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REVIEWS

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**WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE DIFFER: FEMINISM IS NOT JUST ABOUT PATRIARCHY AND INTERSECTIONALITY IS NOT JUST ABOUT OPPRESSION**

*Violence Against Women: Vulnerable Populations*. DOUGLAS A. BROWNRIDGE. New York and London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2009. 302 pp., \$39.95 (paperback) ISBN: 9780415996082.

Intimate partner violence remains a serious, and contested, issue for women. Those who address intimate partner violence are faced with the challenge of negotiating theory and data from a variety of disciplines. In *Violence Against Women: Vulnerable Populations*, Brownridge uses three national data sets to examine whether and how certain women are particularly at risk for intimate partner violence from male partners, and whether and how those risks change across time. His treatment of the data is strong; his negotiation of theory, less so.

With the data available to him, Brownridge is able to examine and compare specific subpopulations of women: cohabitating women; separated, divorced, and married women; women in stepfamilies; women in rental housing and women who are homeowners; rural women and urban women; Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal women; immigrant women and Canadian-born women; and women with and without disabilities. Brownridge clearly acknowledges that he was limited by the methodology of the large-scale data sets he used (the Canadian National Violence Against Women Survey and 2 years of the Canadian General Social Survey) as to which populations of women he could study and what questions he could ask of the data. For example, he notes that there were not sufficient data available to consider other potentially vulnerable women, such as pregnant women or women in same-sex relationships, or other important variables of interest, such as protective factors, or timing or chronology of violence.

Those limitations notwithstanding, Brownridge was nonetheless able to document groups of women who are at greater risk for intimate partner violence, and to identify unique characteristics and situations these women face that help explain or predict their elevated risk. For example, in his samples, women with disabilities were at greater risk for violence compared to women without disabilities, and the strongest predictors were possessiveness and jealousy by their male partners. With respect to marital status,

separated women had the highest risk for intimate partner violence, followed by divorced, and then married, women; yet patriarchal domination, although reported by women from all three groups, was only a strong predictor of violence for married women. However, the level and description of method and statistical analysis Brownridge offers, although critical for this type of work, are complicated to read, and they will be more easily accessible to advanced graduate students and researchers than to undergraduate students or others seeking a more narrative description of the findings.

Where Brownridge is less successful is in his theoretical grounding and analysis of his data. He sets up four categorical “approaches” to violence research—feminist, evolutionary, ecological, and intersectionality—but his treatment of these approaches is overly simplistic and flawed. In addition, his insistence in treating these as categorically different suggests a fundamental lack of understanding of the ways in which feminist approaches can and do inform and utilize ecological, evolutionary, and other theoretical perspectives.

Brownridge’s work is not necessarily at odds with feminist approaches, save for his insistence that it is, in fact, not feminist. His dismissal of feminist analyses of violence is particularly problematic. For example, after a quick acknowledgement that there are multiple types of feminism, he diminishes the work of feminist scholars as focused solely on patriarchy as an explanation for intimate partner violence, selectively utilizing sources that are 10 to 20 years old. Moreover, he appears to be unfamiliar with any recent feminist work on intimate partner violence, such as Anderson’s (2005) argument for understanding intimate partner violence as a gendered problem that includes interactionist and structuralist perspectives, or the arguments of McPhail, Busch, Kulkarni, and Rice (2007) and colleagues, who bring a critical, but unabashedly feminist lens to both historical and more contemporary feminist perspectives on intimate partner violence.

Brownridge’s description of intersectionality likewise misses its mark. Although intersectionality certainly deals with oppression, Crenshaw (1997), whom Brownridge appropriately cites, argues that intersectionality is more broadly about the importance of acknowledging and accounting for multiple aspects of identity. In addition, Brownridge’s recognition of the ways in which his own approach is similar to intersectionality, but less compatible with and superior to feminist approaches, suggests a

lack of familiarity with the ways in which recent feminist approaches have adopted intersectionality as a critical component of theory and analysis.

Brownridge presents interesting and compelling data on groups of women who are specifically vulnerable to intimate partner violence. In some ways, the individual chapters are stronger than the book as a whole; the framing of the data might tempt readers to throw the statistical baby out with the lukewarm and cloudy theoretical bathwater. However, the chapters on different populations at risk can certainly be read selectively as individual studies; readers seeking information on particular populations at risk may find that approach more useful. Readers interested in a feminist analysis, on the other hand, will have to provide their own.

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### A GOOD SEXUAL SELF-HELP BOOK FOR WOMEN WHO BARELY HAVE TIME TO READ IT

*A Tired Woman's Guide to Passionate Sex: Reclaim Your Desire and Reignite Your Relationship.* LAURIE B. MINTZ. Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2009. 256 pp., \$14.95 (paperback) ISBN: 9781605501079.

Although causality is often disputed, sexual satisfaction is consistently associated with relationship satisfaction (e.g., Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 1997). Thus, many argue that sexual fulfillment plays a primary role in relationship fulfillment. Moreover, women's sexual satisfaction typically lags behind their male partners (Laumann, Paik, & Rosen, 1999). Thus, Mintz's book on how to improve women's sexual experiences is an important contribution to the self-help literature. She suggests that once you overcome the first obstacle of making time for sexual activities by

scheduling them, the key to passionate sex is spontaneous sexual desire.

This book is not for those women whose diminished desire results from sexual dysfunctions, health problems, body image issues, or relationship problems. Instead, this work focuses on the modern woman who is juggling so many roles that her needs often come last. This book is for the *tired woman* who is looking to regain the spontaneous desire to have sex with her partner. It is important to note also that, although many of the lessons in this book would help exhausted women in lesbian relationships, they may not appreciate the primary focus on heterosexual examples and male–female dynamics.

As a self-help book, advice is not explicitly research driven. However, this book borrows from techniques within cognitive behavioral therapy, and overall the advice throughout appears to have a lot of face validity. Mintz suggests a number of cognitive behavioral techniques as homework assignments designed to increase positive thoughts about sex, decrease negative thoughts about sex, and introduce sexuality and revitalize desire throughout the day. From the more controversial advice of heterosexual women fantasizing about other men during business meetings to the suggestion of repeating sexual mantras throughout the day, these techniques are likely to increase the salience of sex in women's lives if not their desire. In addition, the author discusses the importance of communication about sex, a vital aspect of improving women's sexual autonomy. Despite the clear difficulty busy women face in finding more time, Mintz also recommends setting aside time for exercise (as well as sex) to improve their energy. Although this is clearly sage advice, finding time for all the suggested homework, the couple trysts, the creative couple adventures, and exercising may prove daunting to some tired women. Whereas one of the chapters addresses this issue (see chapter entitled, "Energy for Life Priorities: Time for Tired Women") with suggestions on reprioritizing time, I imagine that the list of priorities just gets longer because exhausted women typically have too many, nonnegotiable priorities (e.g., children and work) along with their romantic relationship priorities.

Overall, I believe this book takes an important, much needed step in addressing the sexual needs of women by suggesting novel strategies for them to utilize to reinvigorate their nonexistent or less than passionate sexual lives. Thus, I think it would be most helpful to psychologists to use with their clients. The advice in this book is easy to understand, the reasons for the techniques are compelling, and the anecdotes from women about their tiring lives and depleted sexual libidos will likely resonate with many readers.

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## PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH FROM EVERY ANGLE

*Modern Management of Perinatal Psychiatric Disorders.* CAROL HENSHAW, JOHN COX, & JOANNE BARTON. London: The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2009. 294 pp., \$50.00 (paperback) ISBN: 9781904671367.

This book takes an important topic—one misunderstood by the general population in part due to media-sensationalized tragedies committed by mothers in the postpartum state—and with its 11 chapters, biopsychosocial emphasis, and integration of empirical research with applied knowledge takes care to “serve every slice of the pie” as it were. The authors successfully bridge science and practice, and they convey the importance of considering biopsychosocial context and the “meaning” of psychiatric illness to the mother and her family. As reported in the Forward, “. . . at least 10% of delivered women will experience a psychiatric disorder following childbirth.” Pregnancy and the early postpartum period are times of high “surveillance” by health care providers, providing great opportunity for early intervention for women with diagnosed psychiatric conditions as well as identification of women at risk to facilitate preventive strategies. Care is taken to discuss objectively every conceivable issue relevant to women’s mental health in the perinatal period regarding what is known and still to be learned about risks, assessment, intervention, and prevention. A notable asset of this book is that its authors, with combined expertise as researchers, practitioners, and leaders in the field of perinatal mental health (including a past President of the Marcé Society and of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and a developer of the widely used Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale), do not merely highlight problems. Rather they also provide specific means for addressing these issues through clear and feasible recommendations.

The book begins with a discussion of perinatal psychiatric disorders through history and culture, culminating in a review of modern classification systems. The authors provide a compelling argument for inclusion of a mandatory postpartum specifier in revisions of the international classification of diseases (World Health Organization, 1993) and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), and for a distinct diagnostic category for the puerperal psychoses. Highlighting that postnatal depression is a major public health problem, discussion of epidemiology and predictors (i.e., contextual, psychological, genetic, etc.) follows in

Chapter 2, along with discussion of differences between episodes beginning during (versus after) pregnancy. Other psychiatric disorders women experience (e.g., anxiety disorders), as well as distress and adjustment to motherhood, pregnancy loss, or therapeutic abortion, are touched upon. The authors present interventions ranging from therapy to medication, hormones, hypnosis, and other complementary and alternative treatments, emphasizing empirical support and patient acceptability.

Chapter 3 reviews puerperal psychosis in depth. Suicide and the link between self-harm, infanticide and postpartum mental illness, and associated risk factors are addressed. Given estimates that the percentages of women with psychotic illness who are mothers is as high as 63% (McGrath et al., 1999), Chapter 4 covers the unique needs and risks facing women with existing disorders (e.g., schizophrenia) during pregnancy. Given the risks associated with discontinuing psychiatric treatment during pregnancy, the authors emphasize the importance of ongoing assessment and illness management with multiagency and multidisciplinary collaboration.

Chapter 5 addresses the growing problem of substance misuse during pregnancy and postpartum. Maternal and infant outcomes associated with nicotine, alcohol, and other drug use are covered, as are screening and assessment, smoking cessation interventions, and recommendations for detoxification. Chapter 6 comprehensively covers the impact of maternal psychopathology and stress on obstetric complications as well as the health and well-being of the offspring in utero and throughout her or his lifespan. Attachment and parent–infant/child relationships are thoroughly discussed. Specific populations and issues (such as gay and lesbian couples, teen mothers, and child abuse) are addressed.

Debates surrounding mandatory screening, screening instruments (such as the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale) and their psychometric properties, and patient acceptability are covered in Chapter 7. Pathways and obstacles from screening to intervention, and preventive interventions, are then reviewed. Albeit dense, Chapter 8 provides an evidence-based analysis of pharmacological and other nonpsychological treatments for pregnant women experiencing mental illness—a controversial topic because many treatments present developmental risk to the fetus. Given the risks of relapse and untreated mental disorders during pregnancy, the authors recommend a risk–benefit analysis and provide general guidelines (e.g., nonpharmacological interventions for more moderate disorders, avoiding first-trimester exposure). Nondrug interventions (e.g., electroconvulsive therapy, transcranial magnetic stimulation) are also reviewed. Chapter 9 thoroughly covers psychotropic medication and breastfeeding. Consistent with the pharmacologic reviews in previous chapters, the authors present current research, adverse effects, and recommendations based on available data and provide general guidelines (e.g., use drugs with a short half-life, monitor infant feeding/sleep/activity).

Chapter 10 covers the service provision system for pregnant and newly delivered mothers in the United Kingdom, noting deficiencies and suggestions for improving primary and secondary care. Research about the efficacy and acceptability of mother–baby units (which do not exist at this level in the United States), indicates that they are the preferred setting for mothers with mental disorders. The authors identify ideal skills of perinatal psychiatrists: medico-legal expertise, ability to liaise with multidisciplinary staff, and awareness of possible “counter-transferential reactions” to mothers. Chapter 11 provides theoretical sociological and anthropological coverage of ethno-cultural perspectives on childbirth and mothering.

Overall, this book provides an integrative approach that will appeal to researchers and clinicians alike. Although inconsistent from chapter to chapter regarding format and clarity of writing (including detail, conclusions, and research/clinical balance), the book is quite readable and useful as a reference. Some chapters (4 and 5) provide excellent visual aids (tables, flow charts) and user-friendly components such as recommended websites (Chapter 3). More of these extras would have been helpful. For an American audience, given the tremendous cultural, economic, and health care policy and practice differences between the United States and the United Kingdom, the proposed service recommendations have more limited applicability to a typical American patient, service provider, or health care facility.

From both applied and research perspectives, this book is an important and substantial addition to the field of perinatal psychiatry. Perinatal mental health is examined from every angle to help practitioners provide the best and appropriately specialized care for women surrounding childbirth. Refreshingly, while systematically reviewing the most current knowledge, the authors remain careful to recognize the whole individual (brain and mind, body and psyche) within a sociocultural context. Employing empirical data and their own experiences as references, the authors make a strong case for improving services and conducting research relevant to women with perinatal psychiatric disorders. Consequently, they not only raise awareness and expand the knowledge base about these women and their families, but also advocate for them.

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## THE MEDIA DELUGE ON BOYS AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

*Packaging Boyhood: Saving Our Sons From Superheroes, Slackers, and Other Media Stereotypes*. LYN MIKEL BROWN, SHARON LAMB, & MARK TAPPAN. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009. 320 pp., \$25.99 (hardcover) ISBN: 9780312379391.

A significant amount of toxicity emerges every day from television, movies, video games, music, the Internet, and other media, and we have decades of research demonstrating the harm it causes in terms of heightened epidemiologies of violence, eating disorders, depression, obesity, and other problems. At the same time, the occasional positive message emerges, and the potential for mass media to encourage prosocial behavior seems woefully undeveloped. Media produces a great deal of social pressure, and it is difficult to resist a pressure that one cannot name.

In *Packaging Boyhood*, the authors thus set out to name these pressures—to provide a seemingly exhaustive account of both positive and negative media influences and to guide parents in helping their sons negotiate a formidable set of cultural messages. (Lamb and Brown did the same for girls with their 2006 work *Packaging Girlhood*.) Whether it is television, movies, music, clothing, toys, or video games, corporations attempt to separate dollars from boys and their parents, creating a fierce market competition. It is not surprising that much of this attempt to sell is gender specific, both catering to and reinforcing widely held masculine stereotypes. The belief that boys and girls are fundamentally different and the rampant antifeminine nature of cultural masculinity in which the worst thing for a boy is to be “girlish” are nearly ubiquitously used to sell products associated with being a “real boy.”

The experience of reading this book seemed parallel to that of being an adolescent boy in the United States—product after product is described, resulting in an aggregate of influences that overwhelm consumers and potential consumers. The authors begin by describing what most of these products have in common: that boys and men are morally and physically (but not emotionally or relationally) courageous and self-assured characters who love action, adventure, independence, sex (only with females, of course), sports, technology, and crass humor. At the same time, we have seen an increase in the “slacker” image (the buffoonish narcissist) that celebrates detachment, aloofness, and the anti-intellectual “too cool for school” persona. It is no

wonder that so many young boys care more about the backboard than the blackboard.

The authors' descriptions of clothing, commercials, television, movies, and video games demonstrate how early the parade of masculine images begins, from shirts that say "chicks dig me" and "playground pimp" for neonates to highly sexualized commercials aimed at prepubescent boys, books with violent male heroes (intended for very early readers), and hypermuscular action figures. Most of these products are replete with the messages that "girls who are smart are annoying and controlling. Boys who are smart are sissies or nerds. Bad for girls. Bad for boys" (p. 148). Because the effects of media violence are especially destructive, it is disturbing that most physical aggression in movies, television, and video games is perpetrated by male characters, most dangerously the "good guys" (i.e., the characters with whom viewers are most likely to identify) who use violence instrumentally. Additionally, violence aimed at very young viewers is often depicted in humorous context. Stories about boys and men who solve problems using alternative conflict resolution strategies are all but absent.

There is some good news among all of this psychic pollution. The authors describe books that have complex characters and few stereotypes, movies and television shows with prosocial messages, and toys that teach important skills and do not depend on separation of the sexes. The book is prescriptive in addition to being descriptive. Attending to developmental level, the authors make suggestions about shielding boys of young ages from specific media, and importantly, about how to talk to one's son about what kinds of messages are contained in the media he watches either alone or with a parent. From these conversations, boys can learn to ask critical questions: What else could the hero have done besides kill or hurt somebody? What makes meanness or apathy funny? How are the stories we see different from real life? Or, in other words, what healthy stories are being censored by the marketplace? Overall, *Packaging Boyhood* is well worth the time for professionals who want to understand cultural masculinity, but, more importantly, for parents who want to help their sons learn to resist gender pressure when it conflicts with their life goals or hurts another person.

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#### RELEASING THE VINDICATED EVE

*The Woman Within: A Psychoanalytic Essay on Femininity*. RAFAEL E. LOPEZ-CORVO. London: Karnac Books, 2009. 144 pp., \$26.95 (paperback) ISBN: 9781855756946.

This quirky, short book is a utopian polemic—an intellectual joyride the author takes without benefit of references or clinical and research evidence. It takes the reader through wild swings of a psychoanalytically informed imagination about women, men, religion, God, the future, biology, and the meanings of alchemy, cosmetic surgery, women's shopping, and various other topics, both arcane and accessible. It admittedly is rooted in psychoanalytic thinking, accepting some basic psychoanalytic ideas (e.g., the primacy of early attachments, especially to the mother, and the concept of the Oedipus complex—although quite thoroughly reinterpreted). However, it represents psychoanalysis as practiced by one who allows himself to wander across the entire cultural, historical, and sociological landscape to talk uncritically about whatever pet social, religious, political, and cultural trends have caught his eye. Some of his observations are interesting (e.g., the lessening of women's "masochism" with cultural changes and increased scientific knowledge); others are outrageous (e.g., his dismissal of "the rise of homosexuality" as a threat to the family and even to the species); some are either irrelevant or just plain way-out (e.g., British soccer fans rioting in a murderous masculine reaction to being led by two women: the Queen and Mrs. Thatcher; his theories about how Jesus's body was concealed after his death and about alchemy as a reversal of the primal injury of finding that feces are not gold); and a few are patently misinformed (e.g., his mistelling the tale of the discovery of penicillin).

Still, there are nuggets of pure gold in the essay. His basic point is that women have tremendous power due to "imprinting," his term for the primary and unavoidable attachment all human beings have to their mothers (who, of course, are young women, underscoring the reason why youth is so valued). But women have learned, through guilt resulting from their domination by men, to repress their knowledge of this power. As women retrieve this knowledge of their power in years to come (aided in large measure by science, which helps them, among other things, to know their visually inaccessible sex organs), they will possess a source of inner strength, allowing them to transcend their earlier remorse and find their true inner values. However, the author does not stop here; rather, he writes of women then bringing about a Paradise on earth that has previously never existed.

As my review suggests, the book is as romantic as a book can be when it is unburdened by data. It is also maddening in its repetitiousness, its idiosyncratic use of

terms (e.g., “intimacy” for hidden parts of the body), and its untrammelled intellectual frolicking. Its essential tone is immensely supportive of women, and it is sprinkled with some eye-opening aperçus. Would that it was just a bit more disciplined!

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