, Schellenberg argues that biomedical models should also recognize social causes of this illness, such as poverty, malnourishment, and paternal alcoholism, in order to better assess and treat women and their infants. In Chapter Nine, Susan Boyd and Lenora Marcellus summarize some important initiatives that are necessary for the adoption and success of woman-centered, harm reduction programs. They emphasize the need for awareness of social and economic factors which influence women's lives, well-educated and dedicated staff members, and finally, continuous and long-lasting council that offers both medical and social support to all women in need.

With Child effectively demonstrates how woman-centred programs and interventions can help socially disadvantaged women cope with imminent social stresses in their lives through consistent encouragement and community support from healthcare teams. This edited work incorporates qualitative research as well as relevant personal reports from clinicians and patients, allowing for a multi-perspective and interdisciplinary outlook on these major themes. It becomes evident that the challenge for social workers and women-centred programs has been to diminish fear and distrust among pregnant women, and offer a safe, non-judgemental, and caring atmosphere through which mothers can view the child-bearing experience more optimistically while learning important parenting and life skills.

Although the book generally presents a balanced and well-rounded women-centred account of these issues, substance-use among affluent women who are pregnant is not acknowledged. This might convey the false impression that such women do not have such experiences in our society. Additionally, while the context of the book is explicit in its efforts to solely represent the experiences of women according to feminist theory, the overall argument would have been enhanced by exploring how the involvement of men

Book Reviews

in substance-related pregnancies influences the experience of prenatal maternity for women. Regardless of these criticisms, the organization of this book is well-connected; the arguments are clearly established, supported, and relevant. *With Child* will be a valid reference that provides a framework through which both specialists and practitioners in health care and social work professions, as well students of sociology of family, deviance and control, can understand the importance of innovation and development of women-centred services for pregnant women who abuse substances in our society.