

Reviews

Shocking Asia

1981

Geiselsgasleig-Film Productions

First Film Organisation Ltd., Hong Kong

(Available for rental in many video stores)

Rating: ♀

Review by Dallas Denny

Shocking Asia is a German-made documentary film. It seeks to titillate and amaze the viewer by graphically displaying Far Eastern practices which seem outlandish or exotic to Western eyes. It is comprised of a number of short segments showing such things as drinking the blood of snakes (which are considered to be aphrodisiacs in Japan), self-mutilation during religious celebrations, and museums dedicated to displays of phalluses in various states of tumescence.

Shocking Asia would rate a CQ caterpillar, but for one thing: it contains, so far as I know, the only publicly available filmed depiction of sex reassignment surgery (SRS).

The surgeon is Dr. S.S. Ratnam of Singapore, who has published extensively on transsexualism in the medical journals, and who had been doing male-to-female SRS for over ten years when Shocking Asia was made.

The brief segment on Dr. Ratnam's patients begins with a shot of some of them soliciting in an alley in the city. One of these women is later shown being operated by Dr. Ratnam. The scene is rather graphic, showing everything from the initial incision to the removal of the denuded penis, and insertion of breast prostheses as well.

Although the commentators seem unduly cynical (this holds throughout the entire film, and not just for the section on transsexualism), and despite the obviously exploitative nature of the film, the transsexual section is handled in a surprisingly sympathetic manner, and is worth watching.

Shocking Asia is available for rental in many video stores; the second shop I tried had it. Be sure to avoid the sequel, Shocking Asia II: The Final Taboos. You want the original. I wouldn't suggest buying it, but if you are curious about SRS, or are contemplating it for yourself, you might pick up Shocking Asia and fast-forward to the relevant section.

But if you are squeamish, forget it. ♀♀

Hormones: 1991 Edition

by Sheila Kirk, M.D.

60 pages, paperback

Available for \$8.00 postpaid from IFGE

P.O. Box 367

Wayland, MA 01778

Rating: ♀

Review by Hilga Henson

Dr. Kirk's little book about hormones has been eagerly awaited by many in the gender community. I ordered my copy as soon as I got my notice from IFGE that it was in print. I regret to say that I was disappointed. I learned little from the book, but perhaps that is because my idea of a good time is haunting the stacks in the medical library at Vanderbilt University. Those who want an introduction to the use of counter-sex hormones will probably find it useful.

Rating System

- ♂ Don't Bother.
- ♀ Only if the price is right
- ♀♀ Definitely worthwhile
- ♀♀♀ Most Excellent.

As a gynecologist, Dr. Kirk has years of experience in prescribing estrogens and progestins to genetic females, and, as IFGE's on-board physician, she doubtless has experience in prescribing them for genetic males. She knows what she is talking about—she just doesn't say enough. She does not include references, and does not go into enough detail about the positive and negative effects of hormones to give the book much bang for the buck. Let's face it; you'll find lots more information on the little piece of paper the pharmacist puts in the bottle with your prescription.

To her credit, Dr. Kirk prefaces the work with a disclaimer, warning those who take hormones to do so only with proper medical supervision. She does not, however, delve into issues of who should and should not take hormones. This is unfortunate, for the gender community is full of people who have absolutely no business taking them.

For years, feminists have been claiming that estrogens are widely overprescribed by physicians, and that their dangers are minimalized because it is typically women and not men who receive them. Dr. Kirk unfortunately subscribes to the mainstream medical philosophy. The fact is that hormones are not nearly so benign as Dr. Kirk and other physicians would lead us to believe. For example, males treated with estrogens for prostatic cancer have shown an increased rate of cardiovascular events (Henriksson & Edhag, 1986) and mortality (Glashan & Robinson, 1981). Transsexual males on estrogen and cyproterone acetate (an antiandrogen) showed thromboembolic events, hyperprolactinemia, and depressive mood changes at rates many times greater than chance indicated (Asscheman, Gooren, & Eklund, 1989).

Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Hormones undoubtedly do pose significant health risks. The studies which would clearly show those health risks have, unfortunately, not been done. But remember—until a few decades ago, studies had not conclusively shown the health risks of cigarette smoking.

What Dr. Kirk wrote is quite good. Unfortunately, she quit writing far too soon. ☹

References

- Asscheman, H., Gooren, L.J., & Eklund, P.L. (1989) Mortality and morbidity in transsexual patients with cross-gender hormone treatment. *Metabolism: Clinical and Experimental*, 38(9), 869-873.
- Glashan, R.W., & Robinson, M.R.G. (1981). Cardiovascular complications in the treatment of prostatic carcinoma. *British Journal of Urology*, 53, 624-627.
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