

Karkazis, Katrina: *Fixing Sex. Intersex, Medical Authority and Lived Experience*. Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2008. 384 pages, EUR 21,99.

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Fixing Sex (2008) by Katrina Karkazis presents a wide overview of contemporary controversies related to ‘intersex’ in the U.S.A. through well-documented historical analysis and interviews with various stakeholders, including medical practitioners, parents, intersexualized individuals, and activists. The book is primarily grounded in feminist and feminist biological theories and is one of the first to conduct interviews with so many different, and sometimes contesting, groups of individuals invested in ‘intersex’. Karkazis’ work situates the focus on ‘intersex’ within a broader cultural context, conceptualizing ‘intersex bodies’ at the “boundaries between self and society” (2008, 10).

A historical overview of medical approaches before the Money Protocol is provided, which ranges from an examination of the differing medical ethos of Hippocrates and Aristotle to the desire to establish a ‘true sex’ to a discussion of new surgical techniques and technologies developed in the 1950s. The medical approaches of Money and the Hampsons that established the protocols now under critical re-evaluation are presented carefully, and Money and the Hampsons are treated as products of their times who proceeded with the best intentions. This characterization is relatively unique in critical approaches to intersexualization and reminds the reader that most things are done with the best intentions by those seduced into a discourse and in a position of power to enact (ultimately harmful and oppressive) policies and protocols. Criticisms of the Money Protocol, such as those of Milton Diamond and those promoted in Colapinto’s 2000 book *As Nature Made Him*, are contextualized within broader biological and medical debates about nature vs. nurture.

In a short section on terminology Karkazis writes that “the term intersex is used by all clinicians” (2008, 18). There is neither citation for this claim nor an account of how this claim resulted from interviews or actual interactions with medical practitioners. This claim is interesting in light of the fact that Karkazis and co-author Ellen Feder, in the 2008 article “What’s in a Name? The Controversy over ‘Disorders of Sex Development’”, write that medical practitioners primarily do not use the term ‘intersex’ and prefer the terms ‘male pseudo-hermaphrodite’ and ‘female pseudo-hermaphrodite’. The validity of this claim is important to assess in relation to the proposed term ‘Disorders of Sex Development’ and debates about what is actually being replaced by the ‘DSD’ term.

The accounts of ‘intersex activism’ by Karkazis begin with the Chicago Conference in 2005 and work backward, placing the advocacy of the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) within a trajectory begun by previous movements, such as the women’s health movement of second wave feminism and gay, lesbian, and transgender movements. The impact of support groups, ISNA’s political development, and the guidelines of the Consensus Statement that was produced at the Chicago Conference are also analyzed.

Karkazis’ study is situated within the American context, and within that context ISNA is the only ‘intersex advocacy’ group examined. This approach thus restricts the examination of ‘intersex advocacy’ to ISNA’s approach of cooperating with medical practitioners. More work is needed to examine the different strategies of other ‘intersex advocacy’ groups both inside and outside the U.S.A. in order to assess the viability of other strategies (which may be more or less radical and produce different results than the more assimilationist approach of ISNA).

Fixing Sex is an important text for scholars concerned with the numerous issues related to ‘intersex’ as well as individuals looking for a comprehensive introduction. As with all research there are many more questions to be answered and examined; Karkazis’ work contributes to the growing body of literature in ‘critical intersex studies’ while pointing the way toward the work that must still be done.

Bibliography

Colapinto, John (2000): *As Nature Made Him*. London: Quartet Books.

Diamond, Milton & Sigmundson, H. Keith (1997): "Sex Reassignment at Birth: A Long Term Review and Clinical Implications." *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 151, 298-304.

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