

the emergence of stable, prosperous, commodity-exporting societies that interacted ever more closely with their metropolitan centers. Belich calls this process recolonization, and in the case of the British Dominions he gives a plausible account of how the ties between these colonies and the Mother Country tightened over time, and how the cultural and economic roles of London created a collective identity of a "Greater Britain," the ephemeral nature of its political reality notwithstanding. Similarly, Belich's incorporation of the United States into his Anglo-World is a bold act of interloping that challenges several hoary chestnuts of American exceptionalism. He is certainly not the first historian to challenge Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis," but his "boom, bust, and recolonization thesis" actually offers a viable alternative.

Replenishing the Earth is a big book full of big ideas. Some are more persuasive than others, but anyone interested in nineteenth-century intercontinental migration or the comparative study of settler societies will find this a rewarding, thought-provoking treatise.

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SIMON SZRETER AND KATE FISHER

Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918–1963

Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. viii + 458 p. \$95.00; \$32.99 (pbk.).

As a young obstetrician in London in the 1960s, who had just moved into a house built in the 1920s, I began talking to my two neighbors, literally over the garden fence. They were both widows in their 80s and we soon wandered into conversations about the role of contraception in their married lives half a century earlier. Looking out on the sexual revolution of the 1960s, they were almost eager to talk about intimate details of their younger lives.

These discussions gave me a tiny glimpse of the richness of oral history. Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher have systematically and meticulously uncovered the intimate lives of couples one generation later, whose sexual lives cover the interval between the end of World War I and the sexual revolution of the 1960s. *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution* is as representative of a nation's behavior as any social history can be. The narrative is rooted in a comprehensive knowledge of the literature, as well as a familiarity with earlier, more limited attempts to collect intimate oral histories. The authors interviewed 89 men and women, half from the northern industrial town of Blackburn and half from the London area, locations that respectively mirror the British social classifications of working class and middle class. They let the partici-

pants tell the story in their own words, even on occasion recording "remarkable exchanges between married partners discussing how they had not talked to each other in their marriage."

There are many ways in which such a wealth of material could be categorized. The authors choose a useful set of part titles to frame an interesting and logical narrative. The first, "What was sex?," explores how the interviewees learned about sex at puberty and before marriage. Many girls whose mothers had never told them about menstruation were terrified by their first period. Girls were socialized to "be careful" during courtship, and preserving their innocence was a laudable goal. For boys, sexual "innocence" in a partner was also a virtue. Three quarters of the respondents, and over 90 percent of the middle-class interviewees, did not have sex before marriage. In fact the more raucous and flirtatious exchanges tended to occur when groups of young people met, not when a couple were alone together. Dancing was a popular way to screen possible partners and for the two sexes to touch one another. Men interpreted a woman's style of dress, rather than the possible physical attractiveness of her body, as signaling her personality or social status. Your body was something you were born with, but your clothes (especially if you made them yourself) "said something about you."

Part two, "What was love?," looks at expectations about marriage and how young people assessed possible partners. *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution* helps reframe companionate marriage for contemporary social historians. A companionate marriage is seen more as sharing in the hard work of building a home and bringing up children than in reciprocal sexual pleasure. Marriage according to one working-class woman meant being condemned to "live in a poky house and not have any nice clothes," but most couples still found companionship. "My money went on the table," said one man married in 1923, "and I always thought the money belongs to you both, whether one [of you] earned it, or not."

Compared with married couples of the same age today, there was a great deal of sexual ignorance. One woman, married in 1922, recalled she "knew to expect him using that [penis]," but "how and why and which way, I'd no idea." One man, married in 1947, never saw his wife naked in 50 years of marriage. Yet for most of those interviewed, it was not necessarily a world of repressed emotions, although one husband did complain that his wife's reluctance to remove her clothes made lovemaking "about as exciting as posting a letter." Nevertheless, there may have been less conflict between married partners than occurs today with higher expectations of married love and fewer economic pressures to force couples to contend with the inevitable problems that arise during a long marriage. Because the respondents were contacted through local social groups, perhaps lonelier, more dysfunctional couples were not sampled. Even so, one senses throughout the interviews that these couples, many now in their 80s, obviously still love one another and most are deeply sensitive to each other's needs.

The final and longest part, "Exploring sex and love in marriage," is the most important section of the book for demographers and those interested in development and reproductive health policies. The aphorism that "men give love for sex, and women give sex for love" has an element of truth in most cultures, and in England between 1918 and 1963 women had no doubt that marriage carried an obligation to provide sex while men were almost unanimous in shouldering their financial and emotional

responsibilities. The primary methods of contraception were withdrawal and condoms. Among working-class men there was an expectation that the man would keep the woman “safe,” while nearer London the husband and wife more often decided on contraception together. While the UK never had its version of the Comstock laws, large pharmacy chains such as Boots kept condoms literally under the counter until the 1960s. The limited evidence available on withdrawal indicates that the failure rate was comparable to that of condoms,¹ and one clear message of this oral history is that withdrawal is a valid and often effective method of family planning that should not be denigrated in textbooks or during training of health professionals.

Szreter and Fisher capture the lives of my own parents, who married in the north of England in 1923. When it comes to sexuality, even grown children do not have the freedom that a professional interviewer enjoys to ask intimate questions, but *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution* conforms to the picture I painted of the sexual lives of my parents’ generation. It was a world with well-defined gender roles, in which love and hard work revolved around children and their education: a world in which separating sex from childbearing was difficult, both because information was garbled and because contraceptive choices were limited. It was a world where millions of women worried whether they would see their period that month. “Making love (laughing)—I was always too scared, to tell you truth. I’d never kind of relaxed like other people would,” confessed one woman married in 1940. Another answered the question “So did you ever have an orgasm?” “Now what’s that?”

The one weakness of an otherwise excellent book is the inadequate attention it gives to abortion. Abortion was illegal throughout the years covered in the oral history, but in a society with low total fertility one abortion in a lifetime can have a pronounced effect on the birth rate. More importantly an induced abortion, especially in the sexually conservative era under discussion, would be a profound emotional challenge to a woman, as well as often exposing her to danger and exploitation. Some of the interviewees self-reported induced abortions, but Szreter and Fisher do not seem to have probed for more information. We do know that even when abortion was legal, as in Hungary in the 1960s, women only self-reported about half the abortions known to be taking place.²

Sexual behavior and sexual expectations do change between generations. For demographers and social historians there are two big questions: what drives such variation, and do patterns of sexuality (other than by altering the birth rate) influence broader historical trends? Many cultures encourage innocence in young people. One of Szreter and Fisher’s respondents speaks of a “profound and beautiful ignorance of sex.” Is there some culturally adaptive value in such behavior? Or is it simply another expression of the male drive to control female reproduction, or of a female strategy to escape such control?³ A big question might be, would Britain in 1940 have fought a different, and perhaps less successful, battle with Nazi Germany if it had today’s patterns of sexuality? Or would it have made no difference?

We will only begin to answer such questions when we have access to oral histories of the type Szreter and Fisher have provided. Elizabeth Roberts interviewed 160 men and women married between 1880 and 1914,⁴ from the generation I met over my garden fence. Carl Chinn interviewed 85 informants born slightly later.⁵ We can hope that each future generation will have its own social historians. And it would be extremely valuable to have similar studies from North America, China, India,

Thailand, Egypt, and Nigeria. Szreter and Fisher are to be commended for providing an example and a template for such studies.

The cover of *Demography*, the journal of the Population Association of America, defines demography as “the statistical study of human populations.” But is it? Contemporary demography too often becomes a slave to statistical analysis, rather than making statistics a servant of demography. *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution* is a powerful reminder that in the final analysis demography is about men and women with beliefs and passions, who make and break sexual unions and respond to intended and unintended pregnancies in a wide variety of ways. Demography makes no sense unless we remember this.

Oral history captures variables that surveys with formal questions usually miss. For example, many of Szreter and Fisher’s respondents used reduced coital frequency or intervals of sexual abstinence to limit family size: we “just laid off, just laid off... you didn’t bother because, as I say, the fear of making her pregnant again stopped you.” “The fires got damped down and I just sort of put up with it,” reported one man married in 1936. Would men in more patriarchal cultures behave the same way, and could such nuances of behavior be more important than we think in determining the TFR of a particular society?

Or, to end with another example. Desai and Tarozzi set up a random control trial in Ethiopia to test the impact of microcredit on the use of family planning.⁶ They designed a study, spread across 156 villages, testing three intervention groups (microcredit alone, a family planning program alone, and microcredit and a family planning program) and a control group not exposed to any intervention. This expensive study failed totally in its goal of increasing contraceptive use in rural Ethiopia: “neither type of program, linked or unlinked, led to an increase in contraceptive use that is significantly greater than that observed in the control group.” It took Desai and Tarozzi almost 6,500 household interviews and eight years of work to discover why they failed. Eventually, they admitted that “the lack of impact has much to do with the mismatch between women’s preferred contraceptive method (injectables) and the contraceptives provided by community-based agents (pills and condoms).” If Szreter or Fisher had spent two days in one village (even if they required an interpreter), they would have discovered that real people do not think about “programs,” they think about the best solution to their perceived needs; and Ethiopian women, like women all over Africa, favor injectable contraceptives. It is extremely costly to forget that demography is very much more than “the statistical study of human populations.”

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Notes

1 Malcolm Potts and Peter Diggory, *Textbook of Contraceptive Practice*. Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 78.

2 A. Klinger and E. Szabady, “The Hungarian fertility and family planning study,” in *Fam-*

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3 Malcolm Potts and Martha Campbell, “The origins and future of patriarchy: The biological background of gender politics,” *Journal*

of *Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care* 34(2008): 171–174.

4 Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890–1940*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.

5 Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880–1939*. Manchester University Press, 1988.

6 Jaikishan Desai and Alessandro Tarozzi, “Microcredit, family planning programs, and contraceptive behavior: Evidence from a field experiment in Ethiopia,” *Demography* 48(2011): 749–782.

SUSAN GREENHALGH

Cultivating Global Citizens: Population in the Rise of China

Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010. xv + 138 p. \$29.95.

China has been experiencing profound demographic changes since the mid-twentieth century, starting with a steep mortality decline, followed by a rapid reduction in fertility. China's total fertility fell from about 6 children per woman in the early 1970s to below replacement in the early 1990s, and declined further to less than 1.5 in the last decade. These transitions have greatly changed Chinese society and have played a significant part in making China the world's second largest economy. In the international media, however, interest in China's population affairs has long focused only on the country's signature one-child policy—and even this interest has diminished in recent years as the policy's stringency lessened. Scholarly attention has spread to other population-related areas, especially population aging and migration to the cities.

In her latest book, *Cultivating Global Citizens: Population in the Rise of China* (based on her 2008 Reischauer Lectures at Harvard), Susan Greenhalgh provides a timely interpretation of recent developments in China's population program. Instead of focusing on narrowly defined population issues, she examines the development of China's population program and its role in China's rise in the early twenty-first century from the broad perspective of population governance. China's population program in its early stages concentrated on the control of births—some 400 million births averted, the government routinely asserts. (Greenhalgh is skeptical of the claim: especially since the 1990s upsurge in the market economy, “the erosion of the traditional family and changes in child economics have been at least as fundamental as, if not more fundamental than, program efforts” (p. 112).) In recent decades, however, the “population project” has grown broader in scope. A new mode of population governance has emerged, one that “works through modern science and technology” (p. 9). The program, by seeking to create “a high-quality, competitive workforce and a modern citizenry befitting a global power,” has been expanded to a much more broadly defined domain (p. x). Greenhalgh suggests that this new way of thinking about China's population governance is essential to understanding both China's recent rise on the global stage and how foreigners might most effectively respond to the challenges brought about by this change. (Asking why the one-child—more correctly, “one-child-with-exceptions”—restriction remains in place despite China's now ultra-low fertility, she sees the policy as tied to a lingering “crisis narrative” that provided its original rationale along with a fear that any change in it would have cascading effects in other policy spheres (pp. 35–36).)