
This book exists because sex is dangerous. It aims to combat this danger (HIV/AIDS, STDs, teenage pregnancy, etc.) by improving our descriptions and measurement, and therefore understanding, of human sexual behaviour. It consists of 26 chapters (by psychologists, sociologists, physicians, epidemiologists and anthropologists) on a wide range of topics involving both qualitative and quantitative measurement of a wide range of sexual behaviours.

Part 1 provides an introduction to and overview of sexuality research. Diane di Mauro looks at sexuality research in the US, noting that it is too fragmented along disciplinary lines and driven too much by public health policy concerns (i.e. the dangers of sex), with the result that we have too little understanding of ‘normal’ sexual behaviour. Richard Parker’s paper provides an overview of cross-cultural issues in sexuality research, emphasizing how etic (outside observer’s) and emic (insider observer’s) perspectives must both be considered in developing adequate research methods.

Part 2 deals specifically with various interview methods (personal visit, telephone, etc.). Of particular interest here is the finding of Charles Turner and his colleagues that people are more prone to reveal sensitive information about their sexuality when interviewed by means of an interactive computer programme. Part 3 consists of six papers on methodological issues in sexuality research in specific US contexts (e.g. teenage males, African-Americans, Hispanics, gay Hispanics, bisexuals, lesbians). Part 4 contains two papers dealing with the use of survey data to measure change in sexual behaviour over time. Part 5 consists of two studies that compare retrospective interviews with daily diary recording of sexual behaviour. (John Bancroft, the editor, says that ‘the potential value of daily diaries in sex research has not yet been realised’ [xiv].)

The two chapters in Part 6 deal with sampling problems. I was particularly struck by Theo Sandfort’s evidence that different sampling methods can produce very different results. His work with gay men, for example, shows how convenience samples tend to capture the most sexually active men, thus reinforcing the stereotype that gay men are more promiscuous than everyone else. Part 7 deals with both egocentric/sociocentric and quantitative/qualitative methods for researching sexual networks. Of particular interest is J. Richard Udry’s design for his mammoth (n>100,000) study of Adolescent Health (including sex-related health) in the U.S.

Part 8 consists of one chapter on the use of narrative accounts of sexual activity as a new source of sexuality data. Parts 9 and 10 consist of concluding chapters. For me the most interesting was John Kennedy’s, in which he distinguished between ‘big science and little science’. Like di Mauro in Chapter 1, Kennedy sees a certain tension between sexuality research motivated by public health concerns (his ‘big science’,
which is problem oriented) and that motivated more specifically by scientific or theoretical concerns (‘little science’). The distinction between big and little science, he emphasizes, is not the same as between good and bad science. I agree, of course; there is no reason why big science aimed at solving great public health problems cannot be informed and even motivated by new scientific paradigms and cutting edge theory. But while I think this book is important reading for anyone doing research on human sexuality, I also think that the kind of sex research (big or little) it describes can benefit hugely from the theory and methods of human evolutionary ecologists, behavioural biologists and ethologists, of which there is no mention.

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Evolution is not ‘just a theory’. It can kill people if misunderstood. This book contains opinions that are dangerous, while becoming recently more popular in society. We live in times of increasing dominance of electronic technology and declining ethical standards. It is, therefore, most appropriate for a scientist who holds the first European transistor patent awarded in 1948 to write a book on the ethics of biological research and its applications. Unlike theoretical biologists’, the Author’s outlook is that of an engineer used to manipulating the natural world and to deriving pride from contributing to the technological progress of humanity.

For H. F. Mataré evolution is a principle encompassing the entirety of nature, from the beginnings of the universe through evolution of the star systems, chemical elements and compounds to the progress of living forms from simple cells to humanity and then through human history to an English-speaking sophisticated race. With this principle in mind, it is obvious to the Author that various parts of humanity progressed to varying degrees. One of the many reasons, according to him, is that the rate of progress of human civilization and culture remains in direct proportion to the number of wars. The more wars the better. Heraclitus’s words ‘war is the father of all things’ provide support for this conclusion. Sadly, not all the leaders of humanity are aware of this fundamental evolutionary principle. For example ‘Brainwashing and re-education in Germany by the Allies after World War II gave preponderance to German groups who detest those activities reminiscent of the Nazi era. Among those groups are the enemies of genetic engineering and modern medicine, of atomic energy and of most new technologies’ (p. 56). It follows that were the Nazis not defeated all humanity would be much better off today. The ‘imperative of the evolutionary updevelopment’ (p. 99) provides H. F. Mataré with the basis for the formulation of ethical principles.

Humanity faces overwhelming multiplication of the ‘less developed populations’. Enacting legislation that will ensure that only those people who meaningfully contribute to progress will be allowed to live and procreate must prevent this. For example, it may be highly unethical to preserve indigenous people who refuse to
adopt Western science-based culture and wish instead to preserve their ‘superstition-based folklore’. Only healthy and intelligent human beings should be allowed to live while restrictive measures must curb tendencies to proselytize for cults that detract from science-based civilization. The Author states that ‘... churches’ declaration that every [human] life is “holy” is totally untenable and naive,’ (p. 108). It is therefore unethical to spend money to save the lives of elderly or sick people, including children with serious malformations. Expensive medical procedures should only be used to save the life of a productive scientist or engineer. The ten commandments of the new brave bioethics follow. After expounding on the necessity to live in harmony with nature and to maximize technological progress, they state that human procreation must be directed, the gene pool manipulated and personal freedom and voting rights limited in inverse proportion to an individual’s contributions to the progress of community that are determined by his position, influence and capability.

Many readers will recognize in the book a line of thought that brought the sufferings of the holocaust and apartheid upon millions of people and may wish to dismiss its arguments as belonging to the rubbish heap of ideas long proven wrong by enlightened humanity. Doing this, however, is dangerous. The Author is a well-recognized practising scientist, and in the age of peer-reviewed publication his ideas must be shared by a sizeable group of other scientists. This reflects the fact that the present-day academic community has failed to develop the culture of integrating new disciplinary findings into a broader context of the understanding of the world. Instead, we are applauding narrow specialized expertise and ‘scoring’ off trendy discoveries by people whose general education is purposely narrowed down to what seems to be immediately useful and economically efficient. No doubt, electronics and biotechnology are useful parts of our lives, but they are just small parts of the entirety of human knowledge. For a human biologist the most frightening message of ‘Bioethics’ is the realization that most biotechnologists and molecular geneticists may think like H. F. Mataré. To avert the danger we must strive to teach human biology in a broad context of other disciplines, placing emphasis on the deep understanding of biological evolution and social processes rather than on the isolated facts of molecular biology.

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This volume deals with the analysis of social and psychological problems in stepfamilies formed mainly after divorce and remarriage of one or both parents. It is based on literature reviews, as well as on original data of specialists in family studies - both clinicians and researchers - from different countries, mostly the United States, but also from Canada, Israel and the Netherlands. (Note: There is no such entry as ‘adoption’ or ‘stepfamily’ in the cross-cultural encyclopaedia Marriage, Family, and Relationships by G. J. Brown, ABC-Clio, Santa Barbara, CA, Denver,
The book consists of eleven articles and a short Introduction written by the editor in which he refers to his previous edition on the same subject: The Stepfamily Puzzle: Integrational Influences published in 1993. (It should be also mentioned that the present volume first appeared in 1995 and was published in Journal of Divorce and Remarriage 24, No.1/2 and as a separate edition.)

The importance of the addressed issues is clearly described by the contributors:

‘A growing proportion of families in the Western World are stepfamilies, due to the rising frequencies of divorce and remarriage. Currently every other marriage in the US ends in a divorce . . . Thirty two per cent of the population and at least one of every 4-5 children are estimated to live in stepfamilies . . .’ (Berger, p.35);

‘By the year 2000 the stepfamily will be the predominant family structure in the United States and will actually outnumber the nuclear family. In Israel, too, the phenomenon is becoming widespread,’ (Grinwald, p.183);

‘Increasing numbers of children are living in stepfamilies . . . Glick predicts that 33% of all children will probably live in a stepfamily before they reach the age of 18,’ (Solomon, p.89);

‘It is estimated that currently one child in five under the age of eighteen is a stepchild and that by the year 2000, the remarried . . . family will outnumber all other family forms,’ (Atwood, Zebersky, p.133).

Bearing in mind the scale of this process it can be easily understood why stepfamily studies are growing in number and why they are necessary.

The book covers a large number of problems, such as typology and models of stepfamilies; step-parents’ role identification and strain prediction factors; the relationship of remarriage to post-divorce co-parenting; the importance of mother-child relations and influences of different factors on the quality of the stepmother-adolescent relationship; the differences in behaviour of adolescents from stepfamilies and other families – single-parent, instable and stable intact families, etc. Finally, there are some entries focusing on social construction therapy with remarried families and on the clinical implications of dealing with the members of stepfamilies.

The book is well written and well organized. It gives some important insights into the discussed problems and will be of interest to anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists, to those who are concerned about family relations and child development and – importantly – to those who are dealing with the practical aspects of family therapy and social work.

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The association between female education and fertility decline in developing countries has been both generally recognized and subject to critical debate for over two
decades. What appeared to be a simple causal relationship has proved to be much more complex, and empirical studies have been characterized by the diversity, rather than the uniformity, of their findings. Taking as a basis Cochrane’s (1979) Fertility and Education: What Do We Really Know?, this book sets out to examine, through the contributions of a multi-disciplinary set of authors, how our understandings of the processes and linkages involved between schooling and fertility have advanced.

The problems are set out neatly in the concluding chapter by Eloundou-Enyegue. Firstly, there is the question of empirical studies that find associations between female education and fertility decline, since association does not imply causality. Several of the chapters cite evidence pointing to reverse causation or to the effects of other exogenous influences. Secondly, there is the problem of creating a unifying theory with predictive powers in the light of a very diverse set of findings. The reader who hopes that the chapters in this book might help clear up some of these ambiguities will be disappointed: on the contrary, they serve as a fine illustration of the complexity and diversity involved. For example, although the DHS data analysis of Diamond et al. (Chapter 2) shows broad trends in the expected directions, the authors suggest that the relationship between primary education and fertility depends on a host of contextual factors. The chapters by Fuller and Liang (Chapter 7) and Montgomery and Lloyd (Chapter 8) point out that education is not an independent variable, but that a range of other factors (perhaps including fertility) are important in understanding why girls spend different lengths of time in school. However, this lack of convergence should not be seen as a failing. Much as demographers love grand unifying theories, in this instance it seems that it is the details that might be more important.

The various chapters make several important theoretical contributions to the advancement of our understanding about the relationships between schooling of girls and fertility. Firstly, several chapter problematize and deconstruct the rather simple assumptions often underlying the terms fertility and education. Montgomery and Lloyd (Chapter 8) differentiate between ‘wanted’ fertility, ‘excess’ fertility and ‘unwanted births’. While their analysis is necessarily somewhat crude, they raise the very important point that not all fertility is accorded the same value and therefore necessarily has the same effects on educational decisions. Perhaps even more importantly, other chapters challenge the over-simplistic and uniform measures of education. Carter (Chapter 3) argues very cogently that education is socially situated, not culturally neutral, and that people’s experiences of education vary enormously between and within societies. Simple measures such as years of schooling are thus grossly inadequate representations of the educational experience, and more contextualized and nuanced data are needed, such as detailed educational histories. Chapters 6 (Thomas), 5 (Glewwe) and 4 (Lloyd and Mensch) show in different ways that it is not necessarily education per se that matters, but the level and form that the education takes.

A second important theoretical contribution is the inclusion of men into the picture. Fertility research has traditionally focused exclusively on women, but two chapters in particular show that the spouses of educated women should not be ignored. Basu (Chapter 9) suggests that men in South Asia who elect to marry educated women are different from those who choose uneducated wives. They are
more likely to hold ‘modern’ ideas and to want to have fewer children than ‘traditional’ men. Spousal characteristics, through assortative mating, are also found by Thomas (Chapter 6) to account for a third of the fertility differential between women of varying educational levels.

Finally, it is clear from the inter-disciplinary nature of the contributions to this book that there is a lot to be gained from a rapprochement between demography and anthropology in this area. As Eloundou-Enyegue (Chapter 10) points out, demography can contribute useful methodological tools to other social sciences, such as a life table approach to the study of length of schooling, while anthropology can provide the nuanced qualitative data needed to deconstruct the over-simplified categories of fertility and education in ways that these chapters have shown are necessary to understanding the relationships properly.

This book certainly raises many more questions than it answers. As such it is a challenging text, throwing down the gauntlet to future researchers and opening up wider debates about welfare, status, power and autonomy surrounding both female education and fertility choices and constraints.

Reference


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