

research into the effects of sex hormones on human physiology and behavior—that they all share a faulty bias toward “two sex model” and heterosexuality as normal—is not warranted.

All research reflects the theory of the researcher, and all the biological research Roberts discusses reflects the modern synthesis of evolutionary theory that has prevailed throughout the twentieth century. This theory says that all life is a product of evolution, and differential reproduction is key to the process of evolution. In all sexually reproducing organisms there are just two sexes. So of course these biologists are biased toward the “two-sex model.” Concerning their “heteronormative approach,” in so far as such an approach implies moral sanctions against non-heterosexuals, then the criticism is well-taken. However, in so far as such an approach simply reflects that heterosexuality characterizes the majority of individuals in both the human and animal worlds, then it is unproblematic.

Certainly, some researchers have let their personal ideologies and other ideas influence their scientific writings. In so far as scientists have advocated narrow roles for women, sexism, racism or classism and associated this advocacy with their and others’ scientific work, then criticism is entirely warranted. But to tar biological research on sex hormones as biased because it embraces a “two sex model” is not necessary.

The same thing can be said for her criticisms of those who write about the dangers of sex hormones in the environment. Roberts criticizes the use of pictures of pregnant women and fetuses by various organizations to advertise the dangers of hormones and other chemicals present in the environment. The use of these pictures, according to Roberts, shows a focus on women as reproductive, and means therefore that these organizations share a sexist and cultural bias toward women. Please.

The criticisms aimed at discussions of hormone replacement therapy are better placed. It is unethical when the profit motive pushes HRT for the well-being of drug companies, bottom lines, or the ease of harried (or just plain lazy) physicians, instead of the well-being of women. But simply labeling as biased those who have tried to further the

science of biology (often for the good of many people) serves little useful purpose.

## STRATIFICATION

*Income Inequality in Capitalist Democracies: The Interplay of Values and Institutions*, by Vicki L. Birchfield. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008. 244pp. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780271034409.

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Income inequality varies sharply across the world’s affluent countries, and it has increased in a number of them over the past few decades. Government redistribution via social policy is a key determinant of income inequality. Though comparative researchers have studied the causes of social policy generosity extensively, public opinion has featured minimally, if at all, in these analyses.

In a democratic polity, what citizens think and want is likely to affect policy, so this lacuna may seem surprising. But there is a simple explanation: lack of data. Until recently there has been virtually no cross-nationally comparable data on public opinion that could usefully be brought to bear in empirical analysis of welfare state generosity. Happily, the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), the World Values Survey, and Eurobarometer surveys have begun to remedy this.

Vicki Birchfield’s book is one of several recent efforts to assess public opinion’s role as a determinant of social policy and inequality in rich nations (Brooks and Manza 2007; Kenworthy and McCall 2008; Kenworthy 2009). Birchfield suggests that two factors lead to generous social policies and hence low income inequality. One is consensual rather than majoritarian political institutions. The other is public sentiment in favor of political justice — government action to alter the market distribution of income — rather than market justice.

Consensual political institutions include proportional representation elections, more

than two competitive parties, multiparty coalition governments, a balance of power between the executive and the legislature, and established mechanisms for negotiation between organized interest groups. To gauge public opinion, Birchfield uses responses to survey questions asking the degree to which respondents feel "it is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes" (ISSP) and "greater effort should be made to reduce inequality" (Eurobarometer).

Birchfield's chief theoretical contribution is to suggest that the impact of public opinion is conditional on a country's political institutions. She hypothesizes that a public orientation toward political justice will reduce inequality mainly where political institutions are consensual. In a majoritarian polity, it is easier for policy makers to ignore public sentiment.

Her empirical analysis consists of pooled regressions covering sixteen countries over two and a half decades, supplemented with case studies of four nations. The findings are consistent with her hypothesis: income inequality tends to be lower where public opinion is more supportive of government redistribution, and the association is stronger in consensual institutional settings than in majoritarian ones.

I have two worries about the empirics. One is that the association is not particularly strong. Among the ten nations with consensual political institutions, the bivariate correlation between income inequality and public support for redistribution, with each averaged over the mid-1970s to the early 2000s, is very close to zero. (You can see this in scatterplot form at [www.u.arizona.edu/~lkenwor/research.html](http://www.u.arizona.edu/~lkenwor/research.html)). When Birchfield adds control variables, the sign turns negative, consistent with the prediction, but the estimated effect remains small (p. 152).

A second concern is that Birchfield's supportive evidence is almost entirely cross-sectional. Even if the cross-country association were stronger, there would be reason to worry about the direction of causality; it could be that generous social programs established in earlier decades created favorable public opinion, rather than the other way around. Because the public opinion

data begin in the mid-to-late 1970s and don't vary much over time within countries, this alternative hypothesis cannot be ruled out.

There is good reason to suspect that public opinion affects social policy and hence income inequality. But how much? Under what circumstances? And in what ways? Efforts such as Birchfield's to answer these questions are helping to push our understanding forward.

## References

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*Globalisation and the Middle Classes in India: The Social and Cultural Impact of Neoliberal Reforms*, by Ruchira Ganguly-Scrase and Timothy J. Scrase. New York, NY: Routledge, 2009. 194pp. \$150.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780415441162.

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Ever since India embarked upon a path of economic liberalization in 1991, the impact of these reforms on the nation has been hotly disputed. Ruchira Ganguly-Scrase and Timothy Scrase offer an approach to the topic that supporters and critics alike of neoliberalism have neglected—"a detailed, ethnographically informed, empirically grounded" analysis of "the lived experiences and viewpoints of the people themselves" (p.1). Their book focuses on one particular segment of the Indian middle classes—the *bhadralok* of West Bengal, a distinct status group characterized by low income and high education, "distinguished by their refined behavior and cultivated tastes" (p. 11), and who identify themselves as the lower middle class.

The book examines respondents' perceptions of the changes since liberalization; their beliefs and practices related to consumption;