

## PREFACE

ied opinions. Though they remain far from unanimous in their conclusions and interpretations, common threads nevertheless weave in and out of most of the viewpoints here collected. Rather than being seen as disjointed, divided into discrete domains, human sexuality is seen as a unitary phenomenon: the sexuality of childhood, of youth, of maturity, and of age being all of a piece, if not fundamentally the same, then variations on a single theme. Human sexual development emerges in these writings more as a continuous process than as a stepwise progression of stages, and adult sexuality is intimately linked with child sexuality, not a sudden and emergent consequence of physical development at puberty.

Our intent as editors has been to pull together some of the best and most challenging of unpublished and recently published works on child sexuality. As with all such efforts, it is a selective compilation. The editors would be among the first to acknowledge that the orthodox is underrepresented. The traditional theories and models of child development are not recapitulated here except as they are questioned or challenged. The result is not a sourcebook on child sexuality, and some might even charge that it is not even a balanced representation of recent thought on the subject. We have undeniably leaned toward more novel and original research and away from unexceptional repetitions. We have not reprinted or commissioned work on the way young children establish sex-role stereotypes or on common misperceptions concerning reproductive biology as a function of children's ages.

Some things are regrettably absent from this book. We wish there were more instances in which children spoke for themselves about their sexual feelings and experiences. Such research is extremely difficult to carry out under current conditions and, though some such work is underway, none is yet complete. One might wish to know a great deal more about the physiology of sexual excitement and orgasm in children, but the requisite research is even more difficult and less likely to be conducted in the near future than would simple interviews with children. Although studies of the outcomes of childhood sexual experiences are well represented, all thus far have been retrospective. Only carefully controlled prospective research can settle some of the crucial questions now being debated. And, while we are beginning to understand something of the effects of "exceptional" sexual experiences in childhood, much is still unknown about the relationship of "ordinary" sexual upbringing to adult psychosexual functioning. What part does condemnation or tacit disapproval of masturbation play in sexual functioning? What are the effects of the mixed messages of contemporary parents who seek to affirm sexuality while still asserting that only heterosexual, marital sex is fully acceptable? More questions, too many to pose here, remain.

The book is directed toward students and professionals in many fields

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touching on human behavior and to any intelligent reader. We expect this collection to raise controversy. Indeed, for the very reason that so many questions remain unanswered (many because they have yet to be asked), we *hope* this book will prove controversial, thereby motivating new research and new discussion. Both are sorely needed. Only the continued absence of courageous inquiry can, in the long run, be detrimental to the sexual well-being of our own and future generations.

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