



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Biology and Violence: From Birth to Adulthood. by Deborah W. Denno
Martin Daly

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the history and development of substance abuse research as a scholarly field. Though clinicians and students might find this volume too specialized, I would recommend it to researchers in the field as a sophisticated, yet diverse set of reviews.

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BIOLOGY AND VIOLENCE: FROM BIRTH TO ADULTHOOD.

By Deborah W. Denno; Foreword by Marvin E. Wolfgang. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York. \$37.50. xiii + 218 p.; ill.; author and subject indexes. ISBN: 0-521-36219-9. 1990.

This book reports some results of a longitudinal study of 987 children who were born in a Philadelphia hospital between 1959 and 1965, and were the objects of considerable medical and psychological testing from before their births until age 17. Denno asks whether these early measures were significant predictors of criminal offending by the age of 22. Most were not, but there are a few interesting exceptions. The most notable is that "lead intoxication" at age seven predicts juvenile arrests. (Unfortunately, although Denno defines most of her variables in a lengthy appendix, "lead intoxication" is neither explained nor referenced.) Also interesting, although hardly surprising, is that violent juvenile offenders scored significantly below non-offenders (and property offenders) on intelligence tests throughout childhood. Violent offenses were few, however, and they are distinguished only in the analyses of juvenile, not adult, arrests. In fact, violence is not at all a focus of this mistitled monograph.

The titular "biology" is scarcely more apt. For Denno, the opposite of "biological" is "environmental," and she frames her study as an investigation of nature *versus* nurture. Her appeal to this dubious dichotomy is incoherent even in its own terms, most notably on page 2, where the "nature" alternative that we are "aggressive, even violent beings" is contrasted with the "nurture" possibility that we are "inherently (sic) gentle and altruistic"! Other disappointing elements are a thoughtlessly pejorative view of "delinquency" and "offending" as forms of defective functioning, and an equally unexamined conviction that "structural equation path models" obviate the problems of causal inference from correlational data. The result is a simplistic treatment of a potentially interesting data set.

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ADIPOSE TISSUE AND REPRODUCTION. *Progress in Reproductive Biology and Medicine, Volume 14.*

Edited by Rose E. Frisch; Series Editor: M. L'Hermitte. Karger, Basel and New York. \$92.75. x + 142 p.; ill.; subject index. ISBN: 3-8055-5066-9. 1990.

In 1971, Frisch and Revelle published a pioneering study suggesting that human females had to reach a certain degree of fatness before menstrual function could begin, and in 1979, Hartz and his co-workers published a study that documented the empirical association of overfatness with menstrual and reproductive dysfunction in women. Since these publications, anyone literate in the field of endocrinology, especially reproductive endocrinology, has been at least vaguely aware that fatness has something to do with female reproductive function. For many, however, that awareness has been vague indeed—few have been clear about what data there are, when and where they were published and by whom, and what is clearly understood, and what remains to be explained. In an attempt to dispel vagueness on this subject, Frisch has assembled and edited eight articles in this book. She has succeeded admirably in presenting the what, when, where, and by whom of the data in this field, and also in highlighting the considerable ignorance of physiological mechanisms that remains.

Frisch herself leads off with a scholarly and comprehensive review of the relationship of fatness to the initiation of menstrual function and to fertility, a field that she largely created and to which she continues to be a major contributor: more than a quarter of the references cited in her article come from her own laboratory. She shows that the onset of menstruation bears a consistent relationship to the achievement of a certain degree of fatness (about 17% of body mass); that fertility is submaximal at that point and becomes maximal at a fat content of about 22 percent of body mass; that the secular decrease in the age of menarche over the past century is due to the earlier achieving of the minimal required degree of fatness (due to better nutrition); and that increasing loss of body fat, whether due to undernutrition, overexercise, or both, produces anovulatory cycles followed by amenorrhea, which are readily reversible when the fat is regained. Although these facts seem clear, the mechanisms remain obscure. Frisch presents a teleological reason, i.e., that fat reserves are needed for the energy expenditure of pregnancy and lactation, but this is not really an explanation. She mentions four possible mechanisms, none of which is very convincing, and ends, slightly lamely, by stating that the effects of gain or loss of fat are mediated by changes in hypothalamic function, which is rather self-evident but not an actual mechanism.

Cummings and Wheeler go over much the same ground as Frisch, and they are equally unsatisfying