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Book Reviews

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The Sexualization of Childhood by Sharna Olfman, PhD

As editor of Praeger Publisher's Childhood in America

Series entitled *The Sexualization of Childhood* (2009), Sharna Olfman, PhD, has orchestrated a powerful group of experts. They present compelling and cogent data on childhood in our culture; the disruptions of normal growth and development patterns; and the severe, everyday bombardment of sex, violence, and gender stereotyping.

First, Dr. Olfman (2009) establishes a foundation for what is understood to be necessary and appropriate for child development. Contrary to childhood innocence and the protection necessary during this sensitive and vulnerable time in life, she describes the experience of children now "growing older younger" with exposure to media entertainment and Internet pornography. The price paid in our collective (sexualized) society is children at risk for "internalizing impoverished models of gender and human relationships" (p. 1).

The stellar contributions of this scholarly team of experts serve as a testament to all who work with children across professional disciplines, striving to ensure healthy lives. The book's two sections, "Growing Up in a Sexualized Culture" and "Sexualization and Child Sexual Abuse," fully capture the discourse while calling for protection of our children.

Interventions and the opportunities for service and advocacy for such protection include media education literacy (to help counteract toxic messages about sexuality), the support of strong parents and communities, and significant organizations such as The Children's Defense Fund, The Alliance for Childhood, Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood (CCFC), Dads and Daughters, Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, and Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (TRUCE).

Specifically, the experts provide research and balanced, cogent arguments on such topics as the exposure and effects of pornography and video games on boys, commercialized threats to creative play and the self-realization for young girls, why girls in the United States are reaching puberty earlier and earlier, and the experience of sexual objectification, body image distress, and eating disorders.

Of particular note is the chapter written by Carolyn M. West, an associate professor of Psychology at the University of Washington. With a deep commitment to the study of violence in the lives of African American women, her chapter, "Still on the Auction Block: The (S)exploitation of Black Adolescent Girls in Rap(e) Music and Hip-Hop Culture" (p. 89) is a true wake-up call. Of import are Dr. West's strategies for specific ways in which empowerment of these girls can be assisted.

Though this book was difficult to review in terms of the hellish, vile content and the detailed atrocities (sexual exploitation, victimization, pornography, and prostitution) waged against children, Dr. Olfman, her esteemed colleagues, and Praeger Publishers are to be highly commended for their work in bringing these injustices to light in the context of professional practice, the priorities in tackling the compromised health of our current generation, and further opportunities for positive change yet to come.

Written by Aida Sapp, PhD, RN, PMHCNS-BC, LMFT

Reference:

Olfman, S. (Ed.). (2009). *The sexualization of childhood*. Westport, CT: Praeger. [ISBN: 978-0-275-99985-8]