

**Review of Nancy K. Dess, Jeanne Marecek, and Leslie C. Bell, *Gender, Sex, & Sexualities: Psychological Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018; 364 pp, ISBN-13: 978-0-1906-5854-0 (hbk).**

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*Gender, Sex, & Sexualities* is an edited collection by Nancy Dess, Jeanne Marecek and Leslie Bell. In a nutshell, the book is a collection of chapters drawing upon different perspectives in relation to the psychology of gender and sexualities. What sets this book apart from other titles which an undergraduate student may be perusing for their studies, or a lecturer may be selecting for course reading, is that is focused on not only providing an overview of psychology of gender and sexualities scholarship, but also situating where the field currently stands and examining where it is going. Dess et al. locate the book as being in a field which has changed dramatically even in the last ten years, let alone in comparison to the mid-twentieth century. This emphasis on forward thinking is underlined via each chapter ending with a section discussing 'future directions' of scholarship in a particular subfield.

Topics covered range from classic areas of interest such as children's gender development and stereotyping cognitions, to emerging areas of interest such as nonbinary gender identities and gendered power. Even when authors are exploring seemingly well-trodden areas such as

children's gender development, socialisation, and behaviour, attention is drawn to the fact that much of the research conducted have traditionally been focused on cis, heterosexual girls and boys, with little to no attention paid to children with nonbinary gender identities. This reflects contemporary interest from the public and media in trans and nonbinary gender identities and the chapter by Hegarty, Ansara, and Barker in particular provides an accessible starting point for such readers who wish to find out more on the subject.

The editors' goal with this collection is to open up cross-disciplinary debate and discussion in the field of the psychology of gender and sexualities by drawing upon up-to-date empirical research across different sub-fields including developmental, psychoanalysis, cognitive, neuroscience, genetics, evolutionary, discursive approaches, and cultural psychology. Dess et al. contend that it is this range in psychology's scope and specialisms which is one of its key strengths and so the contributors to this collection have been assembled from a range of academics and psychotherapists whose work draws upon a variety of perspectives, theory and methodology. For example, Warner and Shields in their chapter *Intersectionality as a Framework for Theory and Research in Feminist Psychology* consider strategies for integrating an intersectional perspective into positivist experimental research studies.

Contributors to the book are drawn heavily from the USA, but there are also scholars based in a variety of other locations across the globe

(including the UK, Australia, Taiwan, and Sweden). Given the books' strong emphasis on encouraging scholars in the field to adopt a more global and/or transnational outlook in their research, this collection may have benefited from some more contributions from other parts of the globe, in particular from Majority-World settings. However, authors here, such as Leaper, do highlight how much of the empirical research under discussion were conducted primarily in industrialised Western countries and note that findings and patterns (such as in relation to children's gender socialisation) may not translate to other cultures. In particular, Kurtiş and Adams draw attention to how feminist psychologists have been increasing their efforts in incorporating intersectionality into their work, but that transnational feminist perspectives remain notably absent from both psychological theory and research. Kurtiş and Adams advocate a decolonising strategy whereby manifestations of gender and sexuality in Majority-World spaces are normalised, while manifestations from Minority-World settings are denormalised. This strategy is designed to encourage readers to rethink conceptions of gender oppression and these authors support their argument well through discussion of Kurtiş's own research on 'Silencing the Self Theory' in terms of Turkish women's relationships with their husbands.

Dess et al. chose not to adopt the typical convention of structuring chapters from 'biology' to 'culture'. This is because they wish to challenge the notion that 'biology' is the bedrock upon which learning, culture, and society are overlaid. This is a decision I can appreciate as it means the

editors are not imposing a presumed hierarchy of knowledge which places biology and genetics at the top, and treat theory and research interested in society and culture as 'add-on' and less than. The book is divided into two parts: 1. Emerging Frameworks: Beyond Binaries; and 2. Contemporary Avenues of Inquiry. Part 1 comprises of four chapters and focuses on current perspectives which explore and challenge binaries such as male/female, nature/nurture, gay/straight and propose more complex formulations. For example, in Chapter 1, Magnusson and Marecek deconstruct categories such as sex and gender and outline the myriad ways 'gender' has been used, as well provide advice on how to avoid misusing the term such as using it as a euphemism for 'women'. Indeed, Magnusson and Marecek's *Setting the Stage* is well placed as the first chapter as the authors provide a reader's guide of questions to consider when reading literature on gender and sexualities. These questions were originally developed to help the authors' own students become adept readers of psychology literature and encourage readers to engage critically with the literature. For example, encouraging readers to consider whether an author considers possible differences among members of each group under study, or whether the author acknowledges that research is carried out in a particular social, political, historical, and geopolitical context. The remaining chapters in this section are on intersectionality (Warner and Shields); nonbinary gender identities (Hegarty, Ansara, and Barker); and a sex-neutral evolutionary perspective (Gowaty). Part 2 comprises of ten chapters and presents a broad range of perspectives on gender, sex, and sexualities. Each

chapter concentrates on a different topic (such as stereotypes, or attachment and intimacy) and provides an overview of a particular conceptual approach (such as psychoanalysis, or discursive approaches) and body of knowledge. The chapters in Part 2 cover: a cultural psychology approach (Kurtiş and Adams); discursive approaches to sex/gender (Donaghue); Power Basis Theory (Lee); a cognitive perspective on gender stereotyping (Biernat and Sesko); psychoanalysis of gender (Bell); An integrative developmental model of gender, dispositions, peer relations and identity (Leaper); an integrative psychobiology approach to early gender development (Hines); attachment theory and intimacy in adults (Diamond); the integration of affective neuroscience with feminist theory (Heywood and Garcia); and developmental psychological perspectives on categories and gender (Scholnick and Miller).

Due to the wide range of psychological perspectives covered in this book, inevitably there will be some chapters a reader will gravitate towards more than others. For instance, due to my interest in critical and discursive psychological approaches, I found myself drawn towards the chapters focused on intersectionality, nonbinary gender identities, discursive approaches to sex/gender, and the opening chapter's deconstruction of terms such as 'sex' and 'gender'. At times the latter part of the book can feel like it is slanted heavily towards theory and research on gender and children whether it be on psychoanalysis, genetics, hormones, socialisation, or attachment theory. However, having

a mix of different perspectives with up-to-date developments in different subfields of the psychology of gender and sexualities does have the benefit of encouraging reading of literature outside your own specialist area and all the authors seek to challenge your preconceptions of some of these areas. For example, some chapters, such as those by Gowaty in Part 1, and Hines in Part 2, challenge simplistic nature/nurture binaries in relation to evolution, and attachment respectively. Gowaty critiques classical evolutionary theory of sex differences, and posits the case that not all contemporary evolutionary theories advance accounts of behaviour which are essentialist, reductionist or deterministic. Hines advocates an integrative framework towards the development of gender-related behaviour acknowledging the influence of factors such as genetics, hormones, peer socialisation, and self-socialisation. Others such as Heywood and Garcia advocate an integrative approach whereby neuroscientific research is informed by a feminist perspective. Drawing on topics familiar to more experienced readers (perhaps from their own undergraduate studies) and then turning them on their head and challenging our way of thinking about these topics is a strength of this collection.

The target audience for this book is twofold, as it not only targets experienced scholars from the field to encourage debate and forward thinking, but Dess et al. also target students, who are framed as “the next generation of scholars” (p. xi). The editors designed this collection to develop students’ thinking, and prepare them to engage critically with the

subject matter by providing conceptual tools to help readers understand where the psychology of gender and sexualities has come from, how it developed over the last one hundred years, and where it is going. Each chapter in the book is written to be accessible to readers new to the subject matter, and as a result many (but not all) chapters discuss classic literature on a given subject or psychological approach (such as evolutionary psychology) and provide more recent critiques by feminist psychologists working within the particular subfield. A good example of this is Bell's chapter *Psychoanalytic Theories of Gender* which begins with an overview of Freud's work, followed by feminist psychoanalysis from the 1970s-1980s, and then ends with feminist psychoanalysis work from the 1990s to the present day. Chapters such as this mean the book would make a welcome addition to reading lists on both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in psychology or gender studies.

This book works well as a starting point for those new to the psychology of gender and sexualities in how it provides concise overviews and histories of different psychological perspectives and also serves well for those more experienced readers who seek to engage with up-to-date ideas and research in the field. The book also clearly demonstrates that the field of gender and sexualities research continues to be an exciting and vibrant area of study.