

Me, Myself and My Hormones

The Social Construction of the Menopause

HRT: A Narrative of Feminist Progress

- John Studd: ‘The History of Female Sexuality’ (www.studd.co.uk)
- Progressive History of Medicine: from cruelty and fear of women’s sexuality to the recognition of women’s right to sexual fulfilment
- Female Sexual Dysfunction
- Testosterone (1) Sexual Benefits: sexual desire; sexual activity; orgasm; pleasure; responsiveness and self-image (2) Non-sexual benefits: greater self-confidence; greater mental acuity; less depression; greater efficiency and communication at work; increase in self-worth, and ‘women behave like wanted women rather than neglected ones’

The Dubious Science of HRT

- Nothing about menopause can be predicted, no risk factors can be isolated
- Every year new symptoms are added to the syndrome and some are taken off
- Placebo response is high, sometimes dominant
- All experimental results are compromised by the multiplicity of symptoms and by the limiting nature of the phenomenon
- HRT is a multiplicity of regimes using a multiplicity of products in various combinations and strength
- No single individual doctor can find his way around the whole gamut
- Selection of patients suitable for treatment is governed by the subjective impressions of the practitioner

Feminism: The Fabrication of FSD

- Foucault, M. (1978) *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Penguin: London
 - Genealogy
 - The Construction of Truth and The Operations of Power
- Grosz, E. (1994) *Volatile Bodies*,
 - Dichotomies: mind/ body; male/ female

Feminist Genealogy of the Body

- The sexed body is not a raw mode of access to some truth
- It is not reducible to ones primary and secondary characteristics:
- The sexed body is a biological, social, cultural phenomenon
- The body is not opposed to culture: it is itself the cultural product

Medicine and Patriarchy

- Medicine is constitutive of the sexed body
- The male/ female opposition is closely linked with the mind / body and with normalcy/ pathology opposition
- Men's bodies: neutral, the standard by which women are judged
- Men's Sexuality: both present and absent in that it doesn't impair reason
- Women's bodies are inherently pathological: frail, imperfect, unruly, and exhibit a sort of 'natural inequality'
- Women's sexuality: saturates or suffuses the person

Femininity and Masculinity

- The coding of femininity with corporeality has left:
 - (1) men free to inhabit what they (erroneously) believe is a purely conceptual order while at the same time allowing them to satisfy their (sometimes) disavowed need for corporeal contact through their access to women's bodies and sexual services
 - (2) women experiencing their own bodies as faulty/ pathological and in need of medical (male) help

Karen Horney

- ‘it is inevitable that a man’s position of advantage should cause objective validity to be attributed to his subjective relations to women’
- ‘women’s psychology represents a deposit for the desires of men’
- ‘women have adapted themselves to the wishes of men and felt as if their adaptation to their true nature’

Thinking Differently

- Medicine has created the sexualized territory we inhabit and the horizon of women's experience of middle age
- We need to weigh up the costs as well as the benefits of HRT with regard to the social context of the menopause
- Perhaps women can grow up in a society that invests age with dignity instead of being permanently incited to remain young girls
- Perhaps men could be incited to grow up too