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Essential Handbook of Women's Sexuality

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Peer reviewed

REVOLUTIONARY ERA

Eric G. Grundset, ed., *AMERICA'S WOMEN IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA 1760–1790: A HISTORY THROUGH BIBLIOGRAPHY*.

Washington, DC: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2011. 3 vols. bibl. index. \$195.00, ISBN 978-1892237125.

Reviewed by Carrie Dunham-LaGree

This lengthy three-volume bibliography attempts to “draw out the places where American women and girls do appear in published sources, some manuscript materials, and, most recently, online, and put it all in one publication as a guide to show what has already been done and hopefully as a guide to areas needing further investigation” (p. xvii).

The first two volumes are devoted to subjects, with each chapter covering a different topic. These chapters approach women both individually and collectively, and extensive listings of diaries and journals are included. Within each topic, entries are arranged alphabetically by author. Each chapter begins with its section of the volume's table of contents again, which is quite helpful to the researcher looking up more than one item. The second volume also includes an alphabetical index to Volumes I and II, with biographical and subject entries. Unfortunately, the spines do not indicate where the index is located, and some users may not locate it quickly in the second volume of a three-volume set. At least the table of contents for Volume II does mention the index.

Volume III consists of an alphabetical list of entries by author (for authored entries) and a chronological listing of all entries. Although the bibliography covers a span of only thirty

years, the chronological listing is quite useful for those wishing to focus more on a particular time period than on a particular topic. All of the text in this third volume is in boldface type, which makes differentiation difficult, but indented citations help.

The vastness of the resources available may overwhelm inexperienced researchers or those new to the subject, but others will delight at the extensiveness of this bibliography. And although extensive, it is not exhaustive, as the introduction indicates: “[D]espite the length of this set of books, we are under no illusions that we have found everything” (p. xvii). Still, the large number of works referenced is laudable, and this three-volume set is a credit to decades of diligent effort by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

[*Carrie Dunham-LaGree is an assistant professor of librarianship and the librarian for digital literacy and general education at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa.*]

SEXUALITY

Donna Castañeda, ed., *ESSENTIAL HANDBOOK OF WOMEN'S SEXUALITY*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013. (Women's psychology.) 2 vols. 719p. notes. bibl. index. \$131.00, ISBN 978-0313397097.

Reviewed by Sherri L. Barnes

This work is “essential,” in part, because it is the only handbook on this important and perennial women's studies topic. Each of the two volumes in the set addresses several topical areas that illustrate the complexity of women's sexuality and the contextual nature of that experience.

Volume I, *Meanings, Development, and Worldwide Views*, contains four sections and fourteen chapters, and focuses on the fundamental aspects of women's sexuality, sexuality at various stages of individual development and in various countries, and the impact of media influences on women's bodies and sexual experiences.

Volume II, *Diversity, Health, and Violence*, has five sections and nineteen chapters. The section on diversity covers lesbian, bisexual, transgender, physically disabled, First Nation, Latina, Asian and Asian American, and African American women's sexuality. The health, mental health, and violence sections that follow include disturbances in sexuality due to illness, defining and diagnosing women's sexual problems, sexuality and childbearing, sexuality after trauma, trafficking, and coercive sexuality and rape.

This set is part of Praeger's *Women's Psychology* series, and most of its contributors are senior scholars from the field of psychology. The work's strength is its undeniably feminist approach. Valuing women and their lived experiences is at the handbook's core, as is the natural integration of racial, ethnic, and non-heteronormative perspectives throughout the text and in dedicated sections. There is heavy emphasis on and presentation of empirical research. Many chapters read like literature reviews, reporting on the research — thus, there are plenty of bibliographies to raid! All of the chapters question and critique unsuitable frameworks, and some provide or recommend new approaches.

Students looking for background information and sources on typical paper topics like the sexual double standard, pornography, and sexual violence will find usable content, but from only one disciplinary perspective.

Although I am comfortable recommending this reference and am certain it will be heavily used, I can't help thinking that a more interdisciplinary handbook would be an even greater contribution to the study of women's sexuality. However, the focus is not simply on behavior and biology. This handbook pays considerable attention to how women learn about and understand their sexuality, to relationships, and to the various contexts and factors that influence women's sexual experiences and contribute to their sexual well-being. Such factors include, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, history, religion, disease, economics, politics, and the law.

One of the few testimonials in the book is a very memorable one that illustrates both the complex and the contextual natures of a woman's sexuality when she herself defines and controls it. Jocelyn, a Latina who grew up along the U.S.-Mexico border, expresses her sexuality in terms of her experience living in the borderlands. She says, "I am bilingual, bicultural, binational, so of course I am bisexual. It's only natural."

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WOMEN & THE BIBLE

Marion Ann Taylor & Agnes Choi, eds. *HANDBOOK OF WOMEN BIBLICAL INTERPRETERS: A HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL GUIDE*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2012. 585p. indexes. \$44.99, ISBN 978-0801033568.

Reviewed by Mara M. J. Eggherman

Can you name a female interpreter of the Bible? When one of the editors of this handbook, a professor of Old Testament at the University of Toronto, was asked by a student, she could think of current biblical interpreters who are women, but no historical ones.¹ That was the genesis for putting together a reference work about one hundred interpreters, covering the time period ca. 320 to 2002 (no living interpreters at the time of publication were included). Other reviewers have justifiably heaped high praise upon this pioneering compendium due to its breadth of coverage and the depth of research that supports each biographical entry.

From women who wrote sermons for their ill (p. 86) or alcoholic (p. 139) preacher husbands to the twenty-five or more who had their own religious revelations and visions, women have interpreted the Bible widely. One interpreter "was opposed to feminism and to feminist readings of the biblical text . . . Nonetheless . . . it is impossible to quantify how many doors she opened for women" in biblical scholarship (p. 330).

Many more interpreters were solidly woman-centered. One argued for the equality of the sexes based on the creation story in Genesis — a text

frequently mentioned throughout the handbook. If woman should be subordinate to man because she was created after man, wrote this seventeenth-century interpreter, then by that logic should not both man and woman be subordinate to animals, since animals were created even earlier (p. 47)? Another retranslated Genesis to suggest that God expelled only Adam, not Eve, from Eden (p. 101). Still another author called for an exodus from the Bible and Christianity altogether, saying that the Bible was "shot through with patriarchy, and there is no point in trying to tease out a message that would empower women" (p. 69).

Women interpreters mentored other women (p. 52). Quite a few of the handbook entries, in alphabetical order by name, cover stipulations for ordination of women into a particular religion or denomination. Most of the interpreters hail from various Christian groups, but Judaism, Quakerism, and Unitarian Universalism are also represented.

Many of these interpreters were active in social movements; some were imprisoned or put to death for their views. Though Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, and Mary Wollstonecraft may be better known for their abolition and/or women's rights work than for their biblical analyses, the two often went hand in hand. Feminist researchers will recognize Hildegard of Bingen and others, but rare will be the reader who does not encounter a new personality in this handbook.

Poets, playwrights, preachers, and teachers fill the volume. Most were literate, and they left their own written records as letters, transcribed lectures, sermons or memoirs. A good number of articles include substantial quotes from their subjects, giving the researcher a window into original source

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