

## BOOK REVIEW

**The Cycles of Sex.** By Warren J. Gadpaille, M.D. Edited by Lucy Freeman. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1975, 496 pp.

Overworked and overextended students, parents, and professionals can all feel grateful to Warren Gadpaille. With the editorial help of Lucy Freeman, he has written one of those rare books that is lucid, pleasing, and well reasoned, as well as being solidly grounded in psychodynamic theory. What further distinguishes *The Cycles of Sex* and what ought to make it a standard text is its rather astonishing combination of breadth and succinctness. In little more than 400 pages, Dr. Gadpaille considers and integrates the major writing on development from intrauterine life to old age. He is thoroughly up-to-date and in command of his subject. What is more, he writes on otherwise controversial topics without fanfare or an axe to grind.

In the often muddled area of sex differences, for example, Gadpaille is scrupulous in his account of recent research on biological and hormonal differences. Nor does he skirt or render inaccessible the pertinent psychoanalytic concepts. Penis envy is faced as an existing phenomenon with substantial citation from researchers such as Eleanor Galenson and Herman Roidph. At the same time, this emphasis is sensitively balanced with case accounts. These dispel the notion that an operative belief in female inferiority is anything more than a psychosexual handicap for both sexes. Equally sensitive is the presentation, through each life "cycle," of the particular difficulties the male faces, including the "unconscious dilemma" inherent in male envy of the female.

For many people, the issues of pre-Oedipal development in both the boy and the girl are probably the least well known or understood of the major influences on later sexual development. Gadpaille is enlightening in this regard, pointing out the potential for regression as each new sexual cycle is faced and the unique way males and females are seen to handle that threat; males by denying their "inner" feminine sexuality, females by repressing aspects of pre-Oedipal attachment to the mother, e.g., infantile sexuality.

*The Cycles of Sex* will be enlightening in many ways to those who are still working with an older model of development, uninformed by more careful study

of children. Gadpaille dispels the myth of sexual latency, for example, using among other canny data the books latency-age children read, with their obvious sexual connotations of hidden treasures, mysteries, and family romance. He is careful to note that an important socializing task of this period is to learn *not* to display sexual preoccupations to adults; hence the term “latency” is not a complete misnomer.

In his section on adolescence, after again presenting physiological data in full, Gadpaille speaks from a sociological and anthropological point of view. “Ill-conceived cultural norms can create their own unique problems, and adolescence may be one of ours.” Without rushing to rash solutions, he delineates the serious problem of “unperceived sexual constrictions” in adolescence and wonders “whether sex identity and ego growth can take place adequately as a result of anticipatory fantasy alone.” He doubts that sublimation is a viable concept and criticizes “the official sexual attitude of white middle class culture” for its “failure to provide any form of openly approved, guilt-free, orgasmic sexual gratification between puberty and marriage.” He also counters one prominent line of writing on adolescent sex when he states that

There is also good reason to believe that adolescents can learn from mistakes, hurts, and anxieties as well as from success, which casts doubts upon the theory of the inevitability of emotional damage from immature sexual experimentation and less-than-ideal experience.

Difficulties in integrating the sexual aspects of the self are passed on and perpetuated in the developmental stage of parenthood. Gadpaille is a very wise sex counselor to parents, beginning with the rarely heard advice not to be guilty over sexual feelings toward children. These are natural, even if not to be acted on. On the issues that beset marriage and middle age – childlessness, adultery, mate swapping, divorce – Gadpaille offers calm, intelligent opinions. Sex should get better as middle age advances; it needn’t fade away as the cultural norm would have it.

Unlike many works addressed to a general audience, *The Cycles of Sex* is carefully footnoted with a full reference section. The index would have been improved if authors had been listed along with topics. Thus, as a straight reference work, the book has limitations. However, the author in no way seems to have intended *Cycles of Sex* to be a Fenichel of psychosexual development. Limitations in cross-referencing are more than made up for by the fact that this is a book with a plot.

*The Cycles of Sex* should be widely read. Not the least of the reasons to praise it is the grace of collaboration between practicing psychoanalyst and professional writer.

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