



Sexuality: A Very Short Introduction

Véronique Mottier

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Is our sexuality determined primarily by our genes? Or is it shaped by the social norms and expectations we happen to be born into. This Very Short Introduction provides an accessible, thoughtful and thought-provoking introduction to major debates around sexuality in the modern world, highlighting the social and political aspects of sexuality. It critically explores different ways of defining and thinking about sexuality and shows that many of our assumptions about what is "natural" in the sexual domain have, in reality, varied greatly in different historical or cultural contexts. The volume also examines ways in which governments have tried to regulate citizens' sexualities in the past-through policies and laws concerning public health, HIV/Aids, prostitution, and sex education-paying special attention to the particular zeal with which women's sexuality has been policed. The volume concludes by discussing political activism around sexuality more widely, focusing on the ways in which feminists, lesbians and gay men, as well as religious fundamentalists have transformed our ways of thinking about sexuality in the past few decades.

About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

Sexuality: A Very Short Introduction Details

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Bojan Tunguz says

The fascination, some would argue the obsession, with sex and gender has come to be (together with race and class) one of the cornerstones of modern humanistic scholarship. The view of sexuality that has come to dominate the modern academic discourse is largely based on the idea of sexuality as a particular cultural construct, much like a religious ritual or a political system. In that regard the study of sexuality is reduced to the study of ideas about sexuality, mostly through the prism of literary and philosophical writings throughout the history. Of course, this line of inquiry is highly restricted: it places premium on societies and cultures that left behind a lot of textual evidence, which probably skews the impression about what sexual norms were like throughout history. This book plays wholeheartedly into that narrative about sexuality. It subscribes wholeheartedly into the whole view of history of sexuality as mostly care-free, except for that long backward interlude of oppressive Christian attitudes. This becomes particularly glaring when in attempt to prove its points it sacrifices historical continuity and jumps back and forth through writings of Augustine, Calvin, Luther and Origen without necessarily pointing out that they were separated by more than a thousand years.

Most of the philosophical outlook of this book can be traced to Michel Foucault and his "History of Sexuality." Having one particular ideological outlook feature so prominently hardly makes this into a book with a broad outlook or utility.

The book repeats and reemphasizes the supposed distinction between "sex" and "gender." This is really a distinction without difference. Nowadays it only has much currency in academic circles, and predominantly in humanities.

The biological basis of sexuality receives the worst treatment, its main points barely being mentioned in a single sentence. On the other hand the criticism of the biological model receives many subsequent paragraphs. This is patently absurd: sex is the biological process par excellence, and to neglect the biological basis of sex is like neglecting the physical basis of gravity. Yes, you can still talk a lot about how people have conceptualized it over the millennia, but this would not do justice to the subject.

Most of the book is focused on the politics of sexuality from the middle of the nineteenth century until the present. Some of the most arcane and idiosyncratic political theories are described and discussed, oftentimes in terms of academic jargon straight out of a graduate seminar in humanities. The book is as exciting to read as watching an old lady clip her toenails. I can't imagine that a book on the most fun topic imaginable can be as dry and boring. If you are into the whole postmodern-deconstruction-critiques-analysis stuff, this might be the book for you. Otherwise, save a few books and instead of buying this book and go out with a group of friends to a bar and trade stories. You'll certainly learn more about sex that way.

One good thing about this book is the quality of writing. Material for the most part is presented in a clear and readable way, at the high level that one has come to expect from similar books in the "very short introduction" series.

Sujan says

A fascinating read regarding the socio-political history of sexuality. The only limitation the book has is that it does not at all speak about the heterosexual man and his evolution as a sexual being. The book is more about women sexuality and its evolution through the history with a handful of mentionable discussions on sexual minorities.

Anna says

I never inflicted gender-studies on myself, so this was a nice cheat sheet.

Wasn't expecting to be so surprised by the eugenics data - the Swedes were well into it. Excuse me? 63,000 eugenics-based sterilisations between 1934 and 1976 in Sweden? Right then. The Swiss program 'Kinder der Landstrasse' which sought to eradicate Yenish culture through child removal was chilling too - sex and social engineering makes for ugly history.

This little book set me thinking all sorts of inappropriate things about population control. For example, how populous would the planet be without the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918? Taboo thoughts. I'll stop typing and go and listen to Randy Newman's "That's Why I Love Mankind" and slap myself round a bit. I seem to be afflicted with some Gnostic phlegm.

Soroosh Akef says

While the title "Sexuality: A Very Short History" would have been more appropriate, this book does a decent job of covering the various perspectives on sexuality through history and the various movements that have played a role in bringing us to where we are today.

The author begins with ancient Greece (as usual) and the sexual norms prevalent in the ancient Greek society. In the later chapters, we are introduced to Feminists' attitudes toward sexuality (including some very radical views). The author doesn't shy away from discussing controversial ideologies that may shock the 2018 reader.

As one might expect from an academic introductory book, the author manages to paint a fair and balanced picture of the various schools of thought without explicitly taking any sides.

All in all, this book not only taught me about how individuals and activists have perceived sexuality, but brought into focus the uglier side of the 20th-century West for me.

Lucinda Davison says

The title says it all. It is a very short introduction of topics of sexuality. It is nevertheless a great starting point.

David says

Interesting information from Greco Roman times, the Catholic church's influence, and the 1700's through today regarding the biological, political and sociological shaping of sexuality. I got a lot of new perspectives and great information from this book, as a history book does. However I found the book hard to read. Part of its problem is that it is only 160 pages, and hence all the reader gets is a 30,000 foot view of the subject.

????? ??? says

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<http://zoheirnoaparast.blogspot.co.at...>

Bettie? says

GASP All those categories - who knew!

~4.6 hours

Fab series this, just right for a quick refresh or a peek into a subject that one is curious about. All are unbiased, erudite and entirely objective essays.

3* Ancient Egypt

3* Paul

4* Witchcraft

3* The Book of Mormon

4* Druids

4* Forensic Psychology

3* Forensic Science

4* Sexuality

Chelsea Szendi says

Clear, concise writing... which is what we all love about the "Very Short Introduction" series. It also pointed me in some useful directions, especially about eugenics and the left.

However.

Although I found the section on sexual practices in Ancient Greece (and it gets a little conflated with Rome) interesting, as a scholar of Japan, I have a eye-roll reflex to the instant link between a very specific ancient world and the very general concept of "antiquity." The link can (and ought to be) argued, but it should not be assumed. The section "Sex in the Ancient World" leads one to believe that the "Ancient World" was only Ancient Greece. Sigh. And then there is an image (ignored by the text) on page 71 of "Japanese sex toys, 1830," embedded in the section on Second Wave feminist sex wars. Even a brief mention of other antiquities (and the issue of modernity / Westernization / sexology in non-Western contexts) would have made this much much more comprehensive.

Phillip says

Like all of the Very Short Introductions, this is a quick and dirty summary, but as summaries go I thought it was very comprehensive. The focus is primarily how gender and sexuality have been created and regulated, in the ancient world and then in the modern. Parts of the summary show a clear feminist bias (neither surprising nor inappropriate for the subject matter), while the book is very Foucauldian overall, meaning that the author is primarily interested in how the discourse surrounding sexuality and gender has been a tool for creating, changing, and/or resisting power structures.

Amir The Fat Bookworm says

A fascinating book! A- for its coverage of different aspects of sexuality! It managed to do a good job, covering History as well as theory and sociology of sexuality. Though it lacked any chapter on the biology of sexuality, the book retaliated with fascinating details on science history of the matter.

I rather enjoyed this book. And what more, is, how astonishingly neutral the author managed to be while explaining the endless controversies across time!

Thuydung says

Mình t?ng th?y (nh?ng ch?a ??c) c?c s?ch li?n quan ??n n? quy?n ???c d?ch v? in nhi?u h?n trong nh?ng n?m g?n ?ây, tuy nhi?n cu?n D?n lu?n v? t?nh d?c (dù c? m?t ph?n l?n b?n v? n? quy?n) l?i h?a h?n th?o lu?n ?a d?ng v?n ?? h?n xoay quanh khái ni?m “t?nh d?c”, n?n c?ng c? th? xem là m?t tài li?u khoa h?c hi?m hoi và c?i m?. V? ?? hi?m v? ?? m? ?ó th? m?n?n th?ch n?.

V?i ti?u ?? Sexuality, t??ng t??ng ban ??u c?a m?n?n là cu?n s?ch s? l?y tr?ng t?m ?? tài LGBT (dù khi ??c th? té ng?a ra là c?n bao nhi?u th? kh?c ??c ?? c?p). Theo ?ó, m?n?n b?t ??u ??c v? l?: c?ng ??ng LGBT kh?ng ph?i là b?i hi?m qu? hay sao? Ngay c? khi c?c phong trào LGBT n?i l?n r?n r?n tr?n c?c ph??ng ti?n truy?n th?ng, m?n?n v?n th?y n?o xa l? nh? chuy?n nh? ng??i ta. Nh?t là thu?t ng?. ?i k?m theo c?c phong trào LGBT là hàng lo?t thu?t ng? kh?ng bi?t áp d?ng ra sao. Khi m?n?n ngh? là m?n?n có th? hi?u hi?u gay, les, bi m?t ch?út, th? ch?ng ta l?i ch?n th?m khái ni?m trans khi?n cho ??u óc ch?m l?t c?a m?n?n r?i tung l?n. L?y ví d? manga Hourou Musuko, b?n trai A mu?n-l?m-con-gái m? b?n g?i B mu?n-l?m-con-trai, th? t?i n? ?ang ngh? c?i g?i trong ??u v?y, v? m?n?n ph?i nh?n nh?n “nh?n d?ng” c?a t?i n? ra sao? Di?n b?i?n trong ??u nh?n v?t th? m?n?n kh?ng t?m ???c l?i gi?i, nh?ng cu?n s?ch c?ng an ?i cho m?n?n r?ng h?u nh? khái ni?m v? phong trào

nào c?ng có th? lôi kéo các chuyên gia lao vào tranh cãi chí chóe nh? th??ng. Có th? nói, m?c tiêu c?a cu?n sách là trình bày, g?i m? nhi?u h??ng ngh? khác nhau, thay vì d?ng l?i ? m?t k?t lu?n nào ?ó.

Trong tài li?u d?n lu?n này, m?i v?n ?? nêu ra ??u ???c tác gi? ??t vào các góc ?? nh?t ??nh nh? sinh h?c, tôn giáo, ??o ??c, chính tr?, xã h?i và kèm theo các trích d?n ho?c tóm ý t? các tác ph?m nghiên c?u liên quan. Tính khoa h?c và c?ng d?n h?i?n g?p ph?n làm t?ng tính g?p-nh?c-??u cho các ??c gi? l??i suy ngh? nh? m?nh! V? thi?t t?ng ph?i t?i n?a cu?n là m?nh r?ng ??c cho h?t ch? c?ng ch?ng h?ng thú bao nhi?u! L?i nói, v? là “a very short introduction” n?n cu?n sách tranh th? ?? c?p th?t nhanh các v?n ??, tr?ng “r?ng” h?n “sâu”, ng??i ??c c?ng kh?ng vi?c g?i ph?i tiêu h?i h?t, c? th?y n?i dung n?o quan t?m th? d?a vào các tài li?u tham kh?o c?a sách m? t?m hi?u th?m.

V?i m?c tiêu gi?i thi?u nh? v?y, sách soi ???c v?i tia s?ng vào v?n hi?u bi?t t?i t?m t?m m?u c?a m?nh. Ch?ng h?n ch??ng ??u k? chuy?n t?nh d?c ??ng gi?i di?n ra v?o t? ? Hy L?p c? ??i, v? “i?u quan tr?ng là ai x?m nh?p ai”, ch? v? m?t ??o ??c th? ch? có g?i ?áng nói. (V? m?t l?u ý là trong kh?u tóm t?l?ch s? th? sách thi?n v? t?nh h?nh ph??ng T?y; m?i các ph?n sau th? ph??ng ??ng m?i l?u l?u l?o v?i ?i?m m?t ???c.) Vui nh?t là các v? c?i l?n gi?a phe n?y v?i phe kia. Ngay c? trong n?i b? các nh? ho?t ??ng x? h?i c?ng kh?ng th?ng nh?t v?i nhau. R?i th? có v? m?y nh?m n? quy?n t?ch b? ph?n ng??i ??ng ra n?n vi?t hoa t?n b? “AIDS”, n?u kh?ng s? sai ngh?a. Ngoài ra th? m?nh ch? có ý ki?n ? m?t s? t? d?ch ???c sách m? ngo?c ghi kèm t? g?c ti?ng Anh:

(1) Transsexual d?ch là “x?y?n gi?i t?nh” th? ???c r?i, nh?ng m?nh t? h?i d?ch transgender là “l?c gi?i t?nh” th? có h?i b? ng? hay kh?ng.

(2) Câu kh?u hi?u “I hate straights” ???c m? ngo?c ghi là “t?i ghét nh?ng ng??i b?nh th??ng”. Cái n?y khi?n m?nh suy ra c?m “ng??i b?nh th??ng” xu?t hi?n ? nh?ng ch? kh?c ch?c c?ng d?ch t? ch? “straights” m?a ra. D?ch kh?ng sai, nh?ng khi ??t vào v?n b?n khoa h?c th? n? ?ang ?p ??t m?t quan ?i?m ri?ng, trong khi ph?n l?n sách ?ang t?nh b?y r?ng xu h?ng t?nh d?c n?o c?ng b?nh th??ng nh? nhau.

(3) T? queer ???c d?ch g?n là “ng??i ??ng t?nh”, v? th? là ch?ng ta c? ???c m?t câu kh?a t?i ngh?a nh?: “[?]ng sau ??ng t?nh nam, ??ng sau ??ng t?nh n?, ??ng sau t?nh d?c kh?c gi?i (c? l? v?y?) ch?ng ta là ng??i ??ng t?nh (queer).”

...

M?nh h?i si?ng soi ??t xu?t, nh?ng t?i v?i sách khoa h?c d?ch (l?i nh?m l?nh v?c m?i (v? c?ng ty l?)) th? theo m?nh l?c n?o c?ng n?n v?a ??c v?a nghi ng? m?t ch?t.

Joseph Sverker says

Absolutely brilliant introduction to sexuality. This term has so many usages that in contemporary theories that it has been difficult to know at all what it might mean, but Matter does a great job in explaining and

illustrating this meaning and how sexuality has developed to be one of the central terms by which we (Western) identify ourselves. She relies much on Foucault at times, but also makes interesting hints at critiques of the current views on sexuality. Mottier does not shy away from the more uncomfortable sides of the sexual revolution and rights movements either. Well worth reading and I am sure that I will have much use of it.

NancyHelen says

What a fascinating look at sexuality throughout history! I was particularly interested in the section about Eugenics, especially the fact that the people who first came up with it were completely unaware of just how inhumane the idea was. Although the author did make the comment that although they believed they were practicing science, in fact it was mostly based on prejudice. The feminist perspective was also interesting - something I had touched on in my Art History MA. Overall, this is a really succinct and interesting read with plenty of suggestions for further reading.

Amy says

Fantastic guide through the ever developing realm of sexuality with plenty of suggestions for further reading, which I plan to pursue. Unbiased straight forward evaluations of events and their effects that please the scientist within me. Great pace and style kept my interest throughout the whole book. I have already recommended to a couple friends/family and definitely extend that recommendation to anyone even remotely interested in the intricacies of sex and gender.
