

**Ortiz-Gómez, T. and Santesmases, M.J. (eds) *Gendered Drugs and Medicine: Historical and Socio-Cultural Perspectives*. Farnham: Ashgate. 2014. 250pp £65 (hbk) ISBN 978-1409454045**

*Gendered Drugs and Medicine: Historical and Socio-Cultural Perspectives* is an interesting and thought-provoking book in many ways. It presents a set of ten studies by authors from five countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Spain, and the USA) on the social, cultural and historical relationship between gender and drugs (both as medicines and addictive substances). It is structured into three main sections: the first, focuses on the agency of women as researchers, producers, consumers and political targets of drugs; the second part emphasises the impact of the rise of oral contraceptive pills, seen as ‘technologies of liberation’, on women’s modern lifestyle; the third and last part discusses drugs as addictive and transgressive substances and the representation of drug dependency and drug abuse as a ‘feminine vice’.

This publication is a step towards establishing gender (and also class to a certain extent) as a category in the study of drugs, bringing a number of countries (some under-researched) into the scene. In the first part of the book, women’s ‘agency’ is definitely the main focus. Stoff (chapter 1), for example, shows how housewife organisations played a main role in the prohibition of a food colourant, butter yellow, in 1940s Germany, for being of a carcinogenic nature, and how, later on in the 1970s, female members of parliament raised the

dangers and risks of oestrogens. The impact of these women's concerns on female consumer habits was considerable, which led to women's resistance towards the regulation and optimisation of their bodies. García (chapter 2), in turn, shows how women's own bodies have challenged the 'pharmaceutical imagination' in creating a pink Viagra to treat female sexual dysfunction. Women's bodies, concludes García, are active agents in the construction of sex, and the latter is not only a natural, but also a social and a cultural act. Sex, desire and dysfunction thus are contextual. Finally, Santesmases (chapter 3) challenges the history of antibiotics by uncovering women's contributions to it, greatly marginalised by historians in the course of the years.

There are three recurrent topics throughout the second part of the book: the 'pharmaceuticalisation' and 'medicalisation' of women's bodies and the 'descriminalisation' of oral contraceptives. Unsurprisingly, this second part shows (1) how the development of chemical contraceptives is strongly linked to economic and political issues of population stability in the Western world; (2) how Catholic, patriarchal and conservative societies with pro-natalistic policies like Spain during the 1960s and 1970s made the visibility and the circulation of knowledge of the contraceptive pill difficult to women (and Ignaciuk et al. show, in chapter 6, its illegal circulation during this period); (3) how the medical profession was empowered by the pharmaceutical industry to control the access to oral contraceptives, thus creating a cleavage between young, urban, educated women and rural, lower class women, with less opportunities to

find sympathetic doctors willing to prescribe these pills; and (4) how the pharmaceutical industry and the medical profession transformed healthy women into patients through the prescription of an everyday pill, thus normalising its use and pathologising motherhood (Eisert, in chapter 5, clearly shows this in 1960s America).

This collection of studies stands out for challenging conventional ideas, portrays, clichés, archetypes and stereotypes of women in society. This is particularly visible in the third part of the book, where the main theme is the ‘pathologisation’ of addiction and its strong link with women. Firstly, women are represented as the ‘weak sex’, less capable to manage difficult situations and so ‘naturally’ predisposed to drug abuse and consequently to ‘hysteria crises’ and neurosis (Kragh, in chapter 8, goes deep into this by showing how morphinism was mostly associated with men in the late nineteenth century, contrary to the claim that it was a bourgeois female problem). Marchant (chapter 9) also shows how addictive women were depicted as prostitutes, ‘flappers’, lesbians, lascivious girls, junkies, childish and subversives in a French society ruled by men during the 1960s, and how women’s drug abuse in the 1970s, although representing a small minority, was seen as shocking, degrading and scandalous by the French media. Finally, Romo-Avilés et al. (Chapter 10) remind us that risk behaviour and drug consumption and dependency are usually associated with masculinity, thus marginalising women from policymaking on drug dependency (they alert us to the fact that young

females have overtaken young males in the consumption of legal drugs in Spain since the 1990s).

For those interested in women's studies and medicine, I highly recommend this sober and thought-provoking publication. It is informed by a Foucaultian discourse, revealing how women became increasingly entrenched in a growing system of medical surveillance, monitoring and supervision, and through the bio-politics of their bodies – nothing particularly novel but always good to reinforce. Furthermore, and from my point of view very interesting, this publication brings the message that the use and abuse of drugs result from the encounter between a drug, an individual and their socio-cultural circumstances, thus challenging moralist and reductionist biological explanations – supported by a biomedical power and patriarchal professional discourse and reinforced by the literature, the media and popular culture –, based on 'female hormones'. For those who are not interested in women's studies, I also recommend it as a way of awakening them towards the enhancement of women's voice in the Western world throughout more than one century.

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