

# Reviews

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### SHIFTING PARADIGMS? MAKING THE MOVE TO TRANSGENDER CLINICAL PRACTICES

*Transgender Subjectivities: A Clinician's Guide*. Edited by Ubaldo Leli & Jack Drescher. New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004, 162 pages. Paper, \$19.95.

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The relationship between mental health professionals and their transgender/transsexual clients has a long and complicated history—one that has been often characterized in negative terms. Much (though not all) of the service provided to transgender and transsexual populations has been clouded by misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and condescension. *Transgender Subjectivities: A Clinician's Guide* is part of a growing countercurrent within psychiatry, psychology, and allied disciplines, aimed at redressing the shortcomings of that legacy. It contributes to the trend toward affirmative approaches to understanding and meeting the needs of transgender/transsexual clients.

Several of the contributors explicitly state their commitment to transpositive approaches. Perhaps this is most clearly seen in the title of the volume itself, where the possibility of true transgender subjectivities—their existence *and* their plurality—is made manifest. This may seem like a small point. However, the authenticity and complexity of transgender people's lives, both psychic and material, have often been denied or ignored in existing mental health models.

In one sense, then, this volume is part of the larger project of recognizing and valuing transgender and transsexual people. Such a project is often fraught with tensions,

and *Transgender Subjectivities* symptomatically displays some of those tensions. In these kinds of recuperative projects, there is sometimes an impulse to present groups in their best light. Sometimes inclusion within the ranks of “human variation” is bought at the price of capitulating to existing standards of “normal” (or even “optimal”). With a few exceptions, this volume focuses its attention on middle-class White clients, often with an assumption that they will be seen in private-practice clinical settings. It is important to understand the risks of such an approach, especially at the moment that a project of recognition is underway. The mainstreaming of lesbian and gay politics in the U.S. has demonstrated the ways that existing hierarchies of race, class, citizenship, and gender (among others) can become reproduced and reinforced through bids for “normalcy.” Such a move, even made unwittingly, within the context of developing clinical practices, runs the risk of ignoring the specific therapeutic needs of entire subpopulations.

*Transgender Subjectivities* opens with two first-person accounts: one on the subjective effects of testosterone; the other a glimpse into less than supportive therapy. These set the tone of the volume, with its focus on understanding transsexual/transgender people's lives and experiences. Entries that follow include theoretical interventions, research findings, and clinical reports. Data come from autobiographical, survey, interview, and case study materials. Several of the contributors are transgender or transsexual. This range of approaches and perspectives is laudable. However, like many edited volumes, the quality of work is sometimes uneven.

Although *Transgender Subjectivities* does have an impressive range of approaches and perspectives, its coverage is spotty at best; at a slim 162 pages, this is not surprising. For example, none of the chapters focus on transgender/transsexual youth. Additionally, with a few

exceptions, the volume focuses heavily on fully transitioned or transitioning transsexuals, resulting in less attention to gender-variant people who do not fit that model. This would not necessarily be a problem *if* the book did not make claims to comprehensiveness. However, the copy on the back cover hails *Transgender Subjectivities* as “a comprehensive guide for understanding the issues and concerns of the emerging transgender phenomenon.” The editors take a more modest (and accurate) approach, describing the book as “several snapshots of transgender presentations and subjectivities” (p. 1), for those seeking comprehensiveness this volume will not be satisfied (instead see Ettner, 1999; Israel & Tarver, 1998; and Lev, 2004).

In the introduction, the editors express their hope that the volume will prove useful for clinicians who work with transgender patients but have little training or experience in the area. With that goal in mind, as well as wanting “to be of interest to the general public” (p. 2), they should have provided more tools to help the uninitiated reader get the most out of the essays. Their introduction is probably sufficient for the readership of *The Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy*, where the volume was concurrently published, but not for the more general readership they say they hope to engage.

In particular, a discussion of terminology would have been helpful. In the introduction, the editors use the terms “transgendered,” “transsexual,” “gender dysphoria,” and “gender-blending,” among others, without providing an adequate sense of what these terms mean to them. Even more useful, however, would have been a discussion of the *contested nature* and *multiple uses* of these and related terms. This is not simply a matter of helping readers through the text; it is also of real clinical importance. Such a discussion could direct readers, especially clinicians, to the potentially charged nature of applying these labels, and signal the need for a sense of patience, openness, tolerance, and respect concerning their varied uses.

Several chapters do some of the work that is missing from the introduction. For example, Dallas Denny’s “Changing Models of Transsexualism” gives the best overview of new approaches to understanding and providing care for gender-variant clients, including a historical grounding for their emergence. The chapter is structured around the rise of a transgender model of care provision, which is in the process of supplanting an earlier transsexual model. The transgender model is premised on (a) defining gender variance as a natural form of human variability, as opposed to a mental illness and (b) allowing for a wide range of transgender embodiments and identities, as opposed to a narrow transition model with a goal of sex reassignment. Denny argues that, for clinical practice, this shift entails a move from “the mutual belief that the purpose of therapy is to determine whether the patient is or is not a candidate for sex reassignment [to] the mutual belief that the purpose of therapy is to help the client make sense of and life plans about his or her feelings

about gender” (p. 34). Denny’s chapter outlines both the epistemological and practical framework within which the volume’s editors and many of its contributors locate themselves. She also includes recommendations to therapists about how to work within the transgender model.

Vernon Rosario’s “‘Qué joto bonita!’: Transgender Negotiations of Sex and Ethnicity” takes an even longer historical view, summarizing the nosological history of gender variance in Western medicine. He also touches on current controversies over the continuing inclusion of “Gender Identity Disorder” in the *DSM*, and in doing so points out the partial and contested nature of the shift to a transgender model that Denny outlines. The heart of Rosario’s chapter is a clinical case report on Frances, a transgender Latina sex worker. Rosario’s chapter is one of the few places in this volume with a detailed discussion of a transgender subject who is not in the fully transitioning model, and it is one of the only discussions where questions of race and ethnicity are addressed meaningfully. The lack of such a discussion elsewhere in *Transgender Subjectivities* leaves in place troubling associations of race with only people of color, and leaves an analysis of race in the lives of transgender/transsexual White people unexamined. For example, Aaron Devor’s chapter on transsexual identity formation, which includes the disclaimer that it is applicable to people with “mainstream Euro-American values,” was the most obvious of several chapters where there is a real missed opportunity for an analysis of Whiteness.

Rosario’s case study and discussion demonstrate the failure of transition models to account for the experiences of many transgender people. He also illustrates the impact of race, ethnicity, and culture not only on Frances’ gender identity, but also on the salience and shape of various factors (e.g., family, work, relationships) in her life, and hence, for her therapy. Finally, Rosario deftly balances an affirming stance vis-à-vis gender variance while recognizing “the mental health problems of Frances and other transgender individuals” (p. 96).

There is also innovative work in a chapter on guilt and gender variance, and another on children’s experiences of a parent’s transition. In their chapter on guilt, Schaeffer and Wheeler bring together the strengths of a large sample with qualitative data from individual case studies. They are able to report generally on forms of guilt and to convey a sense of the individual pain that their patients experience. They argue that feelings of guilt are a central feature of the lives of most gender-variant people and must therefore be a central feature in therapeutic contexts. Although not everyone will agree with some of their recommendations (they slip into essentialist ideas about the causes of gender variance as a means of assuaging patients’ guilt, and they see “education” as somewhat of a panacea), their chapter opens much-needed discussion on guilt and gender variance.

Likewise, White and Ettner make a valuable addition to the small extant literature on children with transsexual/transgender parents. Previous work (Green 1978, 1998)

showed that children in families with a transsexual parent are not appreciably different from other children (especially concerning their sexuality and gender identity), but White and Ettner look instead at children's adaptation to a parent's transition. They come away with sets of both protective and risk factors that will be useful not only in clinical settings, but perhaps in legal contexts (as Green's previous work has been).

The volume does not shy away from controversial material, as evidenced by Anne Lawrence's "Autogynephilia: A Paraphilic Model of Gender Identity Disorder." Lawrence's chapter offers an overview of Ray Blanchard's controversial concept of autogynephilia, which she defines (using Blanchard's words) as "a male's propensity to be sexually aroused by the thought or image of himself as a female" (p. 71). Lawrence, who has published in this area, provides a detailed and much-needed overview of the literature, concluding that the concept "provides a powerful model for understanding the phenomenology of male-to-female transsexualism" (p. 84). Her discussion productively complicates the relationship between gender, gender identity, and sexuality. To Lawrence's credit, she also includes a section that addresses the controversies surrounding autogynephilia; however, she characterizes these critiques in overly narrow terms. Lawrence's reading of the critiques is that some transsexuals feel misrepresented by the concept of autogynephilia. This is certainly one aspect of the critiques, but it does not tap into their full scope.

Lawrence ends her section on controversies with recommendations to clinicians about how to help their patients see beyond the critiques to the value of the concept of autogynephilia. However, she might have also included some discussion of the concept's possible pitfalls for clinicians. For example, at a recent conference for professionals who specialize in Gender Identity Disorder, I was talking with some young psychologists at a reception. Mid-conversation, one of them pointed to a transsexual woman looking at herself in a mirror adjusting her make-up, and said, "Look at that! And some people don't think autogynephilia is real." Although anecdotal and outside of a clinical context, this points to the ways in which concepts like autogynephilia can take on a life of their own, becoming both reductive and reified, and may be too easily applied. This is a danger that comes in part from explanations wherein there are a limited number of transgender/transsexual "types" and part of the clinician's task is to determine which type applies in a given case.

The overriding tenor of this volume stays generally within a transpositive epistemological framework, yet there are other pockets of potentially pathologizing work. For example, Seil's chapter delineating four subgroups of transgendered patients felt especially out of place. Without making the basis for his assertions clear, he argues "GID varies little in substance from one person to another within each subgroup of patients" (p. 102), something with which many transgendered people (and I suspect some experienced clinicians) might take issue. He

also sometimes relies on simplistic and pathologizing explanations for aspects of his patients' behaviors and identities; for example, he explains drug and alcohol use with vague references to "lifestyle." And while the editors and some of the authors mention the social pressures and hostile culture within which transgender/transsexual people live (see especially Rosario's concluding remarks, p. 96), more attention was needed to the effects of these factors on this population's mental health presentations and therapeutic needs.

Even with the shortcomings that I have mentioned, taken as a whole *Transgender Subjectivities* can be placed among the ranks of a new breed of clinical handbooks that avoid pathology models of gender variance. The volume introduces the reader to a significant range of transgender subjects, using a wide array of data, from several compelling perspectives. The "snapshots" that it shows us will be useful for both the seasoned clinician and for the less experienced reader.

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## BEDBUG SPERM WARS

*The Story of V: A Natural History of Female Sexuality*. By Catherine Blackledge. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004, 322 pages. Cloth, \$24.95.

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In my gynecologist's office there is a framed cartoon on the wall: several grinning sperm in hot pursuit of a fleeing, unhappy egg. Such omnipresent and anthropomorphic mythology about males as sexually "active" and females as sexually "passive," especially with regard to genitalia and reproduction, must have driven Blackledge to prove them wrong. She writes, "I wasn't satisfied with my perception of female genitalia, what I knew about the vagina" (p. 2). Why did having a vagina make her life different, even to the extent of being treated as a second-class citizen, from someone without one? Why were female genitalia so understudied? Why so little research into female reproduction and so many contradictory scientific opinions?

The publisher's press release about this book states:

In the past, medicine may have misrepresented female anatomy, reducing its remarkable complexities to the notion of a passive vessel, but as *The Story of V* shows, science is at last beginning to

reveal the true structure and function of female genitalia and the dynamic nature of the vagina's role in both sexual pleasure and reproduction.

Blackledge herself writes,

For centuries, the notion of female genitalia as a passive vessel..., in part, explains why so little time and money has been expended in the past on figuring out the actual structure and function of female genitalia. Yet the idea of the vagina as a passive vessel is possibly one of the greatest scientific misconceptions of all (p. 3).

Research has shown, she describes, how female choice is widespread at the vaginal/reproductive level: "Females store sperm, they eject sperm, they destroy sperm and they carefully and precisely select the most genetically compatible sperm for them[selves] with their amazing genitalia" (p. 3).

Blackledge, a science writer with a Ph.D. in chemistry, takes readers on a grand tour through prehistoric art, ancient history, linguistics, mythology and folklore, evolutionary theory, reproductive biology, and medicine. Chapters cover the history of vaginal representation across cultures; the history of descriptions, definitions, and terms for female genitalia; a cross-species look at feminine reproductive selection as manifested at the sperm/egg level; the clitoris; the vagina; connections between the genitalia and the nose/scent; and orgasm.

Blackledge aims to show how history and culture have represented and misrepresented female genitalia, and how female organisms at all levels of the taxonomic tree are active rather than passive in the sexual/reproduction process. These are compelling goals, certainly relevant to the interests of many *JSR* readers, and her range of scholarship, research, and factoids is impressive. Researchers into female sexuality may find the book a fascinating resource to check their own knowledge as well as a gold mine of examples to use for writing and teaching. For example, we learn that female mites and ticks require extensive oral stimulation from the male's mouthparts so that the female's vaginal opening swells sufficiently to accept the male's sperm packet (pp. 103-104).

However, *The Story of V* has serious drawbacks both for professionals and for the interested public. First, Blackledge chooses specific themes (e.g., vaginal display, impregnation, the clitoris, the vagina, female orgasm) and then for each one follows a dizzying sweep through history, cultures, and phyla, factoid piled on factoid, laundry list following laundry list. It's like a smorgasbord of casseroles and tossed salads: everything's a mixture, and there are so many ingredients that I lost sight of all but her main point, that the female is active not passive. Things went by so quickly that I could neither remember or understand, nor appreciate (or believe!), everything I read. Fewer but lengthier examples would have been much more entertaining and understandable, and less tedious. Furthermore, many of her descriptions are difficult to follow even with the illustrations, which unfortunately give only tantalizing snapshots with little or no context. In her presentation, all context was left out to grant space for her agenda: the

female is active. But her agenda would shine more powerfully if we could see context. Roadmaps to the argument would help also, like more and better subheadings, some sidebars, and better introductory and concluding sections.

A second primary problem is that Blackledge attributes agency and intent anthropomorphically to *everything*. Here's a typical bit of her prose:

In order to weed out the unsuitable fertilisation candidates, the female's vagina presents a series of genitalic hurdles in the shape of her oviductal obstacle course. Only the sperm that can overcome all of these will have a chance of fusing with her egg.... [T]he vagina is an extremely hostile acidic arena, which easily destroys newcomers. It has to be if it wants to be selective (pp. 109-110).

This is her style throughout. Unfortunately, Blackledge buys into the clichés she deplores by using the same anthropomorphic framework to disprove them. But passive vaginas aren't incorrect simply because vaginas are in fact active. Passive vaginas and female genitalia are factually and logically incorrect, just as are active penises and male genitalia, because organs and body parts don't have psychology or intent or agency. What organs do is simply not describable in terms of human psychological states. And moreover, no organ system or body part "just lies there" in real life.

This is a matter of style, not content. Many of her examples are fascinating and do show that natural complexity trumps historical and cultural clichés of active vs. passive. But that is the point. She would have a far stronger case by disproving the active vs. passive framework rather than simply taking the opposite side of the argument.

Third, she provides no way to check her statements and examples. There is a "Further Reading" bibliography at the end, with major books by chapter, but that doesn't help the reader who might want to find the original reference for a specific claim. This makes the book intensely frustrating for the professional who might want to use her examples or explore them further.

Although this book is subtitled a "natural history" and published by a university press, it is not what one would expect from good science writing. Science aims for understanding, not (only) pushing an agenda. It doesn't attribute intent to organs and body parts, and only cautiously to subhumans like bedbugs, and *everything* is referenced. But perhaps *The Story of V* is pitched more to the intelligent public than to professionals in sexology. Blackledge could get away with this approach if the book was about 150 pages long and a "cool facts about female sexuality" sort of thing from a trade press, or a series of articles somewhere in a feminist journal or magazine. However, the complex and technical discussion, cascades of detailed examples, and sparse roadmaps through the narrative would likely discourage all but the most persistent and fascinated fans of femalia. This is not a book to give to young, sound-bite-habituated women needing a self-esteem boost.

### A NOTABLE RESOURCE FOR HETEROSEXUAL COUPLES

*Love Making: The Intimate Journey in Marriage.* By Lydia Dykes Talmadge & William C. Talmadge. St. Paul, MN: Syren Book Co., 220 pages. Paper, \$20.00.

Reviewed by Joshua Grossman, M.D., F.A.C.P., Dept. of Psychiatry, East Tennessee State University, 1005 Melrose Ave., Johnson City, TN, 37601-2605; e-mail: ZJBG2@imail.etsu.edu.

Psychologists Lydia and William Talmadge provide an outstanding marital enhancement text for committed heterosexual couples. The book is complete, concise, and eminently readable, appropriately referenced, and filled with relevant case histories and specific love-rating scales.

This text empowers each member of a committed heterosexual couple to negotiate for the meaningful warmth each may want in the relationship. As professional sex therapists, the Talmages include specifics on both male and female anatomy, as well as specifics on gentle progressive psychological intimacy. It has long been appreciated that there may be many committed heterosexual couples who are physically intimate without necessarily achieving psychological intimacy.

The cover of the book symbolizes the content: a sensitive, delicate, exquisitely artistic illustration of the physical, psychological, and spiritual blending of a committed couple in multiple hues of soft blue and green. I plan to keep this exemplary text on my desk for ready and thoughtful reference for students and patients alike! Bravo Doctor(s) Talmadge!

### THE STATE AS THE "TOP": THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTROL OF SEX

*Regulating Sex: The Politics of Intimacy and Identity.* Edited by Elizabeth Bernstein and Laurie Schaffner. New York, NY: Routledge, 2005, 313 pages. Cloth, \$22.95.

Reviewed by Angelique C. Harris, Ph.D. candidate, Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York, Department of Sociology, 365 Fifth Ave., New York, NY, 10016; e-mail: angelique.harris@gmail.com.

During the 2004 Superbowl Halftime show broadcast on CBS, pop star Janet Jackson experienced a costume "malfunction" when singer Justin Timberlake tore her costume, exposing her breast. Though those watching the Superbowl only got a split-second glimpse of her breast before the camera zoomed out, the malfunction erupted into a firestorm of controversy and made international headlines. In addition to the \$550,000 fine placed on CBS by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), a five-second delay on live broadcasts was introduced and has been enforced.

The reaction of the FCC, as well as the thousands of people who reportedly called in to issue a complaint, illuminates the United States' current perspective on the human body, sex, and sexuality. To help make sense of this perspective, *Regulating Sex: The Politics of Intimacy and Identity*, edited by Elizabeth Bernstein and Laurie Schaffner, is both timely and useful for understanding how sexuality is viewed in the U.S. and abroad.

*Regulating Sex* is a collection of diverse essays focused on topics pertaining to when, where, and how is sex regulated. The book is broken up into four sections: Part I: "The Regulation of Queer Identities and Intimacies"; Part II: "The Regulation of Sexual Commerce"; Part III: "The Regulation of Childhood and Gendered 'Innocence'"; and Part IV: "Beyond Regulation: Towards Sexual Justice." *Regulating Sex* shows its readers the varied ways in which governments attempt to control citizens' sexualities by limiting their sexual options. Individual essay topics range from homosexual sodomy and transgender legal status to Caribbean sexual tourism and child sexual abuse.

Scholarly works that take a different slant on commonly held beliefs and practices often are the most interesting. Most of the essays in *Regulating Sex* address how the manner in which we view sex is strongly influenced by governmental rules and regulations. The most appealing sections were those concentrating on the attempts of the state to control and dictate peoples' sexuality, and whether the state's control was for the protection of those in vulnerable situations, or to simply enforce sexual norms.

There were several fine essays in this anthology, but in the limited space allotted here, one stands out. This essay, "Liberalism and Social Movement Success: The Case of the United States Sodomy Statues," by Mary Bernstein, spoke most directly to the theme of the book: when and how the government dictates the relationship between the private and the public.

Sodomy laws in the U.S. have an interesting history, which Bernstein's essay discusses. Rather than just review the sodomy laws, Bernstein analyzes them from a socio-legal perspective. She details how they have changed and evolved in the U.S, addressing the cultural and social implications of sodomy's outlawed status and how these laws allowed "for a hetero-normative order." Bernstein describes the history of the social movement to eliminate the laws, and the way that notions and ideas towards sodomy have changed. When people think of sodomy, they commonly think of anal sex, and especially men participating in anal sex with other men. As a result, those early activists were not just protesting against the outlawing of a sexual practice between two consenting adults, but against the outlawing of the identity associated with that behavior.

New social movements tend to be identity-based and challenge the dominant social order. The movement to reverse the ban on sodomy went against what was perceived to be mainstream society's "sexual preferences." However, to be successful, this movement played into one

of America's most sacred ideals: privacy. At the same time that the women's liberation movement claimed that "the personal is political" with regard to violence in the home, such as domestic violence and incest (which was addressed in Kerwin Kaye's "Sexual Abuse Victims and the Wholesome Family: Feminist, Psychological, and State Discourses"), the "sodomy movement" professed the opposite.

Interestingly, neither social movement focused on the mentality of the heterosexual, male-dominated society in which domestic violence was overlooked and homosexuality was frowned upon. The question Bernstein asks is, Do movements have to address the overarching issues at the root of their oppression to be successful, or can they simply frame their complaint so that it becomes a civil right? This issue is also at the heart of the recent struggle for same-sex marriage, a movement which does not attack the fundamental power arrangements within marriage and the elevated status of "family" in our society.

The movement to reverse sodomy laws was a success because it accomplished its explicit goal; however, Bernstein questions whether researchers should count such victories as successes. This movement did not confront the symbolism of heterosexism, but appealed to this nation's need for privacy. Bernstein proposes a multidimensional approach for understanding not just the movement to reverse sodomy laws, but movements in general. Her multidimensional approach fits into three categories: political and policy outcomes, mobilization outcomes, and cultural outcomes. Bernstein's discussion of social movement and new social movement theory is very strong. She does a great job of summarizing these theories as well as providing examinations and applying them to queer legal theory.

*Regulating Sex* was enjoyable to read, but there was one major weakness of this volume: issues of race and ethnicity were barely mentioned. There was an almost total lack of discussion of race and ethnicity and how it has influenced and, in turn, was influenced by, Americans' notions of sex and sexuality. It is unfortunate that a book that provides two essays on how sex and sexuality are regulated in two Scandinavian countries ("Child Welfare as Social Defense Against Sexuality: A Norwegian Example," by Kjersti Ericsson and "How Libertine is the Netherlands?: Exploring Contemporary Dutch Sexual Cultures," by Gert Hekma) does not have a chapter pertaining to how race or ethnicity dictates sex and sexuality.

*Regulating Sex* briefly touches upon race and ethnicity in two essays. "Travel and Taboo: Heterosexual Sex Tourism to the Caribbean," by Julia O'Connell Davidson and Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor, does address race, but it touches more upon the class issues associated with sexual tourism in poor Caribbean countries. Jakobsen and Kennedy's well-written and insightful essay, "Sex and Freedom," draws associations between the gay liberation movement and the Civil Rights Movement, and how they tackle social policy. In this essay, the authors focus on the different directions that movements based on civil rights

and sexual freedoms can take. Jakobsen and Kennedy successfully made connections between the various civil rights movements in the U.S. and movements based on sexual freedom.

*Regulating Sex* is not only incredibly informative, it is also entertaining. It is a rare treat to read a book so up-to-date on issues pertaining to sex and sexuality. The strongest aspect of this book is that it forces Americans to re-think their ideas and beliefs about sexual acts, such as adult-child sex ("Capacity, Consent, and the Construction of Adulthood," by Laurie Schaffner) and prostitution and sexual commerce (all of the essays in Part II's *The Regulation of Sexual Commerce*).

The book prompts the reader to wonder when, if ever, sex should be illegal. When is sex just sex? The many questions that this book raises, and the answers that it provides, lend it wonderfully to use in the classroom. Many of these essays would be great for a course on sex, gender, or sexuality, as well as social movements, policy, and law.

The first sentence of the opening essay states that "[w]riting about sexuality is like writing about last evening's news. By the time one's thoughts are formulated, they may seem hopelessly out of date" (p. xi). But I beg to differ. As the essays in this book suggest, so many notions of sex and sexuality are rooted in the ideas and beliefs of society, which in turn influence laws and regulations. I would imagine that people reacted to Janet Jackson's "malfunction" the same way they would have five or even ten years ago, with similar governmental fines and enacted regulations. Although it is difficult to address sex today because the discourse surrounding it changes so often, *Regulating Sex* formulates interpretations and theories about governmental regulations on sex that will be relevant for years to come.

#### HONEY, I HAVE A FEELING WE'RE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE

*Transcendent Sex: When Lovemaking Opens the Veil.* By Jenny Wade. New York: Paraview Pocket Books, 2004, 322 pages. Paper, \$14.00.

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"It's not just that sex can be 'mind-blowing'; it's that sex can show you the face of God, the smile of the Goddess, the radiance of Spirit—and more unnerving still, not as a force or presence out there, but as your own deepest self and nature." So writes philosopher and mystic Ken Wilber in his forward to Jenny Wade's *Transcendent Sex*.

Wade contends that subtle sexual phenomena such as Wilber describes are among the best-kept secrets in human history. Indeed, they are only recently being acknowledged in the scientific study of sexuality, most often under the rubric of Tantra. However, *Transcendent Sex* goes well beyond Tantric traditions to chart the altered states that can

occur suddenly and unbidden in the course of lovemaking, and to almost anyone, posits Wade. She argues that these states open the veil between the world of physical reality and the realms beyond; they produce revelations identical to those sought through the centuries by spiritual adepts, including Tantrikas, shamans, and saints.

For this book, Wade, a developmental psychologist and faculty member of California's Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, interviewed 53 women and 38 men ranging in age from 26 to 70 (more than one third were in their 40s). Wade recruited these respondents from her personal and professional contacts and states that she made no attempt to seek a representative sample, reasoning that it was necessary to interview only "articulate participants who could verbalize the subtle dynamics of altered-state experiences." To map new territory it makes sense to query those who have traversed the territory; but Wade should have included her interview questions. Her line of inquiry would have strengthened this book by allowing readers to ask those questions of their personal and professional contacts, and of themselves.

Most of the book focuses on the narratives from Wade's interviews. These narratives are engaging glimpses into typically unexplored erotic landscapes. Wade's interpretation of them is not only intelligent, but highly literate, with frequent references to the texts of the major religions and other works. (Did you know that the world's oldest document, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, describes a lusty and miraculous transformation through sacred sex?) What is especially interesting from a critical standpoint is how Wade views her narratives: not as a sex researcher might, through a lens of physical performance or relational consequence, but through the lens of consciousness studies, whose realities are recognized by the philosopher, the ecologist, the mystic, and the poet. Thus, she is able to parse these sexual anecdotes through the language of noetics, the science of time, space, and extraordinary agency.

Chapter headings include "The Spirit of Gaia: Supernatural Connections with Early Life," "By Love Possessed: Shapeshifting, Channeling, and Possession," "Breaking Away: Cosmic Journeys that Leave the Body Behind," "Time Travel and Revealed Truths: Falling into Past Lives," "Being in Nothingness: Sex and Nirvana," and "Divine Union: One with God." The resulting discussions introduce a way of thinking about sexual experience that bypasses some of sexology's most sacred cows, such as survey data and the debates about gender, orientation, morality, and medical intervention. They focus on the notion that throughout human history, sex has been a path to divine revelation.

Two themes weave through the book's narratives. The first is a sense of non-ordinary or altered states, which Wade defines as the disruption of left-hemisphere awareness, and the consequent transformation of ordinary noetic experience (the perception of who does what with whom, and where and when) into non-ordinary experience. The second is a sense of "cosmic force," of entering an unseen

world—a brightly colored Oz inhabited by supernatural beings including deities—God, Goddess, and more.

Some of the most useful content is found in the appendix, where Wade describes her study and its findings. Here she lays the groundwork for a definitive guide to the characteristics of transcendent sex by outlining the varieties of experience voiced by her participants. Some of these varieties, such as merging with a partner, magnetism between lovers, oneness with nature, the rise of kundalini energy, and the sudden emission of female ejaculate, are already well-documented (Bonheim, 1997; Francoeur, Cornog, & Perper, 1999; Heyward, 1989; Ladas, Whipple, & Perry, 1982; Moore, 1998; Nelson, 1992; Ogden, 1999; Savage, 1999; Scantling & Browder, 1993). Other varieties of experience explored by Wade appear in diverse spiritual traditions but are not yet generally acknowledged as part of sexual response. It is important to mention them (below in italics), both for information about the energetic principles they embody and also as a baseline for further research and clinical application.

Some of the experiences Wade enumerates initiated episodes of extraordinary movement and altered location. Nearly one fourth of her participants reported experiencing *past lives* during transcendent sex—finding themselves in scenarios of prior lifetimes and often returning with complex biographical details. About an equal number reported *out-of-body experiences* in which they found themselves, mid-lovemaking, viewing the scene from outside and above their bodies (for the men this most often occurred after coitus). Others, mostly women, reported a sense of weightlessness, floating, and bliss during lovemaking, that Wade calls the phenomenon of *transport*. *Visions*, the extraordinary appearance of human or supernatural beings during lovemaking, were reported primarily by women. Closely related is *clairsentience*, the sudden, preternatural knowledge of "the truth," reported equally by women and men.

Fascinating, if somewhat startling, is a phenomenon called *trespasso*, the ability to see spirits "trespassing" into a partner's body, via another head or heads superimposed on the partner's. Another experience mentioned often by Wade's interviewees is the sense of oneness with the infinite. In Western mysticism this is called *unio mystica*, awareness of the mystical All, typically in a suffusion of light and ecstatic bliss. Other interviewees described experiencing the infinite as *the void*, the primordial emptiness that is a frequent construct of Eastern mystical traditions. Other of Wade's categories involve various forms of possession, in which a lover's ego and being seems to have been taken over by an outside force, as in *shapeshifting*, where lovers suddenly became an animal or a plant, or *deity possession*, where they were inhabited by Kali, Pan, and other supernatural beings. Still other categories involve extraordinary abilities activated by sexual connection. These include *telepathy*, the ability to access the unspoken thoughts and feelings of others, and *channeling*, the ability to access the consciousness of a whole group. They also include *magical connections with nature*, the

ability to empathize and communicate with plants, animals, and the rhythms of the Earth itself.

Finally, Wade lists six outcomes of transcendent sex: spiritual awakening, personal growth, enhanced relationships, an enlarged sense of reality, a sense that physical sex is holy, and sexual healing, by which she means increased openness to pleasure and orgasm and absence of vaginismus, dissociation, and numbness. Along with these outcomes she includes advice about inviting transcendent sexual experiences into one's life and also some caveats about the dark side of transcendent sex, such as dangerous liaisons and intrusive intimacy.

Some sexologists will welcome Wade's research, and others will want to dismiss it as too unrepresentative, too un-Kinsey, too Californian, too, well, "woo-woo." But from my perspective, her research rings true and clear. It not only corroborates (and helps classify) the sorts of descriptions I have heard from countless clients over my 30-year clinical practice, but it also parallels reports of the 3,810 respondents to a nationwide survey I conducted on sexuality and spirituality (Ogden, 2002), the full "report" of which is in press.

Moreover, it corroborates the brain research made possible by today's optical scanning technology, which will convince even some nay-sayers that sexual response is far more than a closed-circuit cycle from desire to orgasm. Functional magnetic resonance images (fMRIs) and positron emission tomography (PET) scans now reveal that sexual experience engages a multiplicity of the brain's systems—physiological, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual (Whipple & Komisaruk, 2002)—and provide an organic basis for including non-ordinary and cosmic dimensions as a valid part of the sexual lexicon.

*Transcendent Sex* offers research that broadens current clinical notions of sexual function and dysfunction. "Transcendence" may not make its way into the *DSM* as an indicator of sexual health. But understanding the concept,

or at least acknowledging its existence, may prompt us to ask questions beyond physiology and performance and imagine interventions beyond behavior modification and pharmaceuticals. Wade's interviewees speak of floating beyond their bodies or hearing the voice of God. Are they dissociating—or are they tapping into the divine mysteries of the universe? In other words, is this dysfunction or is it discovery; voyaging over the edge of the known world to bring back evidence of riches beyond?

Wade's study begins to limn the outer reaches of sexual experience and the deepest meanings attached to sexual relationship. I urge sex researchers, educators, and clinicians to take notice of this book, however far it seems to steer from sexological center.

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