

# **SIECUS Report**

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# MEDIA AND CENSORSHIP ISSUES

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## DEFENDING THE FREEDOM TO LEARN

Dore Hollander

In the late 1960s, when I was about twelve, my parents took me to see the Broadway musical *Hair*. Why would parents take a twelve-year-old to see a rock musical about a group of hippies in Greenwich Village who freely shouted "profanities," thumbed their noses at all manner of convention and authority, gloried in the effects of a variety of drugs, and openly expressed—even celebrated—their sexuality? They took me, I am certain, for some of the same reasons they took me to see *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Man of La Mancha*: it was Broadway, it was theater, it was music, it was culture. Also, I think, they took me because *Hair*, with its nude scene and its songs about sexual behavior, was much talked about in those days, and they wanted me to see for myself what it was that everyone was talking about. Finally, they took me, I suppose, because they thought that in *Hair*, and in the experience of seeing *Hair*, there were lessons to be learned—about how people view themselves, about diversity of lifestyles, about making and expressing one's choices. Indeed, *Hair* was about nothing if not about freedom of expression.

The point here is that my parents took me to see this play because *they* decided it was an appropriate thing to do. Perhaps they surprised some people, but they were stopped by none.

My family's experience with *Hair* captures much of the theme of this issue of the *SIECUS Report*. Today, as in the late 1960s, voices can be heard all along the social and political spectrum calling for bans of artistic, literary, and educational materials with sexual content. Increasingly, individuals and groups of varied ideologies, not satisfied to exercise their legitimate right to decide what materials are suitable for themselves or their children, are trying to keep material they consider objectionable out of the reach of all young people and society at large. They have been taken in by what Marcia Pally calls the "great soothing appeal of censorship": by banning or restricting access to "bad" material, they believe they will eliminate such societal ills as violence against women, teenage pregnancy, and drug abuse. But, as Pally documents in the lead article, if that is the aim of censorship, then censorship does not work.

Meanwhile, censorship succeeds in other ways. Our

colleagues from the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Library Association, the National Coalition Against Censorship, and People For the American Way point out in their contributions to this issue that regardless of the content of the material being challenged, censorship succeeds in depriving individuals of their freedom to create and distribute certain materials; their freedom to decide what educational, cultural, and entertainment works are appropriate for themselves and their children; their freedom to read; and, ultimately, their freedom to learn.

The debate about censorship calls into question the very purpose and nature of education. Young people learn largely, but not only, from the education that takes place at home and in schools. Learning opportunities are present, too, on the evening news, in museums, in the pages of novels and comic books, and on the stage. If the primary goal of education is to teach young people how to think critically about themselves and the society in which they live, is this best done by exposing them to a broad range of materials, however difficult and controversial, or by shielding them from works that do not conform to a given set of assumptions or beliefs? For me, *Hair* threw a light on lifestyles different from my own and from those I encountered daily, and on entirely new ways of thinking. And with my parents' guidance, I proceeded to ponder what I had seen, ask questions about it, and struggle with what it all meant for me. Had they simply dismissed *Hair* as "dirty," or "bad," I would have learned only that if one disagrees with something, one should ignore it, pretend it does not exist, or even try to eliminate it.

The media play an important role in education about sexuality, as well as other aspects of life. In this role, they often, appropriately, rely on sexually explicit materials to reduce ignorance and confusion, and to illustrate the diversity of sexual expression. It is parents' right and responsibility to judge whether their children should read a particular book, take in a particular exhibition, or see a particular play or movie. But they can do this only if the material is available for the asking. And only if it is can society claim to be protecting the freedom to learn.

# OUT OF HARM'S WAY: The Great Soothing Appeal of Censorship

**Marcia Pally**

Author, *Sense and Sensibility*;  
President, Feminists for Free Expression

Censorship in the United States today is offered to the public as an elixir of safety. Like the traveling salesmen whose tonics would cure what ails, proponents of book banning (and movie, magazine, and music banning) suggest their cure will bring an improvement in life: rid yourselves of pornography, Mapplethorpe's photographs, or *Catcher in the Rye*, and life will be safer, happier, more secure. This is the great soothing appeal of censorship: Get rid of bad pictures, and you will be rid of bad acts. This sort of image-blaming is easy to understand and peddle. It provides bumper-sticker explanations for human motive and action. It relies on the flattering notion that without invidious outside forces like movies or magazines, people would be good.

The most frequent argument is that sexual images are the root of what ails, and so their elimination will bring an end to society's woes. Legislation and judicial rulings restricting speech in the United States target sexual material more often than any other, as do attacks against the arts. With few exceptions, campaigns against the National Endowment for the Arts have been aimed at gay men and feminist women who use sexual imagery in their work. Assaults are routine against the sexual frankness in the young adult books of Judy Blume, who the American Library Association (ALA) cites as the most banned author in the United States. The removal of Goya's *Maja Desnuda* from a university classroom and of Lee Friedlander's photographs from a university gallery occurred because the works touch on sexual themes.<sup>1</sup> So do the HIV/AIDS and sexuality education materials that the ALA finds are the most frequent trigger to censorship; so does much of the TV programming that comes under attack.

## **The Image-blamers**

The promise of benefit by banning or restricting sexual imagery is advanced by the radical right and the right wing of the feminist movement. Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin are the best known of the feminist social-benefit bellwethers. Together, they drafted a 1984 bill that redefined obscenity, currently a criminal violation, as a civil offense. (Civil law provisions lower the standard that prosecutors need to

establish guilt and make it easier for courts to find defendants guilty.) Under the MacKinnon-Dworkin bill, which passed into law in Indianapolis, individuals who believed they had been harmed by sexual material could recover monetary damages from the producers, distributors, and retailers of that material. The bill also allowed a woman—any woman, the victim of no crime—to sue producers and distributors on behalf of all women for the infringement on women's civil rights that sexual material allegedly caused. The bill, which held booksellers responsible for the actions of third parties, sane or otherwise, was found unconstitutional by a female, Reagan-appointed trial judge. An appeals court upheld the judgment; the U.S. Supreme Court concurred in 1986.

Sens. Jesse Helms (R.-NC) and Strom Thurmond (R.-SC), along with Donald Wildmon (director of the American Family Association), Pat Robertson, and Phyllis Schlafly, are among the more visible of the radical right image-blammers. Robertson's Christian Coalition illustrates the scope of these groups: The organization has 750 chapters throughout the United States, full-time staff in fifteen states, Washington lobbyists, and an annual budget of \$8-\$10 million.<sup>2</sup> Robertson has raised over \$13 million to support Christian Coalition candidates in electoral races;<sup>3</sup> in Virginia and South Carolina, Christian Coalition members have gained control of key positions in the Republican party.<sup>4</sup>

The basic argument of both the radical right and the feminist right is that ridding society of sexual imagery will reduce rape, incest, and wife battery. Right-wing feminists would add sexual harassment and sexism to the list; members of the radical right would add interracial sexual relations, homosexual behavior, and feminism. The course of the cure seems short and direct, and promises peace in our time. It also has the cachet of feminist tradition. In the last twenty-five years, both women and men have examined images in all sectors of culture, from television commercials to the films shown in medical school. This investigation has become a tool for identifying sexism and exposing its pervasiveness. Sexual material deserves this scrutiny. Yet, in the antipornography movement, confusion has arisen between examining images for their insights about society and calling those images *sources* or *causes*

of social injustice.<sup>5</sup> In targeting words and images rather than the substantive causes of violence, image-blaming addresses none of the underlying causes of violence, such as poverty, illegal drug markets, or sexism. At bottom, the image-causes-harm idea is mistaken because it misunderstands both imagery and harm.

### **Sexual Imagery and Antisocial Behavior:**

#### **Exploring the Link**

The mass-market pornography and rock music industries took off after World War II. Before the twentieth century, few people save a wealthy elite saw any pornography whatsoever; certainly, they heard no rap or rock music. Yet, violence and sexism flourished for thousands of years before the printing press and camera. Countries today where no sexual imagery or Western music is permitted, like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and China (where sale and distribution of pornography is a capital offense) do not boast social harmony and strong women's rights records.<sup>6</sup> For millennia, teenagers have become pregnant without the aid of sexual imagery, rock, or matrimony. Homosexuals have lived and coupled in every society with or without the availability of homosexual imagery.

In light of the historical pervasiveness of violence and sexual abuse, it is unlikely that their cause lies in pornography and rock. In the United States, the greatest advances in sensitivity to violence against women and children—including rape and incest hot lines, battered women's shelters, and the concepts of date rape and marital rape—have occurred since the 1950s, concurrent with the marketing of sexual material and rock. Should one conclude that the presence of pornography or rock has inspired public outrage at sexual crimes? More likely, pornography, rock, and the quality of life for women and children are not causally related. Sexual violence is propelled by long-standing forces in society, as are nonsexual violence, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancy. It is these that demand public attention.

**Government Studies.** Between 1968 and 1970, the U.S. Commission on Obscenity and Pornography studied the relationship between sexually explicit material and antisocial behavior. Its controlled laboratory studies and national surveys on pornography consumption and crime rates found no causal link between sexually explicit materials and delinquent or criminal sexual behavior.<sup>7</sup>

After 1970, two notions nevertheless became popular: that pornography has become more violent and more widespread; and that, as a result, it is responsible for antisocial behavior—specifically, sexual perversions and violence against women and children. In 1985, Attorney General Edwin Meese authorized another commission to study the social and psychological effects of sexually explicit material. The publicity surrounding that commission (which was funded at a

fraction of the level of the 1968-70 commission) led to the belief that the pornography-causes-harm hypothesis was confirmed. Yet, the Meese Commission's investigation did not support this conclusion. Its review of the research found neither that sexually explicit material causes acts of sexual violence nor that the "degree of explicitness" helps explain such causality.<sup>8</sup>

**Other Research.** No reputable research has found a causal link between sexual imagery and violence, family unhappiness, or marital instability. Following is a summary of a review of the research on this subject.

(1) The claim that sexual material today is more violent than the pornography of twenty years ago is unfounded. Longitudinal content analyses of popular sexual material, including videos, find a decrease in violent imagery throughout the 1980s.<sup>9</sup>

(2) The research disproving the claim that sexual imagery triggers aggression would exhaust the remainder of this issue. The best overview can be read in *The Question of Pornography: Research Findings and Policy Implications*, whose authors conclude that the available evidence does not justify leveling harsher penalties against persons who traffic in pornography.<sup>10</sup> Neither the research review prepared for the Meese Commission nor a 1986 Surgeon General's Report<sup>11</sup> finds a causal link between sexual material and antisocial conduct. Nonviolent pornography may, in fact, reduce aggression in laboratory settings.<sup>12</sup>

(3) The idea that "kinky" or "degrading" images promote violence or contempt for women is without support. Research has found no causal link between exposure to "degrading" material and aggression.<sup>13</sup> Though Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant found that in laboratory settings, long-term exposure to "degrading" pornography resulted in more callous beliefs about rape,<sup>14</sup> later research has failed to replicate this result.<sup>15</sup> Long-term exposure to "degrading" sexual material may lead to *less-aggressive behavior*.<sup>16</sup>

(4) Findings on the effects of exposure to sexually violent images in laboratory settings are the most inconsistent, ranging from increased aggression<sup>17</sup> to no effects.<sup>18</sup> This inconsistency is complicated by findings that any form of physical arousal, including exercise, will increase aggressiveness in the laboratory.<sup>19</sup> Physical arousal will intensify all responses in laboratory settings—not only responses of aggression against women, but responses of kindness and generosity.<sup>20</sup> Finally, it is unclear whether laboratory results are "representative of real world aggression."<sup>21</sup>

Few scientists have investigated exposure to sexual materials, attitudes about women, and aggression in real-life situations. Suzanne Ageton found that involvement in a delinquent peer group appeared consistently as the most powerful factor in determining violence, accounting for 76 percent of sexual aggression; all other factors, including attitudes about women and vio-

lence, together accounted for 19 percent of aggression.<sup>22</sup> A study by Judith Becker and Robert Stein on sex crimes committed by adolescents found that, as with adults, crimes were linked to sexual and physical abuse in childhood and to alcohol consumption, rather than to exposure to sexually explicit material.<sup>23</sup>

(5) The claim that pictures of paraphilias (uncommon sexual practices) cause these practices is unfounded. Rather, an inclination toward such practices stems from unpredictable, idiosyncratic, real-world experiences. "The fantasies of paraphilia are not socially contagious," according to John Money, emeritus professor at Johns Hopkins University and an expert on paraphilias (including pedophilia and sexual violence). "They are not preferences borrowed from movies, books or other people."<sup>24</sup> Individuals who seek out specialty sexual material are attracted to it because the behaviors depicted are already of interest to them.

(6) The claim that areas with more sexual material have higher crime rates is without support. Although research in the early eighties showed a correlation between availability of sexual materials and sex crimes,<sup>25</sup> investigators soon noted an association between the incidence of rape and sales of any men's magazines, such as *Field & Stream*.<sup>26</sup> As research in this area progressed, studies found that the correlation between rape rates and pornography sales disappeared when the number of young men living in a given area was factored into the data; the only factor that predicted the rape rate in a given locale was the number of men aged 18-34 residing there.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps most interesting is the finding of a positive correlation between sales of sexually explicit material and high gender equality; both appear to flourish in politically tolerant areas. The best predictor of gender inequality is the presence and number of fundamentalist groups.<sup>28</sup>

(7) Research in Canada, Europe, and Asia has confirmed the research above, finding no causal link between the availability of sexual materials and the commission of crime.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Harm of Objectification**

In response to the social science literature, some image-blammers make the provocative case that sexual imagery may not cause harm, it is harm. By objectifying and degrading women, it is problem enough. When promoted by the radical right, this view is called "traditional values"; when put forth by the feminist right, it is a "radical critique of gender." A careful reading suggests that the former may be closer to the mark: the "objectification" and "degradation" theories rely not on a "radical critique," but on conservative notions of female purity and the good-girl/bad-girl sexual double standard.

The idea that sexual imagery or male arousal is degrading to women is curious. To believe it, one must believe that sex degrades women, that being sexual or

arousing men is something good girls do not do. This strange reasoning suggests that sexual activity is bad for women because it turns them into bad women. Pornography is the pictorial evidence of a woman's fall from good-girl grace. Though image-blammers may prefer it otherwise, the research does not show that exposure to pornography causes men to regard women with less respect.<sup>30</sup>

Women who arouse men have often been called "degraded" and "bad" because of the nature of sexual activity. Sexual behavior insists on abandon and vulnerability. Fearing these, as it is natural to do, some men try to retain control of the situation even as they surrender to it. Control in this case may include controlling women, who may be seen as the sirens of abandon and vulnerability. Staying on top of things may mean taking women down, or taking them down a peg, physically or in the mind's eye. To this end, some men call sexy women "trash," "sluts," or "degraded." This is neither feminism nor rape prevention; it is sexism.

The notion that pornography objectifies women is another curiosity. Those who promote it cannot mean that no woman was the object of male desire before commercialized pictures. Like attacks against "degradation," the campaign against "objectification" relies on the good-girl/bad-girl dichotomy. Image-blammers substitute "object" for "trash" and "slut," and promise to repair the pedestal. Most critically, they make no distinction between being the object of misogyny and the object of desire.

Being an object of sexual desire is demeaning only if that is all one is. Yet, for many, as part of life, as a piece of experience, it lifts the spirits. No one gets dressed up on a Saturday night to be ignored. At times, some men *and* women may want to be desired by total strangers, some may want to grab the attention of a room. At times, they may want the buzz of lust.

Some image-blammers believe that sexual imagery teaches men that women are indeed solely sexual objects to be used and discarded. This theory lives only in the minds of those who thought it up. All human beings have powerful, frequent, three-dimensional experiences of women as many things, beginning with one's mother. It is perverse to think that two-dimensional pictures, sexual or otherwise, could wipe out this reality.

Beneath image-blaming runs a strong current of woman-blaming. Men used to get away with rape and assault with the "tight sweater" excuse: a skirt too short, a neckline too low made rape the woman's fault. Under image-blaming, it is still the woman's fault—if not the woman in the sweater, then the woman in the magazine or on the screen. Porn-made-me-do-it reasoning may be anchored by long tradition: first, it was the devil that made them do it; now, it's Miss Jones. Again, it is neither feminism nor rape prevention, but sexism.

It cannot be a goal of feminism to eliminate

moments when a heterosexual man considers a woman, or women as a group, sexually desirable. Feminism seeks to expand the roles accessible to women, including the role of voyeur and sexual subject. It is some feminists' goal for women to recognize the objects of their desire and partake of them without a fall from good-girl grace. That means more sexual imagery by and for women, not less for men. One of the benefits of the last twenty-five years is that men more readily admit the pleasure of being objects of desire, and women more openly desire. Today's starlets include Hugh Grant, Alec Baldwin, and Tom Cruise, and women make pornography of their own.

Image-blaming feminists take as a first principle, as have generations of men, that sexual expression degrades women. They suggest, as have generations of gentlemen, that women be protected from harm by keeping clear of sexual behavior. However well intentioned, these activists work from unexamined assumptions about sexuality—assumptions meant to soothe men's fears of abandon and the women who inspire it. The division of women into good and bad girls helps some men contain their worries and their women. It helps women not at all. Feminist image-blammers believe they are radical, but they have collapsed into the beliefs of their oppressors.

### **Addressing the Real Problem**

If sexual images and lyrics do not cause violence, public attention must turn to what does. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights<sup>31</sup> and the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity<sup>32</sup> suggest that violence against women begins with educational and economic discrimination, including a sex-segregated labor market and devaluation of traditional "women's work." Some men learn to consider women burdens, stiflers, and drags on their freedom. Many women, in turn, do not have the economic independence and access to day care and other social services that would enable them to leave abusive settings.

Violence against women stems also from domestic arrangements that, even in progressive households, may leave mom as the prime, often only, caregiver for small children. To the infant and small child in such households, mom is the font of affection, food, and warmth. It is on mom that all one's infantile expectations for care are foisted, and all one's earliest disappointments blamed. An infant gets wet, cold, or hungry, it learns to expect mom; when its needs are not immediately met, it gets angry at mom.<sup>33</sup> Under mom-only (or mostly) child care, children learn to act out their desire for mom's attention, and their rage that she is not always there, on all the women in the rest of their lives. Such infantile anger would not fall on mom alone if men and women put in equal time with their children. Under the mom-only setup in many homes, anger against women shows up in fantasies; in music,

movies, novels, art, and sculpture; in advertising and fashion. It shows up, as well, in the ambivalence some women feel for other women and in the sexual fantasies of some heterosexual men, which, again, are the proper place for it. Yet, sexual imagery did not invent desire for or rage at women, and banning such imagery will not end them. The idea that what happens in fantasy happens in life is neither science nor feminism, but science fiction.

To reduce violence in life, one must look at the experiences that teach children where and how to deploy aggression. Fear and anger may always be a component of sexuality; men may forever be a bit angry at women. How will they act on it? Real-life violence is learned in the nonfantasy, three-dimensional pedagogy of family and community. In every nuance and gesture, one generation instructs the next in the sorts of contempt and violence that are acceptable and expected. However popular it is to blame two-dimensional media, basic values about men and women, race, religion, sex, money, work, and the mores of violence are learned early, at home.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Appeal of Image-blaming**

As a proposal for life's improvement, image-blaming has several charms to its advantage. It offers the boost of activism. Sexual imagery is visible, tinged with the illicit, and far easier to expunge than deeply rooted injustices. Well-meaning citizens believe they can fight it, beat it, and win. Feminists are exhausted fighting a sexist economy and politics and sexual violence. Most Americans are at a loss in a difficult economy and in the face of rapid changes in gender, family, and race relations. The "decency" movements are a boon to those who want to feel they control their lives. In this, these movements have the same appeal as the fantasies they assail. They provide a frightening but beatable monster and the pledge of a happy ending. As long as life is insecure, this promise will have a market. Like monster movies and pornography, image-blaming is a fantasy that sells.

Psychologist Paula Webster suggests another idea: that image-blaming appeals because it carries "the voice of mom."<sup>35</sup> Most people in Western societies grew up with the idea that sexual behavior is "icky" and abandon, dangerous. Many women grew up with the idea that men are dangerous. However adults traffic in the sexual aspects of life, this message remains embedded in the imagination and emotional core. Heard indirectly or expressly, it shapes the way one sees the world. But it need not have been heard at all. Biology, with fear and anger whipped into sexual desire, contributes to the tangle. When one is told in one's adult years that sexual imagery is dirty and makes men dangerous, it "clicks." Human beings will ever be wary of sexual expression and blame it for an array of woes. Suspicion of sexual expression is the universal

culprit and oldest quick fix in the Western tradition.

Image-blaming has special appeal for some women. It embellishes the stance of victim, a state of mind and heart that has for these women the comforts of familiarity and flattery. Under image-blaming, women are victimized not only by sexist and violent action, but by "dirty" words. Beginning in 1992, some feminists began describing the emotional and tactical uses of the "cult of the victim."<sup>36</sup> They risked blurring violence against women with wolf-calling and blaming the victim, and they angered many women. Yet, they turned attention to one of the last remaining gilded cages that entrap women since Betty Friedan banged at the bars of *The Feminine Mystique* thirty years ago.

Like all disenfranchised groups, women have used whatever they could to gain control over their lives, however minimally. They have had little choice over their tactics; most often, women have had to turn to their advantage what men believe about them. These are the manipulations of the powerless. If men think women frail and male egos are boosted by protecting them, the pride and prejudices of men may be enlisted on women's behalf. If one cannot act on one's own behalf, as women so long could not, this may be the best route to go. The advantage for some women is

***"Like monster movies and pornography, image-blaming is a fantasy that sells."***

that they gain sway over their world; female delicacy has claims on male behavior where women's rights do not. Daughters have for generations learned these wisdoms in varying forms from their mothers. The manipulations of the powerless are the bedrock of girl training, and they will be longer in changing than the laws on suffrage, gender discrimination, and family leave.

Women's expectations for power, to be hired and heard as men are, have rarely been greater than in industrialized countries today. As social change creeps, it is little wonder that women dig around for something that will make a difference now. Subtle and overt sexism persists in public and private spheres, and women know in a collective unconscious of sorts that delicacy, wooed properly, brings control. The world does not yet treat women fairly; women are tired of working all day and picking up socks at night. Would they not like to be treated like ladies again?

Katie Roiphe writes about the "rape culture" on college campuses as sequestering "feminism in a teary province of trauma and crisis. By blocking analysis with its claims to unique pandemic suffering, the rape crisis becomes a powerful source of authority."<sup>37</sup> It is the authority that counts: universities may still be sexist,

but victims of pandemic rape get heard. The cult of victim offers other benefits, as well. A campus dating code that "not only dictates the way sex *shouldn't be* but also the way it *should be*"<sup>38</sup> soothes the emotional conflicts of young women who want to have sexual relations but were not brought up to pursue them for themselves. The lessons of sexual danger and female propriety linger still. Date rape handbooks in which men are rapacious and women are resisting echo fears learned in girlhood about sexuality and men. They "click" and comfort.

In some women's emotional core, where motive begins, sexual expression still is "icky" and soils them; men still are dangerous and must be cajoled. The manipulations of the powerless are taught as ways to broker such a world. But they also keep women in it. When women must resist, they cannot initiate sexual relations—for good or evil, men must initiate relations with them. They feel soiled by "icky" sex, and feeling soiled, they feel they have been raped.

Women are indeed coerced, bullied, and raped by their dates. They are more often abused by men they know and like than by strangers.<sup>39</sup> This is enough of a problem; the new victim culture creates others. It recasts a woman who decided to have sexual relations and disliked it into a creature who cannot make sexual decisions or recover from disappointing evenings. *It takes a woman who agreed to sexual activity because she wanted to be nice or loving or because she worried she would be put down if she declined, and it bolsters the "femininity" that encouraged her uncomfortable agreement.* There are no statistics on how often women do this, but the culture of victim suggests they should.

Image-blaming, which casts women as victims of words and pictures, is another manipulation of the powerless. It, too, "clicks" when recast in modern language. Roiphe notes that today's victim cultists talk not of "shame," but of "posttraumatic stress syndrome." A student writing in the *Harvard Rag* was more honest and said she had been "defiled."<sup>40</sup> Where loss of chastity cost a woman not only a husband, but often all social cover, women were wise to be chaste. Yet, chastity, like delicacy and unworldliness, advances a world where women must be dolls. The "wisdoms" that some women have learned for protection betray them. Manipulations of the powerless keep these women so.

Image-blaming will not prevent rape, nor will it fell sexism. It has no business being the basis for legislative or judicial remedies to sexism or violence. Consider the case of Ted Bundy. In his efforts to avoid the death penalty, he tried to convince the court that pornography made him murder and mutilate dozens of women. During his trial, family members reported that Bundy spent his first three years living with a grandfather so violent that he threw Bundy's aunt down a flight of stairs, breaking her arm. By age three, Bundy was sticking butcher's knives in his bed. Shortly after, the effects



on Bundy of his grandfather's violence became so aggravated that the family insisted he and his mother move out of the house.<sup>41</sup> But pornography made him do it.

Would that the cure to society's troubles were a matter of eliminating bad words and images. Would that it were so single-issue, or so easy. Censorship has always been more problem than solution. It purges society of books, movies, and music, leaving hate, racism, sexism, poverty, and violence flourishing as they did before the printing press and camera. It flatters people into thinking they have done something to improve life while they ignore what might be done.

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## SIECUS POSITION STATEMENTS

### Sexuality and the Media

SIECUS urges the media to present sexuality as a positive aspect of the total human experience, at all stages of the life cycle. Because of the media's powerful influence on all aspects of society, and particularly upon children, SIECUS believes that the media has a responsibility to present matters relating to sexuality with accuracy, without exploitation, and with sensitivity to diversity. SIECUS particularly condemns gratuitous sexual violence and all dehumanizing sexual portrayals.

### Sexually Explicit Materials

SIECUS supports the use of a variety of explicit visual materials as valuable educational aids, to reduce ignorance and confusion, and to contribute to a wholesome concept of sexuality. Such visual materials need to be sensitively presented and appropriate to the age and developmental maturity of the viewer.

SIECUS supports the informed use of sexually explicit materials for educational and therapeutic purposes and also affirms adults' rights of access to sexually explicit materials for personal use. SIECUS opposes legislative and judicial efforts to prevent the production and/or distribution of sexually explicit materials, insofar as such efforts endanger constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of speech and press. Furthermore, such actions could be used to restrict the appropriate professional use of such materials by sexuality educators, therapists, and researchers. SIECUS supports the legal protection of minors from exploitation in the production of sexual materials.

SIECUS deplures violence, exploitation, and human degradation in our society and objects to the use of sexually explicit materials that condone or promote these negative values.

# ACLU BRIEFING PAPER:

## Artistic Freedom

Today, across the cultural spectrum, artistic freedom is under assault. Free expression in popular music, photography, painting, cinema and other arts is threatened by pressure from lawmakers, prosecutors and self-appointed guardians of morality and taste. Succumbing to that pressure, more and more music stores, museums, schools, theaters, television stations, bookstores and video shops are restricting the display or availability of images and words deemed to be offensive to one group of citizens or another.

The roots of contemporary efforts to curb free expression in the arts reach back to the early 1980s, when a backlash arose against the cultural freedom of previous decades. Religious fundamentalists and others, with overt support from the administration of President Ronald Reagan, began to advocate censorship of books, films and television in an effort to enforce cultural conformism. Today, we are reaping the harvest of that backlash as rap singers and museum directors are prosecuted for "obscenity," performance artists are denied government grants and Congress passes new censorship laws.

Artistic expression has come under attack in other periods of our country's history. In 1873, Congress passed a law that prohibited the mailing, shipping or importation of "obscene" and "immoral" matter. The law was used to ban the works of James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Voltaire and other great authors, as well as printed information about sexuality and contraception. The American Civil Liberties Union, founded in 1920, first confronted arts censorship in 1926 when the city of Boston banned 65 books, including Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, Sinclair Lewis' *Elmer Gantry* and Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. The ACLU countered the city's action, which popularized the phrase "banned in Boston," with a campaign to repeal Massachusetts' Blasphemy Act and end the censorship of plays and books.

Defending artistic expression, which is one of our most basic freedoms, remains among the ACLU's highest priorities. Here are the ACLU's answers to questions often asked by the public about artistic freedom.

### **What protects the work of artists from government censorship?**

Artistic creations, whatever their medium or message, and even if their content is unpopular and of poor quality, are protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. The First Amendment declares that "Congress shall make no

law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press," and the Fourteenth Amendment extends that prohibition to state and local governments. The government is forbidden to suppress the creation or distribution of any music, play, painting, sculpture, photograph, film, or even comic book. Some legal scholars have argued that the First Amendment is only applicable to written or spoken *political* expression, but the U.S. Supreme Court has long rejected that interpretation. In a 1948 decision, the Court stated: "We reject the suggestion that the constitutional protection of free speech applies only to the exposition of ideas. The line between the informing and the entertaining is too elusive."

### **When and how did the threat to artistic freedom emerge in this country?**

Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas once observed that the First Amendment was "the product of a robust, not a prudish, age." For example, many of the Constitution's framers probably read and enjoyed John Cleland's 1748 best-seller, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, better known as *Fanny Hill*. However, the Victorian Age brought extremely rigid and repressive moral standards into vogue in the English-speaking world, prompting both the British and American governments to begin applying sanctions to sexually explicit art and literature.

In 1821, 30 years after adoption of the Bill of Rights, *Fanny Hill* was banned in Massachusetts. In 1842, Congress amended the Customs law to prohibit the "importation of all indecent and obscene prints, paintings, lithographs, engravings and transparencies." In 1868, a ruling by England's highest court established a "bad tendency" test that was appropriated and used by U.S. state and federal courts until the 1930s: The government could ban any material if "the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall." In 1873, Congress passed the Comstock Law, named for Anthony Comstock, who led the Society for the Suppression of Vice. In its first year of existence, that law, which punished first offenders with a \$5,000 fine and five years imprisonment, authorized the destruction of 194,000 "questionable" pictures and 134,000 pounds of books "of improper character."

By 1900, criminal obscenity statutes were on the books in 30 states, and censorship of "immoral and indecent" works had become entrenched.

### **How has the Supreme Court dealt with sexually explicit expression?**

In 1957, the Supreme Court announced, in the case of *Roth v. United States*, that obscenity is not constitutionally protected because it is "utterly without redeeming social value." In the same decision, the Court replaced the "bad tendency" test with a narrower one that declared a work of art obscene if "to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme taken as a whole appeals to the prurient interest." For the next 16 years, the Court refined this definition while reversing many state obscenity convictions.

In 1973, a Court grown weary of reviewing and reversing tried to formulate clearer guidelines for evaluating sexually explicit material. In the case of *Miller v. California*, a 5-4 majority declared that a work is obscene if, first, "the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest..."; second, "the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law"; and third, "the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value." The *Miller* standard remains in effect today, but no one knows exactly what it means.

### **Why does the ACLU object to the obscenity exception to the First Amendment?**

The perception of obscenity in art is highly subjective. As Justice Douglas wrote, in his dissent in *Miller*, "what may be trash to me may be prized by others." By authorizing our courts to decide what is morally acceptable, we turn them into censorship boards that impose the personal viewpoints and tastes of judges

and juries on the rest of society.

Furthermore, formulating a precise definition of obscenity has proven to be impossible. Justice Potter Stewart summed up the problem with his famous one-liner: "I know it when I see it." That assurance is of small comfort to artists, writers, publishers and distributors, who must navigate the murky waters of obscenity law trying to predict what judges will think.

The inherent subjectivity of *any* definition of obscenity has led to the suppression of constitutionally protected expression. Sometimes the suppression is direct and well publicized—for example, the 1990 conviction of a Florida record store owner for selling a certain album of rap music, and the prosecution, in the same year, of an Ohio museum director for exhibiting the works of a celebrated photographer. But even more pervasive is the "chilling effect" that vague standards have on writers and artists, pressuring them to engage in self-censorship to avoid running afoul of a legal definition that means different things to different people.

The First Amendment enshrines the principle that freedom of thought and expression are essential to a free society. In practice, the First Amendment's guarantees mean that adults must be free to decide for themselves, without government interference, what to read, paint, draw, photograph, see and hear.

• • •

Censorship is an infectious disease. Permitting restraints on any expression sets the stage for attacks on all expression that is artistically and/or politically controversial. The creative spirit must be free. When it is not, society suffers.

*Excerpted from ACLU Briefing Paper no. 14. Reprinted with permission from the American Civil Liberties Union.*

## **CONSIDERING CONDOMS VIDEO**

The video *Considering Condoms*, designed to provide high school students with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for discussing and negotiating either sexual abstinence or consistent and proper use of latex condoms, is available from the National Education Association Health Information Network. In this fast-paced fifteen-minute video, a diverse group of adolescents share their feelings, experiences, and choices regarding sexual pressures and activity. The video and accompanying curriculum guide are intended for use as part of a larger, comprehensive sexuality education program.

"This video will revolutionize the way in which teachers and students discuss sexual choices," states Mary Sosa, assistant executive director of the Health Information Network. "The substantive content mixed with MTV style is a winning combination."

To order a copy of *Considering Condoms* and the curriculum guide, send \$15 to NEA Video Library, PO Box 509, Westhaven, CT 06516. To charge on Visa or Mastercard, call 203-934-2669. Make checks payable to the National Education Association. Please allow three weeks for delivery.

# CENSORSHIP IN LIBRARIES: Tales from the Front

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Censorship is on the rise, and pressure groups have grown increasingly strident and unrelenting in their efforts to curtail the freedom to read. The most consistent characteristic of censors is that they are never content to regulate only their own reading or that of their own children. They believe they should decide for everyone what is appropriate, and that anyone who does not agree is immoral, un-American, and a bad parent. Contrary to what some people believe, however, the First Amendment does not say, "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech...for everyone who thinks just like me."

The American Library Association's (ALA's) Office for Intellectual Freedom recorded nearly 700 challenges to books and other library materials in 1993; for the first half of 1994, the count already stood at 384—with the busiest time of year, the fall, when schools reconvene, yet to come. In more than one-third of the cases from 1993, the complainants were successful in having books removed or restricted. Censorship efforts in schools are even more successful: in a recent survey, nearly half the challenges reported by schools resulted in restriction or removal of materials.<sup>1</sup>

## Targeted Materials

The S's—sexuality, swear words, suicide, and satanism—are the flashpoints for challenges to books and other library materials, with "cultural sensitivity" following closely. Sexual materials are always high on the list.

The most challenged book of 1993 was *Daddy's Roommate*, by Michael Willhoite, a picture book designed to help children understand a gay family setting. It tells the story of a young boy whose parents are divorced and whose gay father lives with his "roommate." The book merely tries to make the point that nontraditional families are loving, too. But it has engendered a storm of controversy nationwide in school districts and public libraries. Also on the list of the ten most challenged books for 1993 are *Heather*

*Has Two Mommies*, a story about a little girl and her lesbian parents, and *The New Joy of Gay Sex*.

Madonna's *Sex* was the second most challenged title in 1993. Communities from North Carolina through Texas, Illinois, Colorado, and Washington fought heated battles over whether the title should be in library collections. Some libraries rejected it not because of its content, but because of its binding, contending it would fall apart almost immediately. Other libraries decided that since *Sex* was one of the most hyped titles in history, and since public interest was at a fever pitch, they were obligated to "give the public what it wants."

The remaining titles on the most challenged list include classics, award winners, and titles that no library would be without: Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*; Judy Blume's *Forever*; Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; and two titles that reflect censors' continuing focus on witchcraft and satanism, Alvin Schwartz's *More Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* and Roald Dahl's *The Witches*.

The primary fixation of censors is access for minors to any description of, or information by or about, gay men and lesbians. The concern about such materials is part of a broad, national antigay agenda at the state and local levels. A vivid example of this is the Oregon Citizens Alliance's ballot proposals to keep information about homosexuality out of schools and libraries and away from minors. (Similar measures have been proposed in Idaho, Washington, Colorado, and several southwestern states.) Another example is organized propaganda in opposition to gay men and lesbians in the military. Regardless of how people feel about the underlying issue of gay and lesbian rights, these measures, which are often sold to the public as prohibiting "special" rights for gays and lesbians, are being used as jumping-off points to launch campaigns to purge schools and public libraries of all information about homosexuality. The same tactics are used with other controversial topics, such as abortion.

Books that present any factual information about sexuality and include even neutral mention of homosexuality—for instance, that it exists—have been challenged. These include *Boys and Sex*; *Girls and Sex*; *The New Teenage Body Book*; and *Changing Bodies*. *Daddy's Roommate* and *Heather Has Two Mommies* have been at the heart of some very vocal and well-publicized controversies. Such organizations as Focus on the Family, the American Family Association, Citizens for Excellence in Education, and the Christian Coalition have made it their mission to oppose such titles. Often, individuals affiliated with or sympathetic to these groups will launch a campaign against a public library by targeting highly controversial materials like Madonna's *Sex*, or *Playboy Magazine*; then, once the controversy is front-page news, they will add, "Oh, by the way, did you know the library also has *Daddy's Roommate* in the children's collection?"

In expressing their opinions and concerns, would-be censors are exercising the same First Amendment rights librarians seek to protect when they confront censorship. In complaining and making their criticisms known, they are exercising the same rights of freedom of expression as those who created and disseminated the material they are complaining about. The rights of both must be protected, or neither will survive.

Unfortunately, those who favor censorship just cannot grasp this concept. Almost always, individuals who complain about library resources will ask, as their *first* resort, that the material be removed from circulation. They do not say, "Please find my child an alternative selection"; rather, their demand is, "Don't let *anyone's* child read this." The assumption is that all parents will agree, and no one will find it disturbing that if the material is removed, the right of all other parents to make their own determination on behalf of their own children is also gone.

Parents, of course, always can choose whether or not their children will read the books that are in libraries. Most challenges, however, come from people who do not realize that underlying their complaints is an abdication of parental responsibility—"I left my child in the children's section, and just *look* what he found! Protect me from this!" These parents would prefer to bestow their parental rights, and responsibilities, on public schools and libraries. And they are greatly affronted to learn that librarians regard parental responsibility as resting, oddly enough, with parents! Indeed, librarians regard it as central to their profession to protect people from censorship, not from information.

### **The Censors**

While censorship comes from all points along the political and social spectrum, it is by far most likely to come from the right of center. And the right of center is nothing if not organized. That is probably why so many similar techniques of attack are turning up all over the

country. Seemingly local, isolated incidents look less local and isolated from the perspective of the ALA. Three or four librarians, from farflung locations, may call in one week citing complaints about the same book; while they all think they are dealing with local, grassroots, ad hoc organizations, the complaints they cite use almost identical language. When the ALA receives copies of fliers using the same words, the origin of the complaint becomes clear.

The pressure groups are on the prowl, and their basic tactic is to organize nationally, but act locally, doing what Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition has called "flying under radar." One strategy has been to sponsor "stealth candidates" for school and library board offices, who will not answer questions from the press, will not talk about why they are running, and win by campaigning only in their own church congregations. They win because voter turnout for board elections is traditionally low, and it takes a mere 6–15 percent of the registered vote to win.

***"...librarians regard it as central to their profession to protect people from censorship, not from information."***

Once the right of center is voted in, it shows its true colors, as it has, for example, in Vista, California. There, a tremendous amount of public time and resources was expended fighting to introduce creationism into the science curriculum, although such a move has repeatedly been held unconstitutional. Another example is Oconee County, Georgia, where the school board voted, with one member dissenting, to establish a committee to purge the school system's 40,000-title library collection of all books having any "sexually explicit" or "pornographic" passages, and to screen all future acquisitions to keep such titles out. This, of course, assumes that the committee will be able to define "sexually explicit" and "pornographic." Allegedly, the committee was stacked with congregants from one board member's church and met in violation of Georgia's open meetings law. These are instances where elected or appointed public officials have patently violated the Constitution and state laws, and thus have violated the public trust. Affected citizens have recourse only after the fact, through recall elections, calls for resignation, or lawsuits.

Concerned people honestly believe that the books they question could harm people, especially children. What if that is true? Is that reason enough to remove those books from schools and libraries so *no one's* chil-

dren can read them? How is a librarian supposed to predict which library users are so sensitive, or predisposed to violence, or despondent, or just plain crazy that they might act on information available at the library, or copy something they have read about? Should this nation gear the reading of its entire populace to what is suitable for the most vulnerable? And the biggest question, of course, is, Who would decide?

It is not only materials on sexuality that are drawing fire. Materials that adults challenge on behalf of children frequently are the materials children love the most. These include anything by Judy Blume; *YM* magazine; and certain works of Shel Silverstein, Roald Dahl, Christopher Pike, R. L. Stine, and Jack Prelutsky. Materials that bring reluctant readers into the library and introduce them to reading are also common targets—*Rolling Stone* magazine, adventure stories, and sports biographies. Classics of American literature that are assigned in high school continue to be frequent targets because of their use of “profanity” or their lack of “political correctness.”

And what about books or other library materials that present views that are widely regarded as offensive—views that reflect racism, sexism, or homophobia, for example? Should parents and educators pretend that people who hold these views do not exist? Children walk among such people every day. Much of the rap music children listen to, much of what they watch on video, deals straightforwardly, and sometimes shockingly, with these issues. Many people see that as bad—and want to censor music, books, films, videos, and art because of it.

To respond to these complaints by removing books is terribly wrongheaded. It suggests that students are incapable of dealing with difficult and controversial materials and instead need to be protected from them. It suggests that literature, perhaps even history, needs to be sanitized to be made “safe” for consumption by young people. That attitude is both patronizing and contrary to the goal of education, which is to enable people to deal with and respond to challenging ideas. Educators should be teaching children how to read a book for overall thematic content; they should place books in their historical and social contexts. They should discuss real issues with students using literature

and the fully realized characters in literature—with their flaws, their possibly objectionable behavior, and their occasional foul language—as a starting point.

### **The Role of Libraries**

How do libraries respond to challenges? Most have written guidelines that set forth their selection criteria. An important, and standard, element of such policies is a statement of principle on intellectual freedom, which declares that the library will strive to provide a diverse collection, representing a broad range of viewpoints on topics of current and historical interest for all users, and will not exclude materials just because they may be controversial or offensive to some people. Another essential element of such policies is the reconsideration procedure for responding to demands that materials be removed or restricted. Under such procedures, the library carefully reviews the materials and weighs them against the criteria in the selection policy. If the materials meet the criteria, they stay. If the complainant is still not satisfied, an appeal to the library board is the next—and final—step.

Censors forget that selection is not endorsement: it is the library doing its job as a neutral provider of information. They also forget that it is possible to have an inoffensive intellectual debate, or a calm and reassuring talk with a child, about offensive material; but to do that, people have to read. And censors often forget that books are precious and wonderful to children, and offer secret places of joy and understanding, the love of which makes lifetime readers. Librarians need visible and vocal defenders of the right to read, and more citizens to step forward and defend parents' rights to decide for themselves, but not for others, what reading material they will choose with and on behalf of their children.

As authors and artists continue to press for social tolerance, librarians will be right there with them, offering the public the opportunity to engage in what many regard as the crowning glory of a free society—  
informed public debate.

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# CENSORSHIP TOO CLOSE TO HOME

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The censorship of sexually related expression may well be the greatest threat to the American system of free speech today, and attacks on sexually related expression are certainly hampering education and the open examination of sexuality. Traditional “decency” forces have found a powerful ally in censorship advocates like writer Andrea Dworkin and law professor Catharine MacKinnon, who claim their work represents *the* feminist position on “pornography.” In fact, however, feminists from all walks of life, with a wide range of perspectives, are trying to dispel the myths that women want censorship, that censorship is good for women, and that supporters of censorship speak for women.

## **New Words, Same Old Censorship**

In the past decade, the “antipornography” arguments of Dworkin and MacKinnon have gathered an intense following among those who would decide for others which sexually oriented expression should be taboo. Dworkin, MacKinnon, and their followers claim that what they call “pornography” (including works by gay men, lesbians, and straight women) is a major cause of discrimination and violence against women, and they demand laws against it. They have drafted legislation for the suppression of sexually related expression in the United States (they continue to advocate their so-called model ordinance, which the U.S. Supreme Court declared unconstitutional in 1986), and they have campaigned for similar laws abroad—notably in Canada and Great Britain. They contend that suppression is the cure for sexism and a vast array of other ills.

Dworkin and MacKinnon have supplied old-fashioned censorship with new rhetorical ammunition. They have popularized words like “degrading” and “dehumanizing” as justifications for suppression, insisting that such words offer a different legal standard than “morality” and help to classify works that are “harmful” to women.

Their rhetoric has been adopted not only by “antipornography” feminists, by those who support legal measures against “hate speech,” and by others who represent themselves as being from the political left. Powerful “morality” groups now use Dworkin and MacKinnon’s words, arguments, and names in their insistence on censorship.

The term “pornography” is ambiguous and contestable—hence my use of quotation marks. The

word is not used in U.S. law, and most legal scholars and critics consider it even vaguer than “obscenity,” a legal concept long infamous for its lack of clarity. (Twenty years ago, the National Coalition Against Censorship, or NCAC, was formed out of common concern by groups and individuals about several U.S. Supreme Court decisions that greatly narrowed First Amendment protection for sexually related expression.<sup>1</sup> “Obscenity” laws have since led to legal actions against owners of theaters, bookstores, and record stores; artists; clerks; and even a museum director.) “Pornography” may ordinarily be used to refer to sexually explicit words and images whose sole purpose is sexual arousal. But it also is frequently the label used to attack expression vital to women.

Throughout this century, many feminists and others have been engaged in various types of sexually related expression, including education, art, literature, political activism, literary criticism, film, historical study, sociology, law, philosophy, and music. They have represented vastly different experiences, interests, and views regarding sexuality and its expressions, including what they themselves or others may celebrate or attack as pornography or erotica. Such materials may be designed, variously, to educate, disgust, entertain, arouse, shock, inspire, and much more. Figures as diverse as Margaret Sanger, Sylvia Plath, Maya Angelou, and Holly Hughes have been attacked because of the sexually related content of their work.

Nevertheless, when Dworkin and MacKinnon are asked whether a particular example of material with sexual content would be considered “pornography”—and hence legally actionable—under their proposed definition, they mockingly call the query a “what-can-I-still-have question.”<sup>2</sup> They seem to think any interest in a sexually explicit work is a suspicious, dangerous, and “deviant” interest, which should be subject to an “official” review. But even the closest of friends can endlessly discuss whether a particular passage or scene dealing with sexuality is valid and has intellectual or artistic integrity, or is seriously exploitative, whether and how it is sexist, what kinds of effects it may have, and different ways it might be looked at or analyzed. But neither in writing nor in speaking do Dworkin and MacKinnon ever refer to a sexually related work that would be legally “acceptable” to them, whether as art, as literature, as education, or for sexual enjoyment.



### Canadian Reality Test

In 1992, the Canadian Supreme Court provided an unusual reality test of MacKinnon and Dworkin's theories. In its decision in an obscenity case (*Donald Victor Butler v. Her Majesty the Queen*), the Court adopted arguments from a legal brief that MacKinnon wrote with two others, and upheld and reinterpreted Canada's obscenity law. The decision said that sexually explicit expression that is "degrading" or "dehumanizing" or that depicts violence is "obscene" and illegal because of the public opinion that it "harms" women. The Court found no evidence of "harm,"<sup>3</sup> but nonetheless claimed to be acting on behalf of women and children.

Dworkin and MacKinnon say that the claim of "harm" is a different justification for censorship from arguments about "morality." They criticize "morality" as the reason for suppressing sexual expression because words like "scurrilous," "disgusting," "indecent," and "immoral," when used to define punishable expression, are sometimes taken to justify the patriarchal view "that women's naked bodies are indecent, sexual displays are immodest, unchaste and impure, homosexuality is repulsive and sex outside of traditional marriage or in other than traditional configurations is a sin." By contrast, MacKinnon suggested to the Canadian Supreme Court, words such as "dehumanizing," "degrading," and "subordinating" offer a definition that will prohibit only material that "harms" women.<sup>4</sup>

Justice John Sopinka used that argument when he wrote in the *Butler* decision: "This type of material would, apparently, fail the community standards test not because it offends against morals but because it is perceived by public opinion to be harmful to society, particularly to women." He continued, quoting approvingly from another case, *Town Cinema Ltd. v. The Queen*: "The most that can be said, I think, is that the public has concluded that exposure to material which degrades the human dimensions of life to a subhuman or merely physical dimension and thereby contributes to a process of *moral* desensitization must be harmful in some way" (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

MacKinnon said of *Butler*: "This makes Canada the first place in the world that says what is obscene is what harms women, not what offends our values."<sup>6</sup> Dworkin commented: "Most obscenity laws are based on a hatred of women's bodies and homophobia; the Canadian law is very different."<sup>7</sup>

But feminists, gay men, lesbians, and artists, among other groups, opposed the decision, and worried about how it would be used. They agreed with Thelma McCormack, director of the Canadian Centre for Feminist Research, when she said, "The *Butler* decision belongs to the Right. The Supreme Court of Canada doesn't give a damn about gender equality. It is concerned about control, and was pleased to have a feminist gloss put on it."<sup>8</sup>

### THE NCAC'S WORKING GROUP ON WOMEN, CENSORSHIP, AND "PORNOGRAPHY"

Members of the NCAC's Working Group on Women, Censorship, and "Pornography" believe that government agencies should not tell women or men how to think or write about their lives, including their sexual lives. The group's members believe that such laws are not good for anybody, and are certainly bad for women. The truth has earned its place in the chronicles of history: in the name of "protecting" women from harm, family planning information has been withheld; important works of art have been removed from display; books about women's bodies, sexuality education, HIV/AIDS, and new models of women's sexuality have been banned.

Every disadvantaged group needs the strongest possible system of free expression to voice grievances and to agitate for change. Anticensorship feminists reject claims that freedom and equality are in opposition and that women must choose between them; justice requires *both*.

The Working Group includes feminist scholars, feminist novelists, poets, musicians, essayists, actresses, bookstore owners, playwrights, screenwriters, editors, journalists, and directors.

Some members are or have been deeply involved in organizations that advocate for women's rights, such as Planned Parenthood, the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, and the National Organization for Women. Feminist sexuality researchers, psychologists, sociologists, historians, and therapists, as well as professors from a wide range of disciplines, including English, African-American studies, and women's studies, are also members. Activists from all over the country belong to the group, as well. Many members have had their work attacked as "pornography."

Despite the Working Group's vastly varied experiences, interests, and views regarding sexuality and its representations, all members oppose censorship for the distinctively feminist reason that it always hurts women.

The Working Group's views are represented in the conference report *The Sex Panic: Women, Censorship, and "Pornography"*. Copies of the report are available for \$2.50 each from the National Coalition Against Censorship, 275 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY, 10001; 212-807-6222.

Since *Butler*, numerous cases have illustrated the sad answer to the oft-asked question about censorship: Who decides? The Canadian government—including the police (through Project Pornography, a joint vice squad of the Toronto and Ontario police departments), Canada Customs, and the courts—has attacked, seized, threatened, fined, and banned a wide variety of feminist, gay, lesbian, and other materials and people involved with these works.

Almost immediately after *Butler*, police targeted a lesbian magazine, *Bad Attitude*; Glad Day, a small lesbian and gay bookstore in Toronto, was successfully prosecuted for carrying an issue of the magazine containing what the court ruled was a “violent,” “degrading,” and “dehumanizing” short story. This was the first post-*Butler* obscenity conviction.<sup>9</sup> In reference to this censorship, Dworkin declared: “Lesbian porn is an expression of self-hatred. . . . When it is trafficked in the world, it becomes a social reality.”<sup>10</sup>

Subsequently, the *Butler* “degrading and dehumanizing” standard was used in a court case that upheld the pre-*Butler* Customs banning of several gay comic books and magazines.<sup>11</sup> The court ruled that the materials were obscene, often only because they involved gay sexual behavior. Catharine MacKinnon, under intense criticism, claimed that the court applied *Butler* incorrectly.<sup>12</sup> But neither court nor cop asked her opinion, and the decision stands. Who decides?

*Butler* has also negatively affected the case of Vancouver’s Little Sisters Book and Art Emporium. This small bookstore is challenging the seizures by Customs of yet more lesbian and gay material. The store’s appeal to the courts had been delayed pending the *Butler* decision, which has now seriously handicapped its legal arguments. The Little Sisters case (which has so far cost the bookstore more than \$80,000 in legal fees) has been repeatedly delayed, and has yet to come to trial.

Since *Butler*, Canada Customs has detained, prohibited, and—as Customs put it—“inadvertently destroyed” a huge number and wide variety of feminist, lesbian, gay, and other works, including some by Susie Bright, Pat Califia, Kathy Acker, David Leavitt, the Marquis de Sade, Charles Bukowski, and Andrea Dworkin.<sup>13</sup>

A certain amount of confusion has surrounded the seizures of shipments of Dworkin’s books. MacKinnon has claimed that Customs officials “encountered” two books by Dworkin, and then “found to their embarrassment within about a week” that the books were not “bad.”<sup>14</sup> But according to notices Customs sent to the Montreal bookstore Le Dernier Mot, the agency detained shipments of Dworkin’s *Woman Hating* and *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, and officially determined them to be prohibited by the “degrading and dehumanizing” standard. Then, approximately three months after the books were shipped (and one week after the case received intense publicity), Customs released them without following any of the

agency’s own reevaluation procedures.<sup>15</sup> Dworkin, MacKinnon, and their followers seem to believe that anticensorship feminists consider this episode nothing but a delicious irony,<sup>16</sup> but they are wrong. This type of attack was inevitable, and feminists who are against censorship deeply oppose it.

Censorship crusaders claim that the widely publicized actions of Canada Customs are unrelated to their *Butler* “victory.”<sup>17</sup> But the Canadian Supreme Court interpreted the criminal code; Customs upholds it. Customs was already using the rhetorical and now popular “degrading and dehumanizing” standard, which Dworkin and MacKinnon say is so important and which *Butler* wrote into law. Customs and, as yet, the Canadian courts, do not deem it necessary to revise or clarify these regulations.<sup>18</sup> *Butler* has encouraged Customs to step up attacks on so-called degrading and dehumanizing material. As feminist theorist Pat Califia has said: “The *Butler* decision says [to Customs] you are not prudes. You are white knights defending womanhood and preventing battery and rape.”<sup>19</sup>

Almost 10 percent of MacKinnon’s recent book *Only Words* is devoted to praise for Canada’s acceptance of her ideology. Yet, in the book, MacKinnon says not a word about the real-life consequences of her Pyrrhic victory. She insists that censorship is the remedy for sexism, racism, and homophobia. Among Canadian writers, readers, activists, and scholars, there is widespread anger at MacKinnon, Dworkin, and their followers. At a 1993 symposium, a lesbian speaker said of censorship campaigners: “You handed them the language they had been looking for, the ‘degrading and dehumanizing’ language, and now they are busting our bookstores.”<sup>20</sup> Well over half of Canadian feminist bookstores have had materials seized by Customs.<sup>21</sup>

MacKinnon and others claim that before *Butler*, Canada’s obscenity law was much easier to “abuse.”<sup>22</sup> But are words like “immoral” and “indecent” more flexible than words like “degrading” and “dehumanizing”?

### On the Homefront

Fortunately, in the United States, this “feminist antipornography” campaign was thwarted in 1986, when the Supreme Court affirmed that the so-called civil rights censorship proposal drafted by Dworkin and MacKinnon, and passed by conservative forces in Indianapolis,<sup>23</sup> violated the First Amendment. In *American Booksellers Association v. Hudnut*, the Court summarily affirmed the Seventh Circuit finding of unconstitutionality—that is, it acted without feeling the need for briefing or oral argument. In an amici curiae brief, a wide range of prominent feminists, including Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, and Adrienne Rich, told the Court they were against the ordinance.<sup>24</sup> Today, many feminists—including members of the NCAC’s Working Group on Women, Censorship, and “Pornography”—continue to fight to get the message out that censorship

always hurts women. It is disturbing that this repressive and untenable legislation is still advocated.<sup>25</sup>

Even though MacKinnon was instrumental in the Canadian *Butler* decision, and Dworkin-MacKinnonites have publicly praised and defended it, Dworkin and MacKinnon naively insist that their U.S. proposal is different. Their "model ordinance" is not an obscenity law, but it amounts to more of the same old censorship demands. Its central elements are as follows:

- another vague definition of "pornography," which begins: "the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through words and/or pictures" and uses undefined terms like "degrading," "dehumanizing," and "harm";
- the designation of "pornography" as sex discrimination (or "harm"); and
- the provision that anyone "harmed" may bring suit against "traffickers" in "pornography."

"Trafficking" may conjure images of drugs and white slavery. But the ordinance would permit suits for civil rights violations against teachers, artists, filmmakers, writers, bookstore owners, and even book and video store clerks, among others (any of whom may be feminists), because they write, create, or make available words or images a plaintiff considers "pornography."

Well-intentioned individuals can learn from the Canadian "experiment." Most people remember, some of the time, that censorship does not only happen to books, it happens to society. Women's equality and liberation require ongoing and unorthodox conceptualization, discussion, and dissent about sexuality and its possibilities. Every disadvantaged group and individual needs the strongest possible system of free expression to voice grievances and to agitate for change. Unfortunately, it often takes a disastrous censorship movement—too close to home—to serve as a reminder of how important it is to constantly guard against those who would restrict rights of expression.

## References

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12. A. Dworkin and C. MacKinnon, "Regarding Canada Customs and Legal Approaches to Pornography," press release, Detroit, Aug. 26, 1994.
13. See, for example, T. Kuwabara, "Customs Detains Another Shipment of Gay Literature," and "Customs Monitor," *Censorship News*, Nov. 17, 1993; and J. Boivin, "Asterix and Tintin Held 93 Days under Suspicion of Obscenity," and "Inadvertently Destroyed: Canada Customs Scores 3 out of 3," press releases, Montreal, 1993.
14. C. MacKinnon, speech to the National Press Club, Nov. 22, 1993.
15. Copies of Customs notices to *Le Dernier Mot* and other relevant documents are on file at NCAC.
16. For example, in a letter from MacKinnon to me (on file at NCAC), she mentions my "clear lack of concern or knowledge about the possible impoundment" of her writings.
17. Dworkin and MacKinnon, "Regarding Canada Customs."
18. The Canadian Criminal Code, subsection 163 (8), prohibits "obscenity." The *Butler* decision upheld this subsection and interpreted it as prohibiting "violent" or "degrading" or "dehumanizing" sexually related expression. Tariff Code 9956 of Schedule 7 of the Canada Customs Tariff prohibits entry of, among other things, materials "deemed to be obscene under subsection 163 (8) of the Criminal Code." Memorandum D9-1-1 is the document Customs uses to explain the meaning of "obscenity" to its officers. It includes the "degrading and dehumanizing" language, which is further clarified in Customs Notice N-198.
19. Kingston, "Canada's New Porn Wars," p. 5.
20. Remarks at the conference "Politics of Desire: Pornography, Erotica, Freedom of Expression," Toronto, Oct. 1, 1993, reported by Leonore Tiefer, psychologist and associate professor at Montefiore Medical Center, New York.
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# ATTACKS ON THE FREEDOM TO LEARN:

## People For the American Way's Report on School Censorship

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In each of the past twelve years, People For the American Way has published a report on challenges to educational materials and programs in the public schools, *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn*. The successive editions of the report have documented a steady rise in censorship activity that reflects an ongoing struggle to redefine education in America. The findings of this year's *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn*, released in late August, demonstrate that the censorship strategy continues to play a central role in the larger effort to undermine public education. The losers in the battles this effort engenders are three: parents, whose children are denied access to ideas and materials because of the ideological and sectarian controversies being generated; teachers, who, increasingly subjected to intimidation and harassment, second-guess themselves and cleanse their classrooms of anything that might be considered controversial; and most important, the schoolchildren themselves, whose access to quality education is invariably diminished by these ideological and sectarian demands. Students are being denied the resources to develop the critical thinking skills necessary to participate and to succeed in an increasingly complex society.

It is well within parents' rights to request an alternative assignment or "opt out" for their child when they find material objectionable. School officials respond positively to such requests when they are reasonable. Requests to remove or restrict materials for *all* students, however—such as *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn* documents—go beyond parental involvement to an infringement on other parents' rights.

In the main, the conflicts taking shape in the public schools today mirror larger societal conflicts. Abortion, gay and lesbian rights, television violence, and funding for the arts are all issues that have lately been played out in the courts, in the media, and at the ballot box. The concerns to which these conflicts speak are some of the most elemental in this nation's history: the scope of free

expression, the place of religion in public life, and the extent to which American culture should foster—or at least acknowledge—diversity. The vital role the public schools will play in determining the future direction of these debates makes them a central target.

### **The Role of Public Schools: Preparing Tomorrow's Citizens**

To date, the generally accepted view of education has been that young people should be challenged intellectually in school, that they should be taught to think critically, to solve problems, and to use their judgment and imagination. Concomitant to this is the belief that as these skills are developed, a respect for the opinions of others should also be fostered.

Many individuals who seek to censor educational materials and programs view public education quite differently—they see it as a vehicle for ensuring ideological conformity. This perspective favors a sectarian and reactionary schooling over one that is based on imagination, critical thinking, and recognition of pluralism. Its proponents want students to be "protected" from books and theories that may challenge a particular set of beliefs and assumptions. In short, they believe that children should be told what to think rather than how to think.

As People For the American Way's report illustrates, objectors—who often are connected to or inspired by one or more religious right political groups—are casting a wider net than ever before in their efforts to redefine public education. [Ed. note: *SIECUS* publications use the term "far right" to describe a broad spectrum of groups and individuals with political or social viewpoints similar to those described here. People For the American Way, however, believes that "religious right" is the most accurate way to describe the groups represented in this report.] While censorship has, over the years, proven to be an effective strategy toward this end, more and more objectors are exploring additional

means of accomplishing their goals. Research is turning up increasing numbers of incidents that, while not outright censorship, share the aim of imposing a measure of religious or political orthodoxy on the classroom—incidents such as the creation of a policy requiring teachers to list all “profane words” that appear in required reading materials, and campaigns to inject organized school prayer into the classroom.

### **The Scope of Challenges**

The battle to define American education is comprehensive and multifaceted. People For the American Way researchers uncovered 462 challenges to educational materials or programs in the 1993–94 school year—375 cases of attempted censorship and 87 broad-based challenges to public education. Efforts to undermine the public schools are taking place in every region of the country, in cities, suburbs, and rural areas. *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn* documents challenges in forty-six states and the District of Columbia. For the second year in a row, California had the most incidents—forty-three. Texas followed, with thirty-two challenges; Florida was third, with twenty-two.

No educational materials were safe from controversy in 1993–94. Attempts were made to censor literature anthologies, biology textbooks, novels, and films used in the classroom; books and magazines available in libraries; material on optional, supplemental, and summer reading lists; school newspapers and literary magazines; self-esteem curricula; student-performed plays; and health and sexuality education curricula. And would-be censors met with remarkable success: in 42 percent of the incidents, books and other materials were removed or restricted.

In addition, challengers at the state and local levels took aim at school reform initiatives, assessment tests, graduation service requirements, and optional counseling services. Many of these groups pressed for school prayer; school choice vouchers, designed to divert public school monies to private education; and fear-based, abstinence-only sexuality education programs.

### **Direct Challenges to Students**

Challenges to school newspapers and the students who staff them are on the rise, with objectors attempting to prevent them from covering controversial issues and school officials frequently trying to soften their criticisms of schools or school policies. School officials have based their authority largely on the Supreme Court’s 1988 decision *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, which permitted a high school principal to ban articles on divorce and teenage pregnancy from the student newspaper. Five states—California, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, and Massachusetts—have passed student freedom of expression bills, giving students broader rights than the *Hazelwood* decision allowed them. But some school officials have interpreted *Hazelwood* as granting them

broad, even unchecked, authority. In some cases, student journalists who have balked at the censorship of the school-sanctioned newspapers have started their own “underground” newspapers, only to find those censored, as well.

Challenges to student theatrical productions met with an alarming measure of success in 1993–94. Objectors challenged seven student productions and succeeded in having three canceled (a student lip sync show, *Peter Pan*, and *Bats in the Belfry*) and one edited (*The Robber Bridegroom*). Challenges to productions of *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Damn Yankees*, and *Agatha Christie Made Me Do It* were unsuccessful.

### **Corollaries and “Alternatives” to Censorship**

An alarming new trend emerged in 1992–93: across the country, educators were harassed and in some cases terminated in the wake of challenges to educational materials. This past year, that trend escalated. In more and more cases, activists requesting the removal of materials added a second demand: remove the teacher, as well. For the most part, school officials and school boards stood by their staffs. In some instances, however, teachers became convenient scapegoats and were sacrificed in the face of potent pressure tactics. For example, in Mifflinburg, Pennsylvania, an anonymous complaint calling the claymation film *The Amazing Mr. Bickford* “pornographic” ultimately led to a high school English teacher’s suspension without pay.

Another disturbing trend that has taken shape over the last few years involves responding to complaints about library materials by reclassifying books into different sections of the collection—to professional shelves, reserved sections, or otherwise less-accessible areas. Often, the books are transferred to sections that are obscure, or less likely to be freely accessed by students. In Laurens, South Carolina, for instance, following complaints that the book *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* has a “devil’s theme,” the title was removed from the general collection of an elementary school library and placed on a reserve shelf for teachers only. Such reclassifications signal a reluctance on the part of the schools to take a strong and vocal stand against censorship. Often, this reluctance is the result of increased pressure tactics.

### **Explosion of Broad-based Challenges**

The number of broad-based challenges, in which organizations or individuals applied ideological or sectarian-based pressure on the public schools without necessarily calling for the removal of specific curricular materials, roughly doubled in 1993–94, to eighty-seven. Also remarkable—and, indeed, unprecedented—is the range of materials and activities that came under scrutiny: among other activities, groups mounted campaigns against school reform, attacked state assessment tests, and helped lead an energized school prayer movement.

**The Attack on School Reform.** Most religious right political groups continue to challenge a wide array of educational reforms, including Goals 2000 and outcome-based education. Redesigning education around high standards for student performance is at the heart of school reform, and it has been endorsed by such prominent groups as the Business Roundtable, the National Governors' Association, and the Education Commission of the States. However, outcome-based education has encountered organized and bitter opposition from a number of state and national political organizations. Activists representing these groups travel across the country as part of an intense campaign to thwart adoption of this school reform. In doing so, they use an array of vague charges and distortions while advancing a series of conspiracy theories.

The battle over outcome-based education has expanded to include federal legislation establishing the Goals 2000 program, which sets national voluntary standards and encourages local districts to involve parents and the community, including businesses, in the development of standards for local schools. Religious right political leaders have widely mischaracterized Goals 2000, omitting important information and exploiting parents' anxieties about their children's future.

Religious right political groups have used the hot-button phrase "outcome-based education" as an organizing and fund-raising tool in their broader campaign to take control of America's public schools. They have been so successful that the debate on outcome-based education has yet to focus on outcome-based education; it has instead focused on opponents' erroneous descriptions of outcome-based education. The facts have been lost in the rhetoric.

**Statewide Testing.** Another area of broad-based challenges involves organized efforts to scuttle California's new statewide testing system. After the Traditional Values Coalition, a California-based religious right political group, complained that Alice Walker's short story "Roselily" was "antireligious," state education officials removed the story from a pool of literature available for use in the 1994 California Learning Assessment System (CLAS), a statewide achievement examination to be administered to tenth graders. Also pulled, in a separate decision by the state board of education, were Walker's "Am I Blue?," which challengers had labeled "anti-meat-eating," and an excerpt from Annie Dillard's *An American Childhood*, for a depiction of a snowball fight challengers saw as "violent."

Controversy over the stories, which were ultimately reinstated, turned out to be only the first step in a well-organized campaign against the test—a campaign that employed the rhetoric and strategies used to cripple other education reform initiatives. Although the test was upheld in court, a number of districts voted not to administer CLAS because of the controversy.

**School Prayer.** With the legal and organizing assistance of prominent religious right groups, the school prayer movement made a comeback across the nation during the 1993–94 school year. The issue was ignited in part by the suspension of a Jackson, Mississippi, high school principal who disregarded school district counsel's legal advice and allowed a student to read a prayer over the school's public address system.

Much of the pressure for organized school prayer has been focused at the local level, on school board members and superintendents. By distorting court rulings, religious right groups have sought to pressure school districts into adopting policies that are at odds with the Constitution. On the legislative front, meanwhile, school prayer bills made progress in ten states and the District of Columbia in 1993–94. In addition, the U.S. Congress grappled with the issue as debate over two major education bills was sidetracked by prayer amendments proposed by Sen. Jesse Helms (R.-NC).

The clashes over prayer in the schools involve many of the same issues as attacks on library and classroom materials. In both cases, religious and ideological pressures are brought to bear on school systems, diverting them from their primary tasks of educating children. Often, those who oppose school prayer, like those who support challenged books, are falsely accused of being antireligious or atheistic. Yet, mainstream clergy are attempting to shift the focus of this debate, mounting an increasingly vocal effort to keep organized prayer out of the schools. Their perspective is that government officials should not be editing or approving the content of prayers and that children should not be pressured to participate in religious observances at odds with their own faith.

### **The Lesson of Censorship**

Denying students the educational tools they need to think about and to deal with the complexity of today's society does them an extreme disservice. Perhaps the greater disservice, however, involves the message such action sends to students about their own freedoms. As books and curricula are removed and restricted throughout the nation's schools, children lose the opportunity to learn important lessons. However, the one lesson they do learn—the unfortunate lesson—is that censorship is an appropriate response to controversial ideas.

For more information, a copy of *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn*, or assistance in fighting censorship, or to report censorship in your community, contact People For the American Way, 2000 M Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC, 20036; 202-467-4999.

# TUG-OF-WAR:

## Public Policy and Sexuality in the Media

**Betsy L. Wacker**

Director of Public Policy, SIECUS

**Daniel Daley**

Director, DC Policy Office, SIECUS

In the 1990s, the term “the media” describes an increasingly diverse and complex telecommunications industry. Along with the newspaper, magazine, radio, network television, and film industries, it includes cable and independent television stations, videocassettes, and music videos. In addition, the age of the “information superhighway”—which provides vast information and communications outlets through endless bulletin boards, on-line capabilities, and interactive CD-ROM—is just dawning.

In their roles as entertainer, portraitist, and educator for America, the media naturally have touched upon sexuality, and have drawn great attention—both praise and criticism—for their dealings with the issue. Given this backdrop, SIECUS encourages the media to present sexuality as a positive aspect of the total human experience, at all stages of the life cycle, and believes that the media have a responsibility to present matters related to sexuality with accuracy, without exploitation, and with sensitivity to diversity (see SIECUS position statement on page 9). For those who share this perspective, the media have fallen short in most of their dealings and have been resistant in the remainder. However, the media have also been a disappointment for people who are opposed to an open discussion of sexuality; these individuals view the media as prime agents for communicating sexual permissiveness and as responsible for America’s moral decline. Indeed, in a time when the far right has declared a “cultural war,” the media are a key battlefield, and often reflect the primary battleground—public policy.

### **Is TV the Guide to Sexuality?**

By the time American adolescents finish high school, they will have spent more time watching television than doing anything else except sleeping.<sup>1</sup> An adolescent in the mid-1980s could encounter as many as 2,400 sexual references on television in a year,<sup>2</sup> and an untold number of sexual messages in music, movies, and magazines. By the age of eighteen, the average teenager has viewed approximately 350,000 commercials.<sup>3</sup> The sexual content of soap operas popular with adolescents increased 103 percent in the first

half of the 1980s;<sup>4</sup> one can only speculate as to the number of references to sexuality in the mid-1990s.

Most young people look to their parents as their most important source of information about sexuality: according to a 1994 poll, three-quarters of teenagers have talked to their parents about sexuality.<sup>5</sup> Friends are the second most important source, school courses rank third, and television is fourth. However, this is not to say that parents are having lengthy discussions about sexuality with their teenage children or providing all the information young people need. Research yields clear indications that parents are uneasy when it comes to addressing topics like intercourse, masturbation, homosexuality, and orgasm.<sup>6</sup> In fact, more than two-thirds of young people first learn about sexuality from their schools or the media, rather than their parents.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, with both parents often in the work force and single-parent households commonplace, interaction with parents averages only twelve hours a week,<sup>8</sup> making television more accessible than parents for many young people.

### **Changing the Channel to Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

Because TV is a “total disclosure medium,”<sup>9</sup> some young people may not have the experiential or cognitive skills to absorb all that they see on the screen in a meaningful or mature way. Presentation of material in school-based sexuality education, by contrast, is age-appropriate and sequential; unfortunately, however, school-based sexuality education is not as widespread as sexual messages in the media. While forty-seven states either recommend or require sexuality education,<sup>10</sup> only 72 percent of teenagers report that they have ever participated in any sexuality education classes, and only 5 percent report having had a sexuality education class every year they have been in school.<sup>11</sup> Very few state guidelines include any sexual behavior topic other than abstinence, or such pressing topics as sexual identity and orientation, abortion, and sexuality and religion.<sup>12</sup> Information from the late 1980s (the most recent data available) showed that sexuality

education programs average only five hours of instruction on birth control and six hours on sexually transmitted diseases between grades 7 and 12, and that a large proportion of sexuality education teachers feel constrained with regard to what information they can present in these classes.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Messages Young People Get from TV**

The absence of sufficient sexuality information is particularly troublesome in light of the recent finding that teenagers feel greater pressure from the media to engage in sexual activity than from partners and other peers.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, mass media frequently reinforce gender-typed perceptions of women and men, perpetuating restrictive and outmoded images.<sup>15</sup> This not only influences gender-role identification, but apparently creates a sexist bias in young people's "occupational knowledge," leading to the continuation of pink-collar categories for women and entrepreneurial positions for men.<sup>16</sup> Studies of prime-time television have shown that the message communicated by action, adventure, and music videos is that heterosexual behavior is often associated with power and violence, and infrequently occurs in the context of committed or loving relationships or as "an expression of mutual affection."<sup>17</sup>

### **Media as a Mirror**

If one role of the media is to provide messages about sexuality, it should come as no surprise that a tug-of-war over media censorship policy reflects the changing American society and the policies that govern it. As early as the 1920s, religious groups had begun to accuse Hollywood of lowering the nation's moral standards, and by 1934, the Production Code of Ethics was in place, banning the portrayal of premarital sexual activity and encouraging marriage in films well into the 1950s.<sup>18</sup> The impact of this standard went beyond the film industry and affected the fledgling medium of television, as well.

However, during the late 1960s, the type of information about sexuality issues that the media presented to adults and youth alike began to change. During the 1970s, television and movies began to have characters explore sexuality-related issues (touching on gender stereotypes and reproductive rights,<sup>19</sup> and on homosexuality<sup>20</sup>). In the 1980s, Washington began to send a message that such discussions were not in line with the values that the federal government wished to espouse—values that took shape in public policy as the Adolescent Family Life Act, or the "Chastity Act"; the antiabortion legislation dubbed the "gag rule"; and relative silence on the issue of HIV/AIDS. Feminist social commentator Susan Faludi points out how the media of the 1980s displayed a return to earlier societal structure—women were put back "in their place" or disappeared from the scene altogether, and men returned to positions of power.<sup>21</sup>

### **The News Desk Breaks the Barrier**

During the 1990s, the rules regarding the coverage of sexuality-related issues have developed into a complex set of considerations. On network television, news programs have the greatest freedom to present these issues, presumably because they can fairly present differing opinions on the issues and, as a matter of integrity, are obliged to provide accurate information and correct terminology. Following news programs in terms of freedom, television talk shows also explore sexuality-related topics with a degree of openness and explicitness. However, these programs often highlight relatively uncommon sexual behaviors, leaving a huge body of sexual information unrecognized or unexplored.

Indeed, news stories touching on sexual issues—such as the Clarence Thomas hearings, the Navy's Tailhook investigation, gay men and lesbians in the military, the William Kennedy Smith rape trial, and the Bobbitt mutilation case—have pushed forth explicit discussion in the media, policy circles, and the public. The toll of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is so enormous that previously unmentionable issues of prevention strategies and sexual behaviors have had to be discussed in public forums—including the televisions in American living rooms. The plethora of sexuality-related news stories has permitted the networks' prime-time entertainment divisions to test new ground on popular shows: some have allowed female characters to ponder their reproductive rights, albeit generally without mentioning abortion, and others have let it be known that certain characters are gay or lesbian. In advertising, although contraception is still taboo, the America Responds to AIDS campaign has finally stated in public service announcements that consistent and correct condom use reduces the risk of contracting HIV.

However, other news stories coming from Washington reveal a different perspective. Again, conservative policy makers have sounded an alarm that American morality is off track and that a "cultural war" is going on in America. In 1992, then Vice President Dan Quayle criticized the "cultural elite" and labeled the fictional TV character Murphy Brown a poor moral example because she was single and having a baby. And in 1994, as a key component of welfare reform, President Bill Clinton has embraced this theme of reprimanding unmarried women who bear children. In education policy considerations for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act this year, Rep. Jon Doolittle (R.-CA) tried to set content standards for sexuality education programs, and Rep. Melton Hancock (R.-MO) and Sens. Jesse Helms (R.-NC) and Bob Smith (R.-NH) tried to prohibit any positive portrayals of gay men and lesbians in school programs. SIECUS fears that the message media programmers will take from these efforts is that they should continue to avoid presenting any affirmation of sexuality in its many and varied forms.



## Censorship versus Ratings

Television, with its Department of Broadcast Standards and Practices, and the film industry, bowing to the Office of Classification and Rating Administration of the Motion Picture Association of America, clearly have policies dictating what sexual content they will permit in their products. But these policies appear to be mutable—taking into account a complex matrix of financial, demographic, and public interest issues for the final decision of what can be communicated. Revenue leads the consideration, and as one media watcher stated, “Money is always conservative.”<sup>22</sup> Organizations such as the Traditional Values Coalition and the American Family Association have learned that the threat of financial sanctions, particularly at the local level, can be effective tools to pressure networks and sponsors into pulling sexuality-related pieces from programs.

## Creating Media-literate Consumers

As was best said by a nationally regarded children’s television personality, Mr. (Fred) Rogers, “That which is human is mentionable. That which is mentionable is manageable.” The media can help Americans come to terms with sexuality by presenting a rich tapestry of diverse and positive sexual images and messages.

A media-literate public will be able to distinguish the substantive messages about sexuality from the gratuitous use of sexual images. Such media literacy involves learning skills that provide awareness of the way in which persuasion, fear, racism, homophobia, sexism, and classism are linked to messages about sexuality. Doing this will enable people to construct a balanced and healthy view of sexuality in all stages of life. If the responsibility for quality programming lies with the media, then the responsibility for perceptive viewing lies with the public.

## Winning the “Sweeps” by Holding Our Ground

If advocates for sexuality education are not to lose the advances made over the last twenty years—and are to reclaim lost ground and make progress toward assuring accurate, diverse presentations of sexuality issues in the media—they will probably have to return to the grass roots. They will need to let the media know when sexuality-related topics have been covered well, and when these topics have been covered poorly or not at all. The future of media coverage of sexuality-related issues, and of sexuality education, will likely be determined by the efforts of those who are most dedicated to seeing their version of sexuality on the television—and in the classroom.

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## ● LETTERS FROM READERS ●

### To the Editor:

I was thrilled to see the article "Updating the Model of Female Sexuality," by Rebecca Chalker [*SIECUS Report*, June/July 1994]. I have been conducting physiological research with women since 1979 and have published numerous studies in this area since 1981; thus my keen interest in this article. I believe that everyone has the right to present information from a unique perspective, as Chalker does, and she makes many valid and interesting points. My concern is that much of the recent research is not included, and some information given is incorrect.

The section "Reconstructing the Model" might have included data from a study I conducted with Gina Ogden and Barry R. Komisaruk showing that some women can achieve orgasm from imagery alone, without touching their body,<sup>1</sup> although they have been told that what they have experienced is not an orgasm. In addition to Naomi McCormick's forthcoming book, *Sexual Salvation: Affirming Women's Sexual Rights and Pleasures* (which I have been interviewed for and have discussed with her, but have not read), I would recommend including Ogden's *Women Who Love Sex*, which also integrates the total experience of women's sexuality.

In the section "The Ghost of the G Spot," Chalker states that the idea of the G spot "is not anatomically correct," and then defines it as a "distinct body of erectile tissue, *corpus spongiosum*." I would like to see the anatomical and ultrasound studies to support this. Recent reports from France and Slovakia<sup>2</sup> concerning this area focus on different tissue. John D. Perry and I<sup>3</sup> proposed a second reflex pathway involved in sexual response. I am not aware of any research about nerve pathways conducted and published by Alice K. Ladas and John D. Perry, as Chalker cites.

In the section "The Backlash against Orgasm," the author states that "there are few physical reasons, short of paraplegia... that prevent women from having one or more orgasms." As part of a study funded by the National Institutes of Health, Barry Komisaruk and I have documented that women with complete spinal cord injury do indeed experience the physiological components of orgasm in response to vaginal, cervical, or

hypersensitive area self-stimulation. The data confirm the numerous anecdotal and subjective published reports that women with spinal cord injury experience orgasm. We have published on the neurophysiology of genital stimulation in laboratory animals, and our data on women will be published soon.<sup>4</sup>

Since Chalker's chapter in the *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Orgasm* follows one of the chapters Komisaruk and I coauthored for that publication, she must be familiar with our definition of orgasm and the fact that G spot stimulation is not always necessary for female ejaculation to occur.<sup>5</sup>

Please accept these comments in the positive manner I intend them. There is still much that we do not know or understand about women's sexuality, and we have to be open to hearing what women report is pleasurable to them. We have to investigate and provide data to support women's experiences, and not try to put women into a monolithic pattern of having only one sexual response. Women are all unique individuals, and as unique individuals, they have the ability to respond sexually in many ways. I have always tried to listen to the experiences of women and find ways to document their experiences in the laboratory, and I am thrilled that others are also providing information about women's sexuality.

Beverly Whipple, Ph.D., R.N., F.A.A.N.  
Associate Professor,  
College of Nursing, Rutgers,  
The State University of New Jersey

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### Rebecca Chalker Replies:

"Updating the Model of Human Sexuality" was not intended to be a survey of research on women's sexuality. In the limited space available, it was intended as an analysis of the male model, and to identify broad areas of research that have been downplayed, considered inconsequential, or generally ignored under this model. Had my article been a survey, I would definitely have mentioned Beverly Whipple and Barry Komisaruk's recent work on orgasm, Gina Ogden's *Women Who Love Sex*, Shere Hite's revealing surveys, Nancy Friday's *Women on Top*, and the discrete body of other researchers' work specifically focused on women's sexuality.

As a result of an unfortunate editing error, Dr. Whipple's name was dropped from the text at reference 34. One can clearly see from the references that it was intended to be included.

Anatomists have long ignored the finer points of women's sexual anatomy. The work of Mary Jane Sherfey, the Federation of Feminist Women's Health Centers, and Josephine Lowndes Sevely has greatly enhanced our understanding of women's sexual anatomy and the tissue surrounding the female urethra. Grafenberg himself noted that the female urethra "seems to be surrounded by erectile tissue like the corpora cavernosa [of the penis]."<sup>1</sup> I find these descriptions more satisfying than the idea of a "spot" or an "area" near the urethra. Yet, I too would like to see anatomical and ultrasound studies of this tissue, as well as the studies from France and Slovakia that Dr. Whipple refers to. And I look forward to Whipple and Komisaruk's upcoming studies on orgasm in paraplegics.

I am indeed familiar with Whipple and Komisaruk's definition of orgasm—it is quite a broad definition, encompassing the varied experiences that women have reported. Perhaps to be clearer, my article should have said that women may be frustrated to find that stimulation of the "G spot" does not necessarily trigger ejaculation or orgasm.

Beverly Whipple is one of the preeminent researchers in women's sexuality, and I look forward to further discussions and debates as we evolve our model of human sexuality.

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## NEW FEATURE

The *SIECUS Report* welcomes letters from readers and will publish them as space permits. Letters should be double-spaced and should include the author's professional title and affiliation, address, and telephone number; those accepted for publication may be edited or abridged. Please address all correspondence to Dore Hollander, Editor, *SIECUS Report*, 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 2500, New York, NY 10036. Let us hear from you.

## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Following is a schedule of themes for upcoming issues of the *SIECUS Report*. If you are interested in submitting an article, a related book or video review, or a critical analysis of the issues, send a draft manuscript, double-spaced, to Dore Hollander, Editor, *SIECUS Report*, 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 2500, New York, NY 10036. (Detailed instructions for authors appear on the inside back cover of this issue.)

### **Race, Class, and Sexuality**

February/March 1995

*Deadline for final copy:*

*December 1, 1994*

### **Meeting the Needs of People with Developmental Disabilities**

April/May 1995

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### **Adolescent Sexuality and Sexual Health**

August/September 1995

*Deadline for final copy:*

*June 1, 1995*

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## SEX & SENSIBILITY

Marcia Pally

Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1994, 198 pp., \$11.00

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Do sexual, violent, or "demeaning" images cause rape, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, violence, and social injustice? Will banning those images keep children pure, reverse social decay, and protect our daughters from victimization? These questions are profoundly disturbing to American families, feminists, politicians, and religious communities.

In *Sex & Sensibility*, Marcia Pally asks the hard questions about image, impulse, and the urge to censor, in a democratic country. And she answers them in a cogent, thorough, and ultimately, for this reader, persuasive manner.

Pally disputes the assumption that the images are the source of society's problems by inundating the reader with statistics from and critical assessments of study after study. She exposes the flawed research and reasoning used by those who proclaim that the images are the source of society's woes and seek to justify censorship of speech and image as the cure.

For instance, within the first four pages of the chapter "Minors and Media Minotaurs: Sexual Material, Rock and Rap," Pally cites no fewer than nine studies conducted between 1983 and 1991 assessing the impact on children of sexual material in films, TV shows, or music. All of the research yields similar findings: Little evidence suggests that exposure to sexual images is harmful. Membership in a delinquent peer group, alcohol abuse, and physical abuse in the home—but not exposure to sexual material—appear to be significant causes of adolescent criminal behavior.

Pally goes on to tackle the emotionally charged controversy surrounding violence in the media. A vocal portion of the public now believes that banishing the image of violence will banish the act. Pally points out, however, that the national homicide rate peaked in the 1930s—when there was no TV to blame—and again between 1979 and 1981. Yet, other industrialized countries with high TV viewing rates have homicide rates far lower than the United

States. Pally proceeds to cite studies indicating that family violence, physical discipline, and nonsupervision (leading to "heavy TV viewing"), along with basic personality traits, cause violence among youth. Later, she states: "If public policy fails to address parental neglect, TV labeling will be of little consequence" (p. 142).

Control of what images a person sees, Pally argues, is a matter of choice that is properly exercised by the individual. "Parents have the right and the tedious responsibility to judge art, entertainment, and even trash for themselves and their families. . . . Like most hypocrisies, restrictions on media are empty flattery. They create the illusion of virtue, when one is relying on the 'virtue' of others" (p. 87).

Addressing feminist alliances formed to enact laws that curtail expression, in the name of protecting women from "victimization," Pally cautions that such restrictions may result in feminists' own loss of freedom of expression, and not effect any real benefit for female "victims." Fundamentally, in her view, the appeal does not protect women from victimization, but continues to reduce and divide women on the basis of their sexuality.

Ultimately, Pally contends, censorship "purges society of books, movies, and music, leaving hate, racism, sexism, drug abuse, poverty and violence flourishing as they did before the printing press and movie camera. It flatters a nation into thinking it has done something to better life while it ignores what might be done" (p. 153).

*Reviewed by Barbara Fast, attorney, adjunct professor, Quinnipiac College School of Law.*

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## SEXUALITY AND THE SACRED: SOURCES FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow, Editors  
Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994, 406 pp., \$24.95

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Sexuality from a theological perspective is the topic of this long-awaited and comprehensive book of readings suitable for religious study in seminary and nonsectarian settings. The

collection's five parts cover methods and sources, sexuality and spirituality, gender and orientation, ethical issues, and sexual orientation as an ecclesiastical issue.

The editors, James B. Nelson, a professor of Christian ethics at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, and Sandra P. Longfellow, a graduate of the seminary and theological writer and editor, have compiled selections that reflect the evolution occurring in the Christian understanding of sexuality—from act-centered to relationship-centered, focusing on equity and mutuality. In their definition, sexuality is "who we are as . . . persons embodied with biological femaleness or maleness and with internalized understandings of what these genders mean"; it includes both procreative capacity and "the divine invitation to find our destinies not in loneliness but in deep connection" (p. xiv).

Drawing on scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, the authors represented here—seventeen women and eleven men, most of whom are higher education faculty from the United States and elsewhere—frame compelling arguments to dispel the myth that all those with strong religious beliefs view sexuality as sin or perversion. Underlying these thirty-four essays are a broad definition of sexuality and a view that sexuality is part of spirituality, not a separate or inferior dimension, as in traditional dualistic perspectives.

In defining the book's philosophical stance, the editors note that they have included both the essentialist and the social constructivist perspectives. The former holds that "meanings are not entirely relative; there *is* something 'given' in our sexuality" (p. 5)—namely, "the divinely given energy for connection" (p. xvii). The latter includes the belief that sexuality is subject to socially constructed meanings, which change over time. Stressing mutable meanings rather than static, act-centered standards implies that reconstruction *can* occur; its hoped-for direction will be toward more just, more life-giving sexual meanings. For theologian Carter Heyward, this means that society should "offer basic conditions of human worth and self-respect to all people, regardless of sexual preference" (p. 12). Social ethicist Marvin Ellison proposes that sexual ethics be based on justice—not on gen-

der, marital status, or sexual orientation. A standard of justice, Ellison contends, rules out any act or relationship in which persons are abused, violated, or exploited (p. 231).

Most of these articles date from the early 1980s or later. Three exceptions—the contributions of Margaret Farley (1978), Paul Ricoeur (1964), and Janie Gustafson (1978)—remain relevant. A fourth—by Penelope Washbourn (1977), referring to medical research from 1967 and 1973 on hormone replacement therapy—is outdated.

Despite minor flaws (the inclusion of the Washbourn article and the exclusion of such topics as childhood sexuality, reproductive technology, and bisexuality), *Sexuality and the Sacred* is a very useful and scholarly volume. It allows strong religious emphasis to coexist with, even undergird, a positive view of sexual health. The justice-based ethical perspective, the view of sexual relationships defined by relationality rather than by form or acts, and fine theological writing, in which the authors take firm stands on the issues they address, make this collection an outstanding contribution to the literature in both sexuality and theology. The book contains no index, but the chapter notes will be invaluable for those pursuing further study in any of the areas covered. *Sexuality and the Sacred* is a comprehensive basic resource for exploring sexual ethics from a theological perspective.

*Reviewed by Sarah C. Conklin, doctoral candidate, Human Sexuality Education Program at the University of Pennsylvania.*

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**DOING SEX EDUCATION:  
GENDER POLITICS AND SCHOOLING**

Bonnie Nelson Trudell  
New York: Routledge, 1993, 237 pp.,  
\$47.50

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One day I hope to teach method courses to future sexuality educators. The syllabus will indicate the course outline, paper requirements, examination dates, and—most important—the required text, *Doing Sex Education: Gender Politics and Schooling*. This book is invaluable for both current and future sexuality educators, school administrators, and other individuals interested in sexuality education.

*Doing Sex Education* takes the reader to a high school in a small, predominantly conservative midwestern

town. There, the ninth-grade health and physical education class is studying its four-week sexuality unit, which has followed units on nutrition and physical fitness. In a fairly traditional classroom setting, the teacher presents information through handouts, notes on the blackboard, or lecture. However, the focus is not simply on what is taught or the teaching method. The author, Bonnie Nelson Trudell, examines the classroom experience of both students and teacher, and explores the cultural dimensions that affect students' sexual knowledge. On the basis of interviews with students, she also compares what is taught with what the students actually learn from the classroom instruction.

Trudell finds that the overriding factor influencing students' motivation and interest is not the course content or the teacher, but their knowledge of the amount of effort needed to obtain a passing grade. The interviews further reveal that gender, cultural identification, class, and messages outside the classroom affect students' interpretation of the material. Given her findings, Trudell recommends that educators carefully assess school and community norms and student characteristics when considering both course content and teaching method.

What I appreciated most about this book were the examples presented to illustrate the challenge of teaching sexuality education; in other works on this topic, the classroom experience is often overlooked in favor of a focus on controversies surrounding program implementation. Trudell points out, however, that the program she observed constituted only one-tenth of the year's health education curriculum, and that its scope was so broad, certain topics were "just touched on." She also discusses "defensive teaching," the practice of teaching only the less-controversial topics, such as pregnancy and childbirth, and avoiding such value-laden subjects as homosexuality, masturbation, and sexual pleasure. Many educators use this approach in the belief it will protect them from critical scrutiny by school and community groups. Trudell points out that some aspects of teaching sexuality education are difficult to explain to prospective educators because they are arbitrary and unplanned, and require contact with students—indeed, many future teachers are completely frustrated not by teaching a new lesson, but by the capricious behavior of fourteen-year-old students. Unfortunately, while Trudell portrays the teacher's experience accu-

ately, she devotes limited discussion to possible solutions to the problems associated with teaching sexuality education.

The population Trudell studied and the research and analysis she documents in *Doing Sex Education* illustrate a typical sexuality education classroom in the United States. Students received factual information on sexuality and reproduction from a predominantly heterosexual perspective. The class gave students little opportunity to clarify values, discuss controversial topics, or develop decision-making skills. Although some schools offer more to their students than do others, many students attend a class similar to this one. The material presented in this book emphasizes the formidable challenges that still confront the planning and implementation of effective school sexuality education programs. *Doing Sex Education* should be required reading for anyone in the profession.

*Reviewed by Marsha Florio, sexuality educator and master's candidate, Human Sexuality Education Program, University of Pennsylvania.*

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**THE SEXUALITY EDUCATION  
CHALLENGE: PROMOTING HEALTHY  
SEXUALITY IN YOUNG PEOPLE**

Edited by Judy C. Drolet and Kay Clark  
Santa Cruz, CA: ETR Associates, 1994,  
681 pp., \$39.95

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Sexuality education is often identified with schools or with "pregnancy prevention" agencies such as Planned Parenthood. One of the values of *The Sexuality Education Challenge* is that it broadens the where, how, when, and why of sexuality education. It also properly characterizes sexuality as a "challenge." The contributors to this compendium, a wide variety of writers, researchers, and clinicians, represent diverse approaches to education.

This resource is ideal for several populations. Institutions that prepare teachers should require students to read *The Sexuality Education Challenge* as an introduction to the entire field, and to theory and practical suggestions for teaching. The chapters on sexuality education in school settings—including explanations for such controversial issues as abstinence-only versus abstinence-based curricula and community support strategies for teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS education, as well as resources for supporting and implementing a program—will be especially helpful for individuals studying to be

sexuality educators and program administrators. The section "What Educators Need," in which several writers discuss preparation and qualifications necessary for a good educator, will guide administrators in hiring or assigning personnel.

This collection presents a range of theoretical considerations and is especially rich as a guide to practical application. All chapters include specific recommendations or actions that educators, administrators, or supporters of sexuality education might implement. One chapter presents a model for training teachers to develop skills in dealing with both content and affect in sexuality. A discussion of the "challenges to sexuality education in the schools" outlines ten steps toward meeting those challenges. Several writers present suggestions for effective teaching for people of all ages, from *preschool* through adulthood. The recommendations on working with communities and parents is not only very readable, but beneficial for even experienced educators to pon-

der. I would have liked to see more material on mentoring new educators in the field and ideas for working with colleagues, though this may be extrapolated from the chapters on "communities and partnerships."

The strengths of this compendium are many. For the most part, authors cite recent research to support their contentions. The references, which are invaluable, represent the forefront of thinking and practice. Three of the thirty-three chapters address diversity; unfortunately, in the other thirty chapters, the vastness of cultural, physical, and other diversities is not represented. Prospective teachers (and many experienced teachers) will find answers to some typical challenges teachers face—for example, a detailed rationale for including a slang desensitization activity for teachers and high school students; and a discussion on how to respond to one question adolescents invariably ask—What do you think about abortion?

The introductory overview incorporates a history of sexuality education and, maybe more important, a theoretical review of the field over time; a look at perceptions of the field; a summary of the politics and policies; and an examination of the challenges schools face in the nineties. The last three chapters answer my professional concern about the evaluation of programs, asserting that effectiveness can and should be assessed; in a simple and direct way, the authors describe the various forms evaluation may take and explain how every teacher can be involved.

In short, *The Sexuality Education Challenge* is a much needed resource in the field.

*Reviewed by Konstance McCaffree, Ph.D., faculty, Human Sexuality Program, University of Pennsylvania, and sexuality educator, Council Rock High School, Newtown, PA. Dr. McCaffree is a member of the SIECUS Board of Directors.*

## **PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SUPPORTS COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

On June 14, 1994, the 206th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) approved a resolution supporting K-12 comprehensive sexuality education. The resolution reads as follows:

WHEREAS, . . . sexuality education is a positive factor in preventing unintended pregnancies and the need for abortion; and,

WHEREAS, Christian sexuality education should first be done within the family; and,

WHEREAS, the church can support and train parents and other custodial adults, youth directors, and clergy in this important task; and,

WHEREAS, the church can provide programs that teach and model Christian life; and,

WHEREAS, the church can also provide and support, within the larger community, programs that encourage healthy relationships in all families; and,

WHEREAS, . . . the public schools are also an appropriate setting for educating students about sexuality as an important part of human growth and development, especially when that education is not available in the home or church; and,

WHEREAS, the Presbyterian Church (USA) feels strongly that the public education system should include quality sexuality education as a component of any human growth and development curriculum beginning in the elementary grades; . . .

LET IT THEREFORE BE RESOLVED, that the 206th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) support the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the Surgeon General in planning and implementing comprehensive school health education that includes age and developmentally appropriate sexuality education in all grades as a part of human growth and development curriculum for youth;

AND call upon state legislatures to require that all schools provide comprehensive K-12 human growth and development education that is complete, factual, accurate, free of bias, and does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, national origin, ancestry, creed, pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, or physical, mental, emotional, or learning disability.

# GROWING UP

## A SIECUS Annotated Bibliography of Books about Sexuality for Children and Adolescents

As children grow, some of the most important things they learn have to do with their sense of a sexual self. Sexuality begins at birth, and children are constantly learning, by observing, by experiencing, and by being taught, what it is to be male or female. Sexuality is a natural and healthy part of living, and SIECUS affirms that parents, peers, schools, religion, the media, friends, and partners all influence learning about sexuality for people at every stage of life. However, conflicting, incomplete, or inaccurate messages are often received, and this can cause confusion.

The books included in this bibliography discuss sexuality in relation to the whole person, including an individual's thoughts, experiences, knowledge, ideas, and values from birth through late adolescence. The annotations should assist the reader in deciding which resources will be useful and age-appropriate for the growing individual. Because each young person is unique, age categories should be used as a guideline only. Parents and teachers are encouraged to read these books before recommending them to children.

If the listed resources are not available in your local bookstore, the bookstore may be able to order them for you. Or you may contact the publisher directly. The publisher's address and phone number are provided after each listing.

Please note that SIECUS does not sell or distribute any of the listed publications, other than SIECUS publications. However, most of the materials are available for use at the SIECUS Mary S. Calderone Library.

Copies of this bibliography can be purchased from the SIECUS Publications Department at the following rates: 1-4 copies, \$2.00 each; 5-49 copies, \$1.75 each; 50-99 copies, \$1.50 each; 100 or more copies, \$1.25 each. SIECUS is located at 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 2500, New York, NY 10036; 212-819-9770.

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### AGES 0-5

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#### **DID THE SUN SHINE BEFORE YOU WERE BORN?**

*Sol Gordon*

Intended to be read aloud to small children, this book focuses on the family from the conception to the birth of a new baby. Charcoal sketches depict a variety of family situations. 1992, 40 pp., \$7.95.

*Prometheus Books, 700 East Amherst Street, Buffalo, NY 14215; 800-853-7545.*

#### **BABY BRENDON'S BUSY DAY: A SEXUALITY PRIMER**

*Donna A. Jennings*

Using rhyming text and color illustrations, this book labels parts of the body, including the genitals; identifies stages of infant development; depicts family affection; and presents mothers and fathers as equal caregivers for children. It includes a foreword and introduction to help guide parents in their role as the primary sexuality educators of their children. A companion book about girls, *Baby Brenda's Busy Day*, is in production. 1993, 30 pp., \$15.95 plus postage and handling.

*Goose Pond Publishing, PO Box 14602, Tallahassee, FL 32317; 904-385-6659.*

#### **WHERE DID I COME FROM?**

*Peter Mayle*

Using humor and bright illustrations, this book explains reproduction in ways that young children can understand. It includes discussion of anatomy, intercourse, orgasm, fertilization, pregnancy, and birth. 1973, 43 pp., \$8.95.

*Carol Publishing Group, 120 Enterprise Avenue, Secaucus, NJ 07094; 201-866-0490.*

#### **BELLYBUTTONS ARE NAVELS**

*Mark Schoen*

Intended to help parents create a relaxed environment for the comfortable discussion of sexuality, this colorful book will help adults to initiate and guide matter-of-fact, accurate discussions about anatomy. 1990, 44 pp., \$14.95.

*Prometheus Books, 700 East Amherst Street, Buffalo, NY 14215; 800-853-7545.*

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### AGES 5-8

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#### **A KID'S FIRST BOOK ABOUT SEX**

*Joanti Blank*

With an emphasis on self-esteem and body image, this illustrated book covers "the other parts of sex besides making babies." It discusses body parts; sexual

feelings, behaviors, and orientation; and the pleasures of sexual and personal relationships with other people. 1983, 48 pp., \$6.00.

*Yes Press, 938 Howard Street, #101, San Francisco, CA 94103; 415-974-8985.*

#### **WHERE DO BABIES COME FROM?**

*Susan Meredith*

This comprehensive book presents information in an easy-to-read and colorful format. Topics include fertilization, pregnancy, and the effects of having a new baby in the family. This book is particularly good for a child who is expecting a new sibling. The book includes an index. 1991, 23 pp., \$3.95.

*EDC Publishing, 10302 East 55th Place, Tulsa, OK 74146; 918-622-4522.*

#### **LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX AND LOVING**

*Gail Jones Sanchez*

This book, designed to be read to children, provides information about gender differences, puberty, intercourse, reproduction, masturbation, slang words, sexual abuse, adoption, and love. Asterisks in the text highlight opportunities for discussion. The book includes a foreword to parents, glossary, bibliography, and list of helpful organizations. 1994, 69 pp., \$9.95.

*Empty Nest Press, PO Box 361842, Milpitas, CA 95035; 408-946-5757.*

## HOW BABIES AND FAMILIES ARE MADE

Patricia Schaffer

In a clear manner, this illustrated book covers reproduction and discusses the variety of ways in which babies can be conceived and families can be formed. In addition, it discusses the changing composition of families in today's world. 1988, 52 pp., \$6.95.  
*Tabor Sarah Books, 3345 Stockton Place, Palo Alto, CA 94303; 415-494-7846.*

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### AGES 9-12

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## ASKING ABOUT SEX AND GROWING UP

Joanna Cole

Using a question-and-answer format, this book offers scientific facts and practical guidance about puberty, masturbation, intercourse, pregnancy, sexual abuse, and STDs. 1988, 90 pp., \$4.95.  
*Morrow Junior Books, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019; 800-237-0657.*

## PERIOD

JoAnn Gardner-Loulan, Bonnie Lopez, and Marcia Quackenbush

Written for females approaching puberty, this book discusses physical changes and gynecologic care, placing special emphasis on the physical and emotional significance of menstruation. The chapter "Pads, Pins or Tampons?" discusses the pros and cons of the different products on the market. Illustrations and personal stories—"It seems like sometimes when I'm about to menstruate, I get an urge to reorganize shelves, closets, books. And I have a really good time doing it."—bring humor to the discussion. The book includes a removable parents' guide.  
*Also available in Spanish.*

1991, 98 pp., \$9.95.

*Volcano Press, PO Box 270, Volcano, CA 95689; 209-296-3445.*

## IT'S PERFECTLY NORMAL: GROWING UP, CHANGING BODIES, SEX AND SEXUAL HEALTH

Robie H. Harris

Accurate information about sexuality is presented in a reader-friendly style that includes age-appropriate illustrations and humor. From conception and puberty to contraception and HIV/AIDS, this book covers both the biological and the psychological aspects of sexuality. Intended for ages ten and up, this book is also appropriate for

12-14-year-olds. 1994, 87 pp., \$19.95.  
*Candlewick Press, 2067 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02140; 617-661-0565.*

## SEX STUFF FOR KIDS 7-17

Carole Marsh

In a straightforward and, where appropriate, humorous manner, the author provides factual information about puberty, feelings, dating, contraception, STDs, pregnancy, peer relationships, and sexual violence. 1994, 94 pp., \$14.95.

*Gallopade Publishing Group, 359 Milledge Avenue, #100, Atlanta, GA 30312; 404-370-0420.*

## WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?

Peter Mayle

While dated, this book humorously addresses everyday concerns about puberty in a question-and-answer format with cartoon illustrations. Questions about masturbation, pimples, and breasts are a few of those answered. The questions are introduced by a basic explanation of how our bodies work. 1975, 50 pp., \$8.95.

*Carol Publishing Group, 120 Enterprise Avenue, Secaucus, NJ 07094; 201-866-0490.*

## UNDERSTANDING THE FACTS OF LIFE

Susan Meredith and Robin Gee

This two-volume set, consisting of *Growing Up* and *Babies* (also available separately), is packed with information about puberty and reproduction. It features color illustrations, a glossary (including slang terms), and a comprehensive index. 1987, 96 pp., \$12.95.  
*EDC Publishing, 10302 East 55th Place, Tulsa, OK 74146; 918-622-4522.*

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### AGES 12-15

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## LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

Sam Gitchel and Lorri Foster

Intended to develop better communication between parents and children about sexuality, this book includes facts and activities that will encourage dialogue about values and sexuality. It is divided into two sections: one for parents, the other for children.

*Also available in Spanish.*

1994, 61 pp., \$5.95.

*Planned Parenthood of Central California, 255 North Fulton, Suite 106, Fresno, CA 93701; 209-488-4917.*

## FACTS ABOUT SEX FOR TODAY'S YOUTH

Sol Gordon

This illustrated book discusses sexual anatomy, reproduction, love, and sexual problems. It also provides answers to common questions young people ask about sexuality and definitions of slang terms. 1985, 45 pp., \$7.95.

*Prometheus Books, 700 East Amherst Street, Buffalo, NY 14215; 800-853-7545.*

## WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MY BODY?: FOR GIRLS

Lynda Madaras

This book on female physical development encourages young women to explore, understand, and accept their bodies. Topics covered include male puberty, reproduction, masturbation, sexual orientation, gynecologic concerns, sexual violence, and STDs. There is also a chapter called "Romantic and Sexual Feelings." The book includes an index and bibliography. 1988, 269 pp., \$9.95.

*Newmarket Press, 18 East 48th Street, New York, NY 10017; 212-832-3575.*

## MY BODY, MY SELF

Lynda Madaras and Area Madaras

This companion workbook to *What's Happening to My Body?: For Girls* addresses the feelings that go along with a changing body and provides activities and feedback about how to deal with these feelings. The mother-daughter team writes about female development during puberty in an honest manner in language appropriate for teenagers. A similar companion workbook to *What's Happening to My Body?: For Boys* is due out by the summer of 1995. 1993, 118 pp., \$9.95.

*Newmarket Press, 18 East 48th Street, New York, NY 10017; 212-832-3575.*

## WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MY BODY?: FOR BOYS

Lynda Madaras

This book covers the physical changes of puberty for boys, including ejaculation, orgasm, erections, masturbation, and wet dreams. It also discusses female puberty, reproduction, contraception, sexual orientation, male health concerns, sexual violence, and STDs. Like the similar book for girls, it includes a chapter called "Romantic and Sexual Feelings" and provides an index and bibliography. 1988, 251 pp., \$9.95.  
*Newmarket Press, 18 East 48th Street, New York, NY 10017; 212-832-3575.*



### 500 QUESTIONS KIDS ASK ABOUT SEX (AND SOME OF THE ANSWERS)

Frances Younger

The author has taken 500 of the most frequently asked questions about sexuality from a variety of age groups and answered them in an honest and clear manner. This book not only provides youngsters with the information they want, but also serves as an excellent reference for sexuality educators. 1992, 205 pp., \$32.95 plus \$5.50 postage and handling.

Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 2600 South First Street, Springfield, IL 62794-9265; 217-789-8980.

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### AGES 15-18

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#### YOUNG, GAY AND PROUD

Sasba Alyson, Editor

This volume addresses challenges concerning gay youth. It discusses coming out to parents and friends, sexuality and health care, and finding support groups, and includes personal stories. A revised version is due out in early 1995. 1985, 93 pp., \$4.00.

Alyson Publications, 40 Plympton Street, Boston, MA 02118; 617-542-5679.

#### CHANGING BODIES, CHANGING LIVES

Ruth Bell

This book offers information that adolescents need to be sexually healthy, both emotionally and physically, to take good care of themselves, and to have control over their lives. It includes information on contraception; STDs, including HIV/AIDS; suicide; relationships; masturbation; sexual orientation; pregnancy; rape; and communication with parents and friends. 1988, 254 pp., \$18. Random House, 400 Hahn Road, Westminster, MD 21157; 800-733-3000.

#### HOW SEX WORKS

Elizabeth Fenwick and Richard Walker

This illustrated book covers changes during puberty, dating and relationships, sexual activity, contraception, STDs, and sexual violence and consent. It also provides references for teenagers who need further information. 1994, 96 pp., \$14.95.

Dorling Kindersley Publishing, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016; 212-213-4800.

#### BE SMART ABOUT SEX

Jean Fiedler and Hal Fiedler

Written in an easy-to-understand, question-and-answer format, this book includes discussion of the changes that take place during the early teenage years, sexual decision making, responsible sexuality, STDs, alcohol and other drugs, and safer sex practices. 1990, 128 pp., \$17.95.

Enslow Publishers, PO Box 777, Hillside, NJ 07205; 908-964-4116.

#### TWO TEENAGERS IN 20: WRITINGS BY GAY AND LESBIAN YOUTH

Ann Heron, Editor

Forty-three young people tell how they have come to terms with being gay or lesbian youth, and describe their decisions as to when, if, and how they should tell their friends and parents, as well as the consequences of their decisions. This is a revised version of the 1983 collection *One Teenager in Ten*; some of the essays are from the original book. 1994, 200 pp., \$17.95.

Alyson Publications, 40 Plympton Street, Boston, MA 02118; 617-542-5679.

#### SEX EDUCATION FOR PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED YOUTH

C. Edmund Hopper and William A. Allen

While dated, this informative book, written for youth with disabilities who are reaching maturity and are seeking information about sexuality, covers sexual fantasies, masturbation, homosexuality, dating, reproduction, birth control, STDs, and drug use. 1980, 154 pp., \$21.25.

Charles Thomas Publishers, 2600 South First Street, Springfield, IL 62794-9265; 217-789-8980.

#### SEX AND SENSE

Gary F. Kelly

The author dispels many myths about sexuality and emphasizes the explorations and examination of adolescent sexual and emotional development. The text stresses communication, being well informed, and clarifying one's values before making sexual decisions, and helps adolescents examine what it means to be a sexual person. 1993, 256 pp., \$7.95.

Barrons Educational Series, PO Box 8040, Hauppauge, NY 11788; 800-257-5729.

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### OTHER RESOURCES

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#### CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE EDUCATION, PREVENTION, AND TREATMENT: A SIECUS ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF AVAILABLE PRINT MATERIALS

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States

This bibliography identifies resources for children, adolescents, parents, and professionals on the prevention of child sexual abuse. The materials listed present sexuality in a positive context and include books, curricula, and a listing of organizations. 1990, 7 pp., \$2.00.

Publications Department, SIECUS, 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 2500, New York, NY 10036; 212-819-9770.

#### HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEXUALITY AND OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES: A SIECUS ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR PARENTS

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States

This bibliography lists recommended resources to help parents discuss with their children such topics as anatomy, sexual behavior, puberty, relationships, pregnancy, and STDs. Resources include books, organizations, and pamphlets. 1994, 3 pp., \$2.00.

Publications Department, SIECUS, 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 2500, New York, NY 10036; 212-819-9770.

#### TALK ABOUT SEX

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States

This booklet provides young people with information and communication tips to enable them to make responsible decisions about themselves and their sexuality. It includes a list of toll-free hot line numbers. Elizabeth Winship, syndicated author of "Dear Beth," writes, "Talk about Sex is just what is needed. Short, snappy, accurate, illustrated, and readable, it is perfect for teenagers." 1992, 46 pp., \$2.00.

Publications Department, SIECUS, 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 2500, New York, NY 10036; 212-819-9770.

*This bibliography was prepared by Shelly Masur, SIECUS intern, and Shelley Ross, library assistant.*