

Book Review: From Toads to Queens: Transvestism in a Latin American Society. By Jacobo Schifter. Harrington Park...

Jacobo Schifter

Archives of Sexual Behavior

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Book Reviews

Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics: Sex, Loyalty and Revolution. By Paula C. Rust. New York University Press, New York, 1995, 367 pp., \$45.00 (hardback), \$17.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Jill C. Humphrey, Ph.D.¹

This book represents quite a remarkable accomplishment, both as a text and as a study. As a text, it is written by a lesbian-identified feminist sociologist whose open-minded approach to the territory of women's sexuality and women's politics is quite refreshing, and whose capacity to attract diverse audiences is maximized by an inclusive mode of address which is rare among scholars. Lay readers should find the text accessible insofar as the author summarizes and simplifies the background context of sexological theories and scientific methods. Political activists should find it useful insofar as it contains an overview of bisexuality debates in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual press. Social scientists will find that Rust has undertaken an innovative research project and an incisive analysis of sexual identities and political ideologies.

As a study, it draws upon over 400 self-administered questionnaires completed by lesbian, bisexual, and "nonidentified" women in the mid-1980s. The snowballing technique enabled these questionnaires to reach a wide variety of women in terms of political involvements, age range, and geographical location, although the sample was still predominantly Euro-American lesbians. But the real methodological feat resides in the deceptively simple question—"What is your opinion of bisexuality?"—since it is the detailed analysis of rich replies that constitutes the core of the study, with the replies to other questions acting as secondary supplements. As a proponent of qualitative research into sensitive topics, I was impressed by the role of the survey in surpassing a tin-opener role, and by sensitivity of the researcher in analyzing the contents of the tin.

Some of the findings around the bisexual conundrum presented in the chapters on "Lesbians' Voices" and "Bisexuals' Voices" may not be too surprising, although this is a far cry from suggesting that they can be taken-for-granted or trivialized. Lesbian and bisexual women articulated the entire gamut of opinions about bisexuality, with

the former placing more emphasis upon the "negatives" and the latter placing more emphasis upon the "positives."

I gleaned four main lessons from the empirical data and conceptual schema provided by the author. First, there is the complexity of real-life identities, activities, and lifestyles which is congruent with the findings from other large-scale research studies, but incongruent with the presumptions of identity-based political movements. Here, we are informed that 90% of lesbian-identified women have had a heterosexual relationship, that 40% have self-defined as bisexuals at some time, either pre- or postcoming out as lesbians, and that about 65% experience some emotional-erotic attraction to men. Second, there is the prevalence of invalidating bisexuality within the lesbian community—a multilayered invalidation stretching from existential and emotional to social and political levels. This seems to be part of a *rite de passage* in the lesbian community, serving to explain away previous heterosexual experiences and guard against bisexual self-identifications in order to preserve and purify the lesbian feminist body-politic. Third, there is the salience of extrapolating from experience in making sense of the world, which both creates and conceals misunderstandings between women. Although lesbians assume that other lesbians are just like themselves, they are not necessarily cognizant of just how diverse their own inner realities are, so that those with lesbian-only feelings tend to assume other lesbians to be exclusive lesbians, whereas those with bisexual feelings tend to assume other lesbians to be closeted bisexuals. Fourth, there is the problematic conceptualization of hybridity at the heart of bisexuality. Rust examines how bisexuals can be viewed as having "the best of both worlds" only if we construe them as chameleons who pass as perfect straights in one world and pure lesbians in the other. However, if we reframe them as properly bisexual-at-all-times, then they seem to suffer "the worst of both worlds" inasmuch as they can never hide their other side, and will therefore be refused full membership in both worlds. Both frameworks are predicated upon bisexuality as an individual sociosexual phenomenon rather than a collective sociopolitical phenomenon, and Rust sets out to remedy this in the rest of the book.

The first remedy is to retrace the trajectory of lesbian feminist politics in a way that demonstrates that bisexuality was its blind-spot and boundary-marker, and that an excavation of the bisexual trope can uncover the

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contradictions of lesbian feminist ideology. Indeed, Rust's deft handling of this in the chapter entitled "The Pink and Blue Herring" also illustrates the predicaments of heterosexual women in the lesbian feminist orthodoxy. On the one hand, an essentialist model of sexuality has been important for lesbians in asserting the legitimacy of their existence in the heterosexist historical world order. In positing a distinct lesbian "essence" and in reconstructing a distinct lesbian ancestry and herstory, a quasi-ethnicity can be mobilized to insist upon the naturalness of lesbian existence and the necessity of civil rights. However, this model is vulnerable to deconstruction and reconstruction by bisexuals claiming an equally valid bisexual essence and proclaiming the actual bisexuality of many women-identified women in herstory. On the other hand, a social constructionist model of sexuality has been just as significant to lesbian feminists, since this hinges upon choice as the axis around which women's liberation must revolve. Given the patriarchal history of virtually compulsory heterosexuality, women's choices in the here-and-now need to prioritize feminist separatism in the service of political if not sexual lesbianism, and women who declare themselves bisexual or heterosexual are guilty of diluting their commitment if not betraying the cause. However, this model is also vulnerable to criticism in the service of more radical liberation. Feminists, humanists, and sex radicals complained that women's emancipation became meaningless if it violated individual's right to self-definition and self-determination, and, that if sexual emancipation was to mean anything, then it had to include sexual experimentation beyond prescriptions and prohibitions. These arguments about the relative value of lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual women in the feminist movement raged from the late 1960s to the late 1980s on both sides of the Atlantic, only to be supplanted by the emergence of queerdome, of which bisexual politics is a key moment.

The second remedy, then, is to examine the emergence of bisexual politics in the United States from the late 1980s onwards, contained in the final chapter on "Another Revolution in the Political Wheel." The message here is that bisexual politics is about celebrating diversity. First, bisexual activists are operating with the benefit of hindsight, so that they set out to eschew the cardinal errors of identity politics to date. This means that they welcome all kinds of difference—sexual and gendered, racial and cultural, social and moral—and refuse to succumb to essentializing the bisexual identity, homogenizing a bisexual community or mythologizing a bisexual history. Second, bisexuality is about complexity and change, which ruptures binary categorizations of sexual and gendered identities as well as linear life-trajectories. This postmodernist turn holds out the promise that politics may yet become

more reflective of, as well as reflexive about, real life as lived by real people. Third, the burgeoning bisexual movement is open to diverse alliances with feminist, lesbian, gay, and queer movements. Clearly, this presupposes reciprocity, and this seems to be more forthcoming from gay and queer camps than from lesbian and feminist camps, although some progress in creating a LesBiGay model and movement has been made.

Rust also stresses that this should not be misread as proselytizing the superiority of bisexuality or multisexuality, or as presuming any superior political acumen or intellectual privilege among bisexual or multisexual people. In other words, if a new generation of queers owe their present insights to past political struggles and debates, then they will owe any future breakthroughs to ongoing coalitions with comrades in a variety of left libertarian movements.

As an exploration of the relationship between lesbian feminists and their ideology on the one hand, and bisexual women and the nascent bisexual politics on the other, this book should be placed on the "compulsory reading" list. Nevertheless, this relationship also demarcates its limits. The major omission is, of course, "men"—they are in the background as creators and defenders of male supremacy, but there is little or no consideration of gay men in the lesbian and gay movement, bisexual men in bisexual networks, black and disabled men who challenge hegemonic masculinities, or indeed pro-feminist men who march in support of women's liberation. As soon as lesbian separatism becomes untenable on a large scale, and bisexuality is recognized as a prevalent phenomenon, and alliances between different oppressed peoples are countenanced, then the question of men rears its head. Indeed, this is at the core of contemporary debates and struggles, for if we are serious about inhabiting a world which cherishes sexual and gendered diversity while crushing sexual and gendered oppression, then the deconstruction and reconstruction of men and masculinity will occupy center-stage, and this is an endeavor which feminists would be ill-advised to entrust to men alone.

Women Who Become Men: Albanian Sworn Virgins.

By Antonia Young. Berg, Oxford, 2000, 168 pp., \$19.95 (paperback).

*Reviewed by Jeffrey M. Dickemann, Ph.D.*²

As transgender/transsexual identities worldwide have begun to receive attention from students of gender and

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sexuality, a treatise on one such identity, a traditional European female-to-male transgender surviving to the present day, must evoke considerable interest. Young is one of a few investigators who have interviewed these "Balkan sworn virgins." Having spent many years visiting Albania, she has probably identified more such individuals than any other reporter. Although numerous travellers' comments and articles have been devoted to these individuals, from the 1870s on, still much of importance to gender specialists remains unclear, even as the impact of industrialization and Westernization results in inevitable change in form and function.

The Balkan sworn virgin is a traditional role in which a female-born person becomes a social man, fulfilling all social and political functions of men except marriage and procreation, generally assuming the new identity at or before puberty, and swearing lifelong chastity and celibacy. The most usual rationale is to provide a male head of household, in the absence of sons, or of a son old enough to accede to leadership, on the death of the father. Although this book introduces the phenomenon to the general reader, it will disappoint the informed scholar. A lack of grounding in social science method and in sex/gender research greatly weakens the treatment. Following a brief history of Albania, Young describes the kin-based, patrilineal, patrilocal social organization of highland north Albania, without attending to the ecology and economy which underlie this system, and the feuding and raiding that was a salient aspect of it. The communal household, holding property in common, was by no means unique to Albania, its size depending on available resources, so that high mountain valleys supported smaller households than richer lowland valleys. Young acknowledges that smaller households, containing fewer young adult males, were more likely to produce sworn virgins, but does not provide correlative ecological data. Although she identifies adoptive groom marriage as an alternative to sworn virgin status, providing an inheriting son where none is born into the family, this practice is more common in southern than in northern Albania. She provides no explanation for the prevalence of sworn virgins in the north, when so many of the world's patrilineal practices practice forms of adoptive groom marriage.

A good deal of attention is paid to women's work and status, their arranged marriages with village exogamy and bride price, mild clausturation of young girls, and the crime of honor (familial right to kill women offending against the code of sexual modesty and fidelity). The enormously heavy labor burden and low status of women that Young describes are significant, as they may contribute to the choice to become a man, escaping an intolerable life and gaining social privilege, a choice that Young acknowledges is "often actively made by these women

themselves" (p. 7). Yet the relation between women's views of their lives, sworn virgins' views of women's lives, and degree of personal agency in the gender change is not explored.

Young describes the customary oral law, or so-called "Kanun," occurring in several local versions, but relies on the few published versions rather than those obtaining in the villages she visited. Other folklore and folk beliefs not part of canonical law are not discussed. Thus, it is unclear what traditional ideology governed each specific case, particularly in regard to sanctioned reasons for adoption of masculinity and the means of obtaining permission. Relatives in a large extended family might provide competitors for the role of inheriting male descendant and therefore veto the transition. Young notes that her sample was mostly rural and mostly poor. A complex of ecological, economic, and demographic factors seems to be at work here, but they are never integrated. Similarly, Young refers to the absence of an inheriting son as a situation that "may bring shame" to the family, yet fails to note the critical need for a functioning adult man as governor and representative of each household, extended family, and larger kin unit for both economic and political survival.

Addressing the sexuality of these transgendered persons, Young pleads the difficulty of "prying," although Gremaux (1994) obtained valuable information on this topic. That these isolated mountain people should not possess or comprehend the modern urban Western concept of "lesbianism" is no surprise, but whether sexual relations of any kind may occur between women is an utterly different question. Young dismisses accounts of others, maintaining that such acts by sworn virgins are "probably nonexistent." Attention to the last several decades' research on female homosexuality (e.g., Blackwood & Wieringa, 1999; Faderman, 1981) would have clarified this muddle.

Sworn virgins do not refer to themselves by any of the terms available in Albanian for this role, but rather simply as "men." Young notes the peculiarity, in this transgender population, that some are addressed and referred to, in this highly inflected language, by masculine forms, while others are not. Similarly, some have adopted a masculine given name, while others retain the female birth name. This reveals a very different conception of gender identity than that of Western Europe, but is unexplored here. Throughout the volume, we are confronted with Young's inexplicable pronominal usage in referring to these social men. Her own explanation is: "For the sake of uniformity, I have only used masculine pronouns for the 'sworn virgins' when these were used in reported speech referring to any of my subjects. In all other cases I have used feminine pronouns, even where this was avoided by everyone else" (p. x). Her practice is exemplified by the

following: “Shkurtan with *her* sister-in-law, Bute who says, ‘I felt sorry for him, and it was also a family decision that *he* needed a *woman* to take care of *him* and the home’” (photo caption, p. 81, my emphasis). Or, “Hajdar is deeply insulted if anyone refers to *her* as a *woman*, all *her* relatives call her ‘uncle’” (p. 89, my emphasis). I cannot avoid the impression of a homophobic, transphobic subjectivity lying behind this text.

Although Young regularly uses the term “choice” to refer to the gender transition, she insists at one point that the change has “less to do with the individual than the social, economic and cultural situation into which they are born” (p. 57). This naive view ignores the role of social forces in personality formation. It ignores as well the many cases, her own and others previously reported, in which gender crossing began in earliest childhood, with a trajectory indistinguishable from the gender dysphoria of Western female-to-male transsexuals. This same obtuseness allows Young to discredit reports of physical attraction to women, to attribute masculine appearance to “years of acting as men,” and in general to downplay personal agency. But then, little can be expected from a text that regularly confuses “sex” with “gender.” The transgendered reader, like the gay or lesbian reader, will have many occasions to wince.

Twenty-five pages are devoted to accounts of individuals, 13 met by the author, and three interviewed by others. Even the longest accounts are too brief in relevant details, yet they are all absorbing, and accompanying photographs, many taken by Young, are invaluable. We learned on page 58 that Young interviewed through an interpreter, and on page 98 that the interpreter was a woman. Given the emotionally, ideologically, and linguistically laden nature of gender investigations, one must raise questions regarding the reliability of this method. However, the accounts provide many nuances not reflected in the generalized account that precedes them, as Young acknowledges. As one example, Young regularly refers to these individuals as “honorary men” or “prestigious men,” never addressing possible ambivalence or negative attitudes on the part of coresidents. Yet, “Dilore told a story of a man who once challenged what might be uncovered below her belt: ‘I pointed my gun at him and threatened to kill him; he finished up pleading for his life!’” (p. 77).

In spite of Young’s familiarity with other accounts of sworn virgins, no consistent comparisons, no tabulations of any kind are provided, whether of the ecological or economic variables discussed above, or of the age of gender crossing, motivation, birth order, familial involvement, change of given name, or any other of the many variables necessary to construct an accurate picture

of the phenomenon. What is apparent is the many functions served by this opportunistic role, even if insurance of a masculine household head predominates. In obeisance to the publisher’s series, “Dress, Body, Culture,” Young includes a chapter on dress, focusing primarily on veils and aprons of women, two garments irrelevant to the transgendered man, and on trousers and skull caps. That Young never discusses the marked absence of mustaches on the sworn virgins, items prominent on the faces of other Albanian men, nor on the obvious presence of unbound breasts in several of her own photographs of sworn virgins, suggests the inadequacy of this chapter for gender studies.

In a penultimate chapter, an attempt is made to compare the Balkan sworn virgin to other transvestite and transgender traditions crossculturally. Here, in contrast to her previous assertions, Young now acknowledges that there is some indication that “‘sworn virgins’ are not in every case treated absolutely on an equal footing with men . . .” (p. 119). She cites two cases; there are others in the literature. A concluding chapter addresses the current situation in Albania and Kosova. Young estimates that there are about 100 living sworn virgins, mostly in north Albania, based “purely on subjective observation.” Again, she insists on the absence of homosexuality, and predicts the extinction of the identity with increasing education. An alternative prediction would be the evolution of this role into modern lesbianism, as is happening to many traditional transvestite/transgender forms around the world. This would to some degree parallel the evolution of female relations in the Western world, from intimate friendships and mannish or passing women, some of whom were celibate and some not, to “lesbians,” some mannish and some not, with acknowledged sexual relations, and finally, some “lesbians” transforming into transsexual men. No such historically informed speculation occurs here.

An appendix on the “Kanun” concludes the volume, but no quotations from sections addressing sworn virgins are provided, nor is the Catholicized nature of the most widely cited version, attributed to Lek Dukagjini, noted. Other than vague assertions that several of the sworn virgins “knew the Kanun,” we have no understanding of how customary oral law functioned in their lives. An extensive and valuable bibliography is included.

Internally contradictory, muddled in concept and in prose, uninformed by the very literatures most relevant to the topic, this limited account of some Albanian sworn virgins will take its place alongside the many other travellers’ accounts and the few serious investigations so far published. Yet the unusual Balkan gender identity is critical for our understanding of gender variance and of the ways

in which humans conceptualize gender. Badly needed is serious long-term ethnographic investigation, in the native languages, informed by the sex/gender literatures of the past decades. To my knowledge, that investigation has yet to be undertaken.

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From Toads to Queens: Transvestism in a Latin American Society. By *Jacobo Schifter*. Harrington Park Press, New York, 1999, 155 pp., \$39.95 (hardcover), \$14.95 (paperback).

*Reviewed by Don Kulick, Ph.D.*³

This is a pleasantly written, very quickly-read book that is much more interesting for the data it presents than the analyses it sketches. The topic is the lives of what the author calls “transvestite sex-trade workers” in San José, the capital city of Costa Rica. The various chapters discuss transvestites’ life trajectories, their living conditions, their relations with one another, their lovers, and their neighbors, their work routines, drug use, and sexual practices. The book is based on interview and questionnaire data from over 50 transvestites, as well as in-depth interviews with several of the transvestites, lovers, and clients. A brief period (3 weeks) of ethnographic observation was also conducted by the author.

Schifter is the regional director of an AIDS prevention program and his perspective is very much focused on HIV prevention, so much so that the text is really more of a field report than it is a scholarly book. And judged as a field report on a particular group of people who are at high risk of contracting HIV, the text is excellent, even if some of the conclusions might have been better documented and discussed, such as the claim that many transvestite sex-workers do not know how to use condoms “correctly” (p. 110)—something I find hard to believe, or

at least understand, considering that sex-workers have a great deal more experience using condoms than anyone else. The text importantly highlights conditions and practices that can lead individual transvestites to engage in unsafe sexual practices (e.g., low self-esteem and lack of solidarity within the community of transvestites; or the fact that clients will often pay more money for sex without a condom). It is also a very entertaining and light read. The frequent use of quotes from various transvestites—often trenchant or funny—gives the text a great deal of bounce and convinces the reader that the author did indeed come to know many of the people he features throughout the book.

What is missing is contextualization and analysis. The text gives the impression of having been put together very quickly (this is a complaint I have about most of the books published by Harrington Park Press). There are a great many intriguing quotes and observations, but these are sprinkled throughout the text and are never really synthesized into any kind of coherent theoretical argument. This is especially unfortunate given that much recent work on Latin America has argued that local practices of homosexuality and transgenderism crucially complicate and nuance our understandings of sexuality and gender throughout the region (e.g., Kulick, 1998; Lancaster, 1992; Murray, 1995; Parker, 1991; Prieur, 1998). It is lamentable that Schifter is either unaware of or unconcerned with this work—there is not a single reference to any other research on the topic, except to his own books. Had he tried to relate his study to some of that other work, he might have avoided the banal psychologizing that mars the text: Transvestism and other forms of seemingly incongruous behavior are “varying manifestations of a condition known as multiple personality disorder” (pp. 33–34); “Lesbians in particular, some of whom are faced with sexual identity problems, are often drawn to the type of intimacy transvestites offer” (pp. 141–142). He might also have been able to dump his unhelpful (standard psychological) classification of anyone who cross-dresses as a “transvestite,” and instead spent more time trying to sort out the details of indigenous classifications and subjective experiences of sexuality and gender.

That said, I did find this book extremely interesting. The thing that most amazed me was how similar the individuals described here are to the Mexican *jotas* described by Prieur (1998), and to the *travestis* with whom I work in Brazil (Kulick, 1998). Their childhood experiences, their life histories, their sense of humor, their opinions about women, prostitution, boyfriends, their experience and ideas about sex—much of what appears in this book could have come right out of my own field data from Brazil. What social processes, historical legacies,

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and cultural commonalities can have produced such remarkable similarities in communities so geographically distant from one another? And what can those similarities tell us about how gender and sexuality are structured, imagined, and lived throughout Latin America?

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Psychoanalytic Therapy and the Gay Man. By Jack Drescher. Analytic Press, Hillsdale, New Jersey, 1998, 373 pp., \$55.00.

Reviewed by Kenneth Lewes, Ph.D.⁴

For the first 80 years of its history, psychoanalysis had been engaged in the self-imposed project of converting homosexuality. The last 20, however, has witnessed a startling turnabout: the transformation of psychoanalysis itself by homosexuality along with feminism and the literary ideas associated with modern hermeneutics and deconstruction. Gay people and their supporters have argued successfully to have this sexual orientation recognized as the full equivalent of the more common heterosexuality and, in doing so, they have forced a reassessment and reformulation of basic psychoanalytic principles and procedures. This represents an extraordinary moment in intellectual and social history, and Drescher's volume may be considered its monument. It is the objective marker, the celebration, and the concrete embodiment of the shift that has unsettled and reestablished psychoanalysis. Because it is the monument of this moment, it offers us the opportunity to take measure of how far we have come, what still needs to be done, what we have gained, and what we have lost.

The book itself is a pleasure to read. It is gracefully written and blessedly free of jargon, obfuscation, grammatical errors, and pomposity. Drescher's tone is remarkably humane and, although he can be quite stern when he deals with what seem to him to be moral issues, he

projects a winning sense of humor and a sober respect for his patients and his readers. Similarly, he disagrees with other clinicians (including the present reviewer) in a respectful, though sometimes exasperated and sardonic tone, and only rarely does he descend to bad manners (see, e.g., p. 159). For people wishing to familiarize themselves with the current analytic treatment of gay people, this is simply the book to read. On the other hand, there is much that Drescher does not deal with here, either through omission or rejection, and I should like later to return to these lacunae and to consider how they relate to the relational school of therapy that is at its height today.

In general, Drescher reflects a growing trend in contemporary relational psychoanalysis to turn away from metapsychological theory and to concentrate instead on the details and nuances of what patients themselves have to say. For him, theory can never capture the complexity and texture of an individual account, but instead often serves to filter out this particularity and to distance the clinician from his patient. It even can deny the validity of these accounts when they contradict theory. For Drescher, the primary therapeutic project is the sympathetic and informed attention to accounts of life experiences. Thus, throughout the book, the privileged place of respect is accorded to what Drescher calls "unofficial stories," the unique and idiosyncratic way each patient tries to make sense of his experience. The book is thickly interlarded with these stories, as Drescher attempts to capture for the reader what the world looks like from the position of a gay man. For him a prominent issue in the psychoanalytic treatment of gay men is their experience of antihomosexual attitudes and behavior—as it was first experienced as having come from family members, later from the world at large, and lastly as it emerged from within, having been internalized and adopted by the gay man himself. Drescher's project of sensitizing therapists to this issue has a particular urgency, since such homophobic damage is sometimes repeated in therapies intended to alleviate it. He illustrates this with an extended discussion of so-called "reparative therapies," which seek to lead the gay patient out of the sad, dark world of homosexuality into the bright day of heterosexuality. He shows very clearly and convincingly that such a project represents a homophobic assault on the dignity of the patient and that it is entirely incompatible with the moral values of psychoanalysis. The book ends with a long discussion of how gay men have had to hide their sexuality from themselves and from others, and of the many ways they emerge from these closets and overcome the Sullivanian dissociation that imprisoned them there.

As I have already suggested, this is a book to celebrate both for itself and for the moment that it represents.

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It is important historically not so much for the originality of its ideas as for its tone. Though it discusses many controversial ideas and disagrees with many psychoanalytic theorists, its tone is not particularly argumentative. Instead, it speaks from a position of stability and consensus. Even the lamentable reparative therapists are treated as a recalcitrant and atavistic splinter group, capable of harm, to be sure, but not really representative of anything important or vital. The humane and "respectful" movement, of which Drescher is the spokesperson, has won the war.

He is emphatic in dismissing questions of etiology as being entirely without interest: "An etiological question is never without a subtext . . . [and] is often motivated by a wish to know why a gay man did not become a heterosexual" (p. 231). Whenever etiological theories come up in sessions, as they frequently do, Drescher's attention is exercised only in discovering what defensive functions they serve: a moral attack on parents, an expression of self-loathing, a conviction of having been injured or stunted. He consequently does not discriminate among theories of research results, rejecting such endeavors as "impossible and undesirable." Although he does not say so, it would appear that any such research or theorizing should not now be undertaken until moralistic and tendentious motivations can be safely articulated and bracketed. Although some readers may find this a sensible position, it does leave out much that would have been valuable. Certainly some biological and statistical research is more pernicious than others and it is quite true that much "hard" scientific research is covertly homophobic and has been used for political and discriminatory purposes. But Drescher does not discuss whether notions of etiology and nosology are intrinsically valueless or they might prove useful, either now or in the future. Hence, a reader in search of a guide among various research projects and theories will have to go elsewhere.

The most striking characteristic of Drescher's book and of the relational movement it comes from is its resolutely antimetapsychological stance and its distrust of theory in general, despite Drescher's frequent evocation of such figures as Winnicott and Sullivan. There is nothing here on diagnosis, based either on character and defensive styles, or on level of pathology. Nor does he discuss intrapsychic differences between gays and straights. Similarly, he seems to have little use for developmental stages, except in the most general way, and gives short shrift to the Oedipus complex, finding in all of these an implicit teleology and hence a set of *a priori* norms of healthy and pathological, natural and perverse. Such notions, he claims, are inimical to the primary therapeutic activity, which again and again is simple attention and respectful

listening to the stories his patients tell him. What does interest Drescher as the source of endlessly varied accounts is his patients' experiences of antihomosexual sentiment. This for him is the primary characteristic reliably distinguishing gay people from others. Much of the treatment Drescher reports consists of remembering and reexperiencing this homophobia and then working through the conflict between later, acquired gay-affirmative attitudes and older, deeper, and recalcitrant feelings of guilt and self-contempt.

These are all humane and liberal attitudes and they characterize a great deal of current "relational" psychoanalytic therapy, especially of a gay-friendly variety. The rise of such schools is, of course, an occasion for applause, but they also seem to involve certain limitations in thinking. First, it is important to see that Drescher's own practice and thought are full of theoretical positions and moral judgments. They are, for the most part, quite benign: he seems to favor sex within a relationship over anonymous encounters, despite disclaimers on his part; he likes it when families are united and supportive; he thinks that emotional and intellectual maturity is compatible with religious belief and observance; he does not object even when his patients wish to be good Republicans. It may seem perverse to object to judgments that consider a comfortable position for the individual within a certain social order as desirable, but other values are also possible, though they exact a higher price: independence, discontent, and the refusal to accept certain social arrangements, the clear-eyed perception of contradiction and the willingness to surrender rejected possibilities and to mourn for them. It is important that we recognize that positions such as Drescher's that claim to be value-free are inescapably political in nature, especially when their subject is homosexuality and its relation to the larger society. Drescher's world of future gay men happily integrated into their society has much to recommend it, but it is a world, strangely enough, void of gay people, or, more properly, one that accepts them only if they are willing to sign on for the duration and follow the rules. This is a strong way of putting it, but the movement that began with the Stonewall Revolt would have put it even more strongly.

This is not the place to argue these values, but it is relevant to observe that Drescher's apparent apolitical stance situates itself clearly on one side of a political divide. Nor could it be otherwise. Although theory, psychological or political, can, as Drescher says, interfere with sensitive and sympathetic listening, it still remains impossible to listen without the "filter" of some kind of theory. We cannot know what to listen for, what is expected or surprising, how to determine what is important or simply filler and evasion, or to feel satisfaction at a coherent narrative

without some *a priori* propositions. It is not sensible to demand that one operate without theory, but it is imperative that we be aware of what our theory is, so that we can recognize its limits and its implications. Readers may want to consider this as they contemplate Drescher's seemingly unobjectionable apolitical and atheoretical stance.

But he really does espouse a theory. As is the case with most relational therapists, he rejects drives as "questionable psychoanalytic premises" and concentrates instead on yearnings for attachment and on being situated in an interpersonal field of influence. Aggression and sexual striving become secondary constructs, derivatives of a more basic attachment. Thus, he will interpret certain of his patients' behavior as motivated by a desire for "closeness" with a man and not by a wish to do sexual things with or to him. He does not in this book ever suggest to his patients that they may be motivated by revenge, spite, or sadism. Yet even this anodyne orientation contradicts an essential feature of Drescher's practice—his respectful validation of his patient's point of view. I have found that many, if not most, gay men who come to treatment initially discuss their sense of being homosexual and their modes of behavior as being due to an exigent drive to have sex with other men. The case may be different with many lesbians, but for most of my gay patients, the sexual drive has been primary. Yet Drescher's patients, according to the transcripts he offers, are motivated primarily by a wish to be close to other men, to bolster their self-esteem, and to heal the wounds inflicted by familial rejection. I, for one, wonder about this difference in accounting for motivation. Is it due to his patients' having come to a deeper understanding of their "real" motivation? Or is it due to an unacknowledged theory on Drescher's part that encourages his patients to understand themselves as searching for love, and not sex? This review is not the appropriate occasion to discuss whether human behavior is essentially motivated by instinctual drives of sex and aggression, yearnings for attachment, both, or neither. But it is important to observe that the ways Drescher's patients feel and think about themselves and the kind of people that emerge at the end of a successful therapy with him depend largely on a theory that Drescher has espoused and acted from. He may choose not to defend his personal theory in this book, but he cannot claim to be working without one.

This issue touches on another troubling aspect of Drescher's book: the verbatim transcripts of sessions, which have a peculiarly repetitious and monotone quality. They all revolve around the themes of homophobia and the emergence from closets of various sorts. But they frequently sound like TV interviews, where patients are asked for reminiscences, reflections, summings up, resolutions,

and so forth. Drescher is alert for the appearance of the harmful effects of homophobia in his patients' lives, so it is not surprising that they talk about this topic, almost to the exclusion of other experiences and thoughts. What is for the most part lacking is any sense of spontaneity, any break in logic or sense of moving from one plane of experience to another. There is, in short, no free association, as we have come to understand this characteristic mode of psychoanalytic investigation. And, despite Drescher's abhorrence of the "filtering" effect of theory, his therapeutic interests really do encourage patients to talk about certain topics and not others. In addition, he confines himself primarily to mirroring and encouraging reflections. He never interprets a patient's aggression or spite or points out when he is being oppositional, pusillanimous, or willfully stupid. He never confronts an obvious contradiction in a patient's account, as when one claims to have thought that he was the only homosexual on the planet and also simultaneously to have feared being branded "a fag." Consequently, there is a pervasive middle tone, a vague sense of injury and victimhood, and little recognition of complicity in their own misery.

This flattening out of psychoanalytic communication is, I think, a function of Drescher's primary objective in this book, which is to demonstrate how to create an appropriate holding environment for his gay patients. Unfortunately, this leads to a relative neglect of theoretical considerations. When he occasionally does discuss theory, his treatment is quite unsatisfactory. Freud's views, especially on homosexuality, changed throughout his life, but Drescher focuses primarily on the early ideas of the *Three Essays* of 1905. Not all of Freud's theories effeminized homosexuality, and his views differed often radically from those of later Freudians. Drescher's understanding of the Oedipus complex is one-dimensional, and he says nothing about its importance in the formation of the superego. He also is surprisingly silent on transference. He will occasionally draw a comparison between, say, Anna Freud's notion of identification with the aggressor and Sullivan's malevolent transformation, but the similarity is superficial and leaves out all that divides these theoretical orientations: the importance of the intrapsychic as opposed to the internalized, the notion of sadistic gratification as opposed to defensive self-protection. Similarly, psychoanalytic ideas of narcissism, narcissistic object choice—as opposed to anaclitic choice—or identification (which, contrary to Drescher, is most often partial and multiple) are difficult, slippery, and in need of careful explanation. On the other hand, maybe he is right and they all need to be thrown out. His book would have been even more valuable and interesting had he specified more fully his reasons for wanting to scuttle them.

Finally, his theoretical insouciance leads him to unfortunate lacunae. He claims that the experience of anti-homosexual bias is the primary difference between gay and straight men and he declines to discuss possible dynamic or structural differences between the two. Thus, he does not address issues that concern a therapist who works with gay men but is uncertain about how to react to behavior that seems odd or bizarre: their amazing search for sexual variety and frequency, the importance to them of fantasy and sadomasochistic scenarios, the abuse of drugs to heighten sexual experience, their apparently adolescent narcissistic physical display. It is, of course, not clear if these phenomena are indeed more common among gay men than straight, and it is certainly important to consider whether they are pathological trends or are symptoms of greater freedom and ego strength. But therapists working with gay men hear about these behaviors frequently. It really is essential to have conscious and articulated notions of what is pathological. Without them, many therapists will be baffled, frightened, and helpless, and otherwise well-meaning ones will be unable to recognize or change homophobic or conformist attitudes of which they are not aware. There may, of course, be political reasons for not wishing to discuss these issues at the present time, but I, for one, cannot agree with them. It must also be said that these very "asocial" traits of our patients are aspects of what historically has made gay people distinctive and valuable, especially in homogenizing and totalizing social systems. Whether they are intrinsic to the dynamics of a certain object choice or they depend entirely on the social experience of homophobia, as Drescher claims, has not been determined. But the issue of whether these are desirable traits has a peculiar urgency nowadays when membership in a dubious social arrangement can be achieved only at the price of erasing identities and styles that have cost so much to maintain and affirm in far darker times.

So let us celebrate this book and what it represents, but let us not lose ourselves in celebration.

Sexuality in America: Understanding Our Sexual Values and Behavior. Edited by Patricia Barthalow Koch and David L. Weis. Continuum, New York, 1999, 346 pp., \$39.95.

Reviewed by Edward S. Herold, Ph.D.⁵

Far more research on the topic of sex has been carried out in the United States than in any other country. This

edited volume provides a comprehensive guide to the vast amount of research which has been conducted regarding the sexual attitudes and behaviors of Americans. It is an expanded and updated version of the original chapter which was published in Robert T. Francoeur's three-volume *International Encyclopedia of Sexuality* in 1997. Thirty scholars of sexology from diverse disciplines were invited to contribute their own specific area of expertise to the book in the form of chapters or sections of chapters. The result is a fully developed panorama representing the diversity of American society.

The book covers a wide range of subjects. These are analyzed under the basic themes of diversity, social change, and sexual conflict. The major topics include: religious, ethnic, and gender factors influencing sexuality, sexual education, autoerotic behaviors, interpersonal heterosexual and homosexual behaviors across the life cycle, bisexual and cross-gendered persons, coercive sex, sex work, pornography, paraphilias, sexual health, dysfunctions and therapy, sex research, and sex and the Internet.

The main premise of the book is outlined by Weis who argues that the history of sexuality in America has been dominated by continuous conflict between competing groups over which sexual ideology will prevail. For example, groups such as religious fundamentalists would like to see their sexual values imposed on everyone, in particular their belief that sex is legitimate only in marriage.

A major contribution of this book is the discussion of how religious, ethnic, and gender factors have influenced sexual attitudes and behaviors. Too often these factors are ignored by researchers. The influence of the Judea-Christian heritage is presented followed by a review of the sexual behaviors of African Americans and Hispanic Americans. There is also considerable discussion of gender differences and the development of feminist sexual ideology. Most importantly, tensions and differences within these social groupings are analyzed as well. For example, detailed comparisons are made between the fixed and processual world views of the major religions. The authors also outline the divergences found between official religious doctrine and the actual sexual practices of church members. Furthermore, they analyze the major differences among feminists, particularly the debate between radical feminists who focus on the dangers of sex and the liberal feminists who focus more on the pleasurable aspects of sexual empowerment for women.

Koch discusses the origins of sex education, including the development of marriage manuals and the impact of magazines such as *Playboy*. She contrasts the values

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of organizations promoting comprehensive sex education with those promoting abstinence only sex education. In analyzing the political conflict over sex education, she points out how research findings have discredited the claims of the "abstinence only" movement.

In analyzing the topic of childhood sexuality, Weis notes that the presumption of childhood sexual innocence is still prevalent and has made it difficult for researchers to study this topic. Indeed, the focus of most discussion has been on childhood sexual abuse with only limited research having been done on what is considered normal sexual development in children. In discussing trends regarding adolescent sexual experiences, Weis makes an important point by noting that researchers, in focusing on behavioral measures such as number of partners, have generally ignored the context in which sex occurs. He does a commendable job of presenting different theoretical explanations of adolescent sexuality and makes a strong case for researchers to study the relationship dynamics involved in sexual initiation and behaviors. Similarly, in discussing adult sexuality, he emphasizes the need for researchers to focus more on such dynamics as the negotiation and termination of sexual encounters.

A major strength of the book is that it gives an honest portrayal of the many conceptual and methodological problems facing sex researchers. This is well illustrated in the section on sexual orientation where Hawkins and Stackhouse analyze the complexities involved in assessing sexual orientation and in the section on coercive sex where Muelenhard and Highby discuss the differing definitions of sexual assault and rape. Particularly impressive was Muelenhard and Highby's conceptualization of rape as involving elements of sex as well as violence.

Another significant contribution of the book is that for every major topic area, the authors demonstrate how conflicting societal values have shaped people's perceptions, government decision-making, and, in some cases, biased research findings, especially in such highly charged areas as pornography, prostitution, and abortion. Finally, the book also includes important new developments in sexology such as the impact of the Internet.

I have few criticisms of this book. Obviously, given the large number of contributors, some sections are not as strong as others. In the section on aging, I would have liked to have seen more recent research presented and in the section on therapy, I would have preferred to have seen more analysis of the research on treatment effectiveness. Overall, this work is an outstanding achievement. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who wishes to obtain a comprehensive scholarly understanding of sexuality in American society.

Pomosexuals: Challenging Assumptions About Gender and Identity. Edited by Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel. Cleis Press, San Francisco, 1997, 199 pp., \$14.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by J. Paul Fedoroff, M.D.⁶

This edited book consists of first person accounts of what life is like for people who self identify as "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and friends (LGBT & F)." Christina's opening essay sets the tone and theme of this book in a remarkable essay about the significance of the terms used to define identity. She explains why a woman who has sex with men and women may choose to identify herself as lesbian because of a subcultural belief that bisexual women mean "a bad person to be scorned and feared." She suggests that debates about nomenclature, far from being mere academic discourses, may, in fact, be a way of facilitating discussion about issues that are difficult to address directly. For example, the question in some circles about whether "bisexuality" exists raises questions like: "Which is more important, who you have sex with or who you don't have sex with? Is sex more important than romance? Is sexual activity more important than sexual attraction? (Or the more universal version of that question: Is identity defined by feeling or behavior?) Is fantasy the same as desire? Is desire the same as intention? Is gender born, learned or both?" Unfortunately, as Christina points out, nomenclature debates can also disguise these questions, particularly since the way people see a situation can influence how terms are defined, and vice-versa.

Weir describes his attempts to have sex with a woman while still identifying himself as gay. What are his motivations? Weir answers in the final paragraph of his essay: "It's not women I want. I don't even really want men. What I want is that unquestioned ease in the world, like Nick (his straight male friend) flirting with the waitress without caring about his awkwardness or realizing his grace. I want a woman so I can see myself, even briefly, even just in Nick's eyes, as a man."

Raymond is the daughter of a "feminist lesbian" who describes the sociocultural and political pressures she experiences as an involuntarily celibate woman with sexual desires for both men and women. "I want to be a sexual being without defining myself solely or even primarily on the basis of my sexuality." Scott is a man who has sex with men but who declines to accept the label of gay since he feels

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the concept of “man” is no longer fixed. He raises questions of whether a man can retain the label of “gay” if he has sexual desires for a man who has had sex reassignment surgery and lives as a woman. What about a woman reassigned as a man? He also discusses the problem of assigning consistent labels to women who prefer the company of gay men (so called fag hags) and suggests it is as reasonable to call them gay (a gay man trapped in a woman’s body) as it is to call a male-to-female transsexual who is attracted to men a heterosexual woman. He concludes, “If we aren’t just helpless slaves to our identity, it opens up the philosophical playroom for much more exciting possibilities, such as *choice* and *freedom* . . . Homosexuality’s over . . . The issue isn’t identity, it’s ideology. It’s about freedom, responsibility, and values.”

Vassi moves the debate to another level by introducing the concept of “metasexuality,” which he defines as: “Sex is that activity which takes place between one man and one woman who are fucking to make a baby. Metasex is everything else.” He advocates analysis of sexual relationships in terms of relationships (as well as gender). Is a man who masturbates by himself gay, bi, or straight? Does his orientation change as his fantasies do?

Queen returns to the topic of “fag hags,” describing her own sexual desires for men who are gay. She dispels the myth that all fag hags are attracted to gay men because they don’t have to have sex with them. Some women are sexually attracted to men because those men are gay. She also points out that the reverse situation exists, although we don’t have a word for it, that is, men who are sexually attracted to lesbian women because they are lesbian.

Califa is a woman who has written sex advice columns for gay men and whose fictional writing includes pornography for gay men. She jokingly writes that when pressed, she describes herself as a woman trapped in a man’s body. The often paradoxical interactions between global and local sociopolitical concerns, sexual orientation, and sexual interest are reviewed. She writes:

Bisexuals blur the clear boundaries that separate gays from straights, us from them, the good and oppressed people from the enemy. Transgendered people blur the boundaries between women and men, with similar consequences. And S/M people challenge the whole idea that sexual orientation ought to be based on gender in the first place, since many of us care more about the fetishistic aspects of our partners’ apparel or the equipment we are prepared to wield than we do about the contents of their laps. (p. 103)

Allison presents an image of lesbian women who can be as sexually driven as men. In one segment, she enters a carrot inserting competition with a gay man. Yet,

a more stereotypic image of lesbian sensibilities is also revealed: “It isn’t sex I want when I am like this. It’s the intimacy of their bodies, the inside of them, what they are afraid I might see if I get too close . . .” is a lesbian woman who adopts the role of a “boy” with a dominant, gay male. She praises the paradoxical freedom provided by the etiquette of the sadomasochistic subculture: “It felt like the right thing to do, to me. It was a way for me to enact the fantasy life I dreamed about, to engage in a relationship with a man that had limits and boundaries . . .” Nagle describes her attempts to make sense of her wish to have sex with a gay man as a gay man. She asks: “Is this the result of heterosexism?” She also considers the more complicated problems faced by transsexuals who also “plan” their subsequent sexual orientation.

Harrison is a preoperative female-to-male transsexual who has “decided” to alter her publicly declared sexual orientation from lesbian to gay. Unlike the stereotype of transsexuals seen by clinicians, Harrison seems content with body image: “If anything, it’s shown me I’m not doing too badly at all, and that most people have something about their body they’re not quite satisfied with and would like to change.” Wilkins is a male-to-female transsexual who frequents public swingers clubs, self-identifies as lesbian, but also has sex with men. The complicated interplay of sexual and social roles as expressed in an environment designed to accentuate and merge roles is described: “. . . I begin to play with my head a little. Imagining he is a woman and his dick a dildo . . .” Ford is a man who engages in sex with (presumably) straight men by posing as a female on the Internet. He explains: “I wanted a man to make love to me the way a man who really loves women makes love to a woman he wanted more than anyone else in the world.”

Schimmel is a Jewish gay man who discusses the similarities and differences between the societal pressures that result. He begins his essay by stating that Jews do not get tattoos. He finishes by stating that while in the future it is possible he might adopt a “straight life-style,” it is more likely he will get a tattoo. Tuller is a gay man who writes about his gradual realization that three Russian acquaintances are in a sexual relationship consisting of two (female) lesbians and one male who self-identifies as an “inverted transsexual” and participates with the two women as a third lesbian. He also writes about the contrast between sexual identity in the organized North American gay culture and the invisible gay culture of Russia. He concludes:

. . . that sexuality is far more subtle than the rigid categories, the concrete bunkers, that we create to describe it; that there is no right or wrong way to be gay or lesbian or

anything else . . . with no gay community to turn to, they created their own rules. My friends relied on the internal promptings and rhythms of their bodies and hearts, not on the ideology imposed from the outside. (p. 188)

This is not an academic or scientific book. Its contributors are clearly influenced by the local politics of

San Francisco and New York. However, anyone looking for well-written, thoughtful, first person accounts by individuals involved with unconventional gender and orientation problems and solutions has found it in this book. It should be required reading for anyone who thinks about sex for a living.

Published October 1st 1995 by New York University Press (first published 1995). More Details Original Title. *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics: Sex, Loyalty, and Revolution* (The Cutting Edge : Lesbian Life and Literature Series). ISBN. 0814774458 (ISBN13: 9780814774458). This book is problematic and not well written, to boot. Rust's conclusions read like what I learned to do in middle school: "Now, repeat everything you just said but summarized." Yet she doesn't tie one section to another - the chapter on bisexuality politics was her strongest by far, but not a thing she criticizes appears in her chapter of lesbian feminism. Very little about Rust's book is critical. It was written in the 90s, so she's got no excuse for her rampant race and trans microaggressions. The subject of bisexuality continues to divide the lesbian and gay community. At pride marches, in films such as *Go Fish*, at academic conferences, the role and status of bisexuals is hotly contested. Within lesbian communities, formed to support lesbians in a patriarchal and heterosexist society, bisexual women are often perceived as a threat or as a political weakness. The subject of bisexuality continues to divide the lesbian and gay community. At pride marches, in films such as *Go Fish*, at academic conferences, the role and status of bisexuals is hotly contested. Within lesbian communities, formed to support lesbians in a patriarchal and heterosexist society, bisexual women are often perceived as a threat or as a political weakness. *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics: Sex, Loyalty, and Revolution* by Paula C. Rodriguez Rust 1995, NYU Press An in-depth look at the relationship between lesbians and bisexual women, including data from a survey by Rust. Also explores bisexual politics as it relates to feminism and the broader activist women's community. Articles examine several different new studies on bisexuality, including bis of color, mental health issues, women's friendships, and relationship patterns. Plus, the editor provides an exhaustive reader's guide to social science literature focused on bisexuality. Rust PC (1995) *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics: Sex, Loyalty, and Revolution*. New York: New York University Press. [19]. Rust PC (2000) *Criticisms of the scholarly literature on sexuality for its neglect of bisexuality*. New York: Columbia University Press. [20]. Open Science is a peer-reviewed platform, the journals of which cover a wide range of academic disciplines and serve the world's research and scholarly communities. Upon acceptance, Open Science Journals will be immediately and permanently free for everyone to read and download. CONTACT US. Office Address: 228 Park Ave., S#45956, New York, NY 10003 Phone: +(001)(347)535 0661 E-mail: openscience.article@gmail.com. Paula Claire Rodriguez Rust (born 1959) is an American sociologist who studies sexual orientation, especially bisexuality. Rust is editor of *Bisexuality in the United States* and author of *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics: Sex, Loyalty, and Revolution*. Rust earned a Ph.D. in Sociology from University of Michigan in 1989. She has taught at Hamilton College and State University of New York at Geneseo. Rust is a member of the International Academy of Sex Research. She has been critical of