A Review of "Fuckology: Critical Essays on John Money's Diagnostic Concepts"

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To say that John Money was a colorful character would be a vast understatement. The eldest son of working-class, religious parents and growing up in a small New Zealand farming town, he might have easily become just another dyed-in-the-wool fundamentalist. Instead, this solitary little boy with an inborn penchant, if not obsession, for ordering and organizing (he once told a biographer about how, as a kindergartner, he took it upon himself to systematically catalogue bird droppings in his front yard) would grow up to become one of the world’s most controversial sexologists. Money’s former student, Richard Green, eulogized him in 2006 by noting how his mentor had regularly hosted orgies at early gatherings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality (“of which he was a gifted participant”).

In some quarters, Money’s name is uttered in the same revered breath as Masters and Johnson or Kinsey, a pioneer who bravely carved out a path for objective scientific work in taboo areas, including transsexuality and the paraphilias. In others, however, Money epitomizes all that was wrong with sex research and gender studies in the 20th century. It soon becomes apparent in reading Fuckology that the triad of authors contributing to this book falls squarely in the latter camp.

The title of the volume is a rather clever coinage by Money himself, one of the few—and arguably the best—colloquialisms in the nearly endless series of clinical terms he devised during his long career. While a handful of his linguistic inventions became ubiquitous (e.g., “gender role”) or at least adopted as specialist vernacular (“lovemap”), the lion’s share was hugely obscure. Both those attracted to amputee partners (“alloapotemnophiliacs”) and those aroused by the thought of themselves as amputees (“autoapotemnophiliacs”) owe a debt of gratitude, one supposes, to Money’s affinity for neologisms. In his view, nosology imposed necessary scientific order. But as the authors of Fuckology note, it also medicalized people and drew restrictive parameters around the notions of normality and social acceptability.

Perhaps what this collection of critical essays does best is paint a convincing portrait of the contradictions riddling Money’s arguments. It also showcases him as a flawed, narcissistic scholar who bent over backward to avoid admitting his errors. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his handling of the infamous Reimer case, in which, on Money’s expert advice, a boy who’d suffered irreversible damage during a botched circumcision was raised as a girl in the 1960s and 1970s. The nightmarish outcome of that social experiment in gender construction is now well known (by his teen years, the boy had reverted back to his chromosomal, “felt” gender of male, but the psychological trauma experienced by Reimer contributed to his suicide at age 38). Fuckology contains an exceptional chapter by Morland, in fact, that recounts the dramatic unfolding of Money’s role in the debacle from start to finish. The book is notable in itself for providing a uniquely clear timeline of this textbook case.

Although Money’s legacy is inextricably linked with the Reimer ordeal and that notorious affair has overshadowed nearly everything else he did academically, his wider contributions to sexology were in fact considerable. Still, while he boasted of having authored or coauthored more than two thousand scholarly publications, the writers of Fuckology are not only unimpressed with the overall quality of that output, they speculate that his intellectual motives were dubious and,
despite his paying lip service to a jejune version of feminism, his words often betrayed a sexist worldview.

Having no particularly strong feelings about Money’s unique take on gender and deviance before this book, by the end I was indeed convinced that he was a master of obfuscation and verbal legerdemain; when looked at in full, his writings do seem to reflect a deep-seated need to always be the smartest man in the room. Unfortunately for him, that came at the cost of being theoretically inconsistent—and often. I suspect that few of us would come out smelling entirely of intellectual roses if our lifework were put under the microscope as Money’s has been here, but Fuckology unravels something deeper and more worrisome than the average scholarly waffling. Money suffered the pathology of rigid certainty; his ego refused to bend to conflicting data.

That being said, one can’t help but feel that the authors are kicking a dead horse with their approach, which is, at times, monotonously unfavorable toward a fellow scholar who can no longer respond to his critics. This is an effect exacerbated by the fact that most of the book is not jointly written, but instead singly authored in back-to-back chapters, so that it sometimes reads like an uncomfortable gangung up. And since the three contributors have, of course, different voices and styles, but shared negative opinions on Money’s work, the tenor is ultimately sour. There are also occasional flare-ups of vituperative prose, perhaps most jarringly in the chapter “Reorienting Transsexualism” by Nikki Sullivan, who, among other things, accuses Money (rather unfairly, in my opinion) of harboring a “brutal perception and orientation to transsexualism.” Fuckology also contains semifrequent lapses into the very obscurantism that the authors pin on Money’s theoretical models. Only here, the counterarguments linger a little too self-approvingly over postmodernist explanations of sex and gender instead of Money’s “scientistic” conceptions. In a bizarre section in the concluding chapter, for instance, the authors embark on a three-page analytical nitpicking of the “unusual” iambic pentameters of Money’s definition of gender.

All in all, however, Fuckology is a revealing look at a deliberately complex mind; it is an upper-level text that will help contemporary scholars understand Money in context.

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The intersection of the health care profession with domestic and sexual violence is well documented in the literature of both fields. Victims and survivors are often not forthcoming with information about the violence but report that an inquiry in a confidential health care setting will often result in the sharing of information that might otherwise not be revealed. The key to this occurring is the knowledge, approach, and manner with which the inquiry is made. The ABC’s of Domestic and Sexual Violence provides an excellent overview of the many aspects of working with both domestic and sexual violence and can serve as an invaluable guide for health care