

## SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY The Relevance of Eastern Traditions

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In recent years, the age-old association of sex with Adam and Eve's original sin in the Garden of Eden has lost its meaning as individuals increasingly accept sexual desire and pleasure as a natural good. Social turmoil, technological changes, increasing recognition of personal needs, and a sexual revolution have wrecked havoc with the meaning and relevance of the traditional Judeo-Christian sexual images, icons, and myths of the purpose of sex, monogamy and male primacy over female.

Because cultures draw their life blood from their myths and archetypes, human beings are searching for new myths and archetypes.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Americans in particular are increasingly fascinated by the more sex-positive images of Eastern sexual philosophies. This article outlines two major Eastern sexual and spiritual traditions, Tantrism and Taoism, within the context of Hinduism and other religions and philosophies. After contrasting these Eastern views with Western values, some practical applications that complement Western sexology are discussed.

### Eastern Sources

Even when the hidden roots of Eastern sexual traditions can be detected, they are found to be far more tangled than the origins of sexual values in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Archaeologists have found 8,000-year-old clay images of feminine power and fertility in the pre-Indus settlements on the north-west edge of India. Similar early expressions of a great Goddess who guarantees fertility have been found, with her subordinate male consort, in regions of ancient Egypt, the Aegean, the Danube, Asia Minor, and western Asia. Between 1800 and 1500 BC, waves of migrating Indo-Aryan people moved from eastern Europe, over the mountains, and into the Indus valley of western India. Their worship of a great Goddess intermingled with the fertility religions of pre-Aryan inhabitants they conquered in the Indus River valleys.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Historian Karl Jaspers calls this the pre-Axial

period of human consciousness.<sup>6</sup> In this context, Jaspers is using the term Axial to mean turning point.

According to Jaspers and others, this striking transformation in human consciousness occurred in China, India, Persia, the Middle East, and Greece with the advent of Confucius, Lao Tzu, Buddha, Zoroaster, the Jewish prophets, and the pioneering philosophers of Greece. This opened the first Axial period. Everywhere male consciousness and power gained ascendancy over the female principle. In Christianity and Islam, phallic power virtually subdued the power of the female, except for the veneration of Mary, the Virgin Mother of God. After a male God gave man dominion over nature in Eden and ancient Greece gave priority to analysis and objectification, nature became Western man's toy to control and exploit. Although feminine images of sexual power persisted in the East, they were subordinated to the phallogocentric male. But unlike the West, Eastern cultures maintained a respect for nature, emphasizing that health and spirituality are only achieved when humanity respects its place in the cosmos and places itself in harmony with nature.<sup>5,6</sup>

### Hinduism

In India, the amalgam of pre-Aryan fertility religions with the emerging dominance of male consciousness produced Hinduism, a generic term for the traditional religion of India. Hinduism encompasses a wide range of seemingly contradictory beliefs, including reincarnation or transmigration of souls, atheism, and a pantheon of gods and goddesses who symbolize the many attributes of an indescribable supreme principle or being. Hinduism embraces both monistic and dualistic beliefs, and contains many popular local deities and cults. Thus it is not a religion in the same sense Westerners use that term to refer to a system of clear beliefs about a personal God and a spiritual world apart from this material world.<sup>7</sup>

The ideal life of a Hindu male embraces a wide

spectrum of roles, from the student of religion to the householder who produces a son to carry on ancestral tradition, and from the hermit who tries to achieve indifference to everything in the world he previously found desirable to the homeless wanderer who renounces all earthly ties. Passing through these four stages is the *Way of Knowledge*, an expression that denotes the spiritual path, which leads to spiritual union with the Infinite. Along the Way of Knowledge, a Hindu male can pursue four goals: *kama* (sexual love), *artha* (power and material gain), *dharma* (spiritual duty), and *moksha* (liberation).<sup>2</sup> The first two goals deal with desire, the last two extol duty and renunciation. Typical of Axial thinking, Hindu sacred texts explain the paths of desire only from a male viewpoint, as if desire, pleasure, and power play no role in the lives of women whose primary activities are childrearing and household duties.

This mix of desire and duty in Hinduism allows a strong tradition of sexual abstinence by celibate monks to coexist with an equally strong religious celebration of sexual pleasure in all its forms as a path to the Divine. While sexual abstinence is favored at certain stages, Hindu sexual asceticism complements the celebration of sexual desire and pleasure, unlike Christian sexual asceticism, which is rooted in the need for redemption from original sin. Most Hindus, even the ascetics and monks, view sex as something natural, to be enjoyed in moderation without repression or overindulgence.

Hindu sacred writings, devotional poetry, and annual festivals celebrate married love, the fidelity of women, and the religious power of sexual union. Hindu myths of gods and goddesses are symbolic of spiritual powers and energies within and the daily challenges of life faced by all human beings. While monotheistic Western cultures tend to objectify and personalize their God, Eastern cultures view their mythologies as psychological and metaphysical metaphors that reveal the miraculous and natural wonders of human life and its desires.

Mythology provides a key to Hindu sexual views. *Brahma*, the Creator, *Vishnu*, the Preserver, and *Shiva*, the cosmic dancer of the cycle of destruction and rebirth form the basic triad of gods in the Hindu pantheon. Hindu sexual values are expressed in images and rituals associated with Shiva and his consort, the goddess *Shakti*. Shakti has several images, appearing as *Parvati*, the gracious embodiment of sensuality and sexual delights, as *Durga*, the unapproachable, and as *Kali*, the black wild one, the helpful, awesome goddess of sex's transcendent powers.<sup>2a</sup> The *lingam*, a stone or wood phallus, represents Shiva and the concentration of sexual energy by asceticism. Triangular stone sculptures of the *yoni* represent Shakti and the vulva. Mystical geometric patterns called *yantras* combine the circular lingam with triangular yoni. Used in meditation, yantras reflect the belief that sexual practices can be a way of balancing the male and female energies of one's body and experiencing cosmic unity. The worship of lingam and yoni, of Shiva and Shakti, are a regular part of public

and household rituals. *Kama*, the Hindu god of love, is also believed to be present during all acts of love. He represents love and pleasure, both sensual and aesthetic. His wife, *Rati*, is the embodiment of sensual love.

Hindu scriptures include hundreds of treatises on the art of eroticism, allegedly written by the gods and sages. Only three of these manuals, the *Kama Sutra*, *Kama Shashtra*, and *Ananga Ranga*, have been translated into English. The *Kama Sutra* (second century

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*"...Eastern cultures maintained a respect for nature, emphasizing that health and spirituality are only achieved when humanity respects its place in the cosmos and places itself in harmony with nature."*

BC) discusses the spiritual aspects of sexuality, with advice on positions and techniques for increasing the sensual enjoyment of sexual intercourse. The beautifully illustrated *Ananga Ranga* or *The Theater of God* (15th century AD) describes the sexual organs and erogenous areas of men and women, the cycles of erotic passion, and an encyclopedia of lovemaking positions. This spiritual tradition of erotic love appears in temple art depicting *mithuna*, loving couples in sexual embrace. Such sculptures reached their peak in the sensitive, emotionally warm, and intensely spiritual bas-reliefs celebrating all forms of sexual behavior (except adultery and violence) that cover the 1,000-year-old "love-temples" of Khajuraho and Konarak.<sup>9,10</sup>

### **Taoist Sexual Traditions**

In their quest for spiritual and physical health, including longevity and immortality, the Chinese traditionally turned to Taoism, which originated from the teachings of the sixth century BC philosopher Lao-Tzu.<sup>7</sup> Taoism views nature and spirit as interdependent and mutually sustaining. Tao is "the Way," the "eternally nameless" path followed by the wise, the ever-changing rhythmic source of life, and living in harmony with all things. Taoism advocates a life of simplicity, integration, cooperation, and selflessness, and has no formal dogma or church. It does not recommend asceticism or reject natural desires or cravings. It recommends self-cultivation, healthy living, and the fuller enjoyment of both earthly and heavenly joys.<sup>2,11,12</sup> Harmony in one's sexual desires, passions, and joys is a natural and important aspect of health. Sexuality is considered part of nature and is not associated with any kind of sin or moral guilt. In fact, lovers joined in ecstasy can experience a transcendent union with the cosmos.<sup>13</sup>

Some Taoists have sought the secret of longevity in an alchemical formula. Others have sought longevity by bringing the body and soul into a perfect, harmonious balance,<sup>11,12</sup> or by transforming the male or female essence into the "Elixir of Life."<sup>14</sup>

Taoist sexual traditions emphasize the importance of female satisfaction in all sexual relations. It talks of "a thousand loving thrusts," and the importance of non-genital touch for both the woman and the man.<sup>11</sup> In order to increase the enjoyment of sexual intercourse for both women and men, Taoist exercises help a man gain control over his ejaculation, with simple but sophisticated versions of the Sensate Focus, Stop and Go, and Squeeze Exercises popularized 2,000 years later by Masters and Johnson for treatment of premature ejaculation and inhibited female arousal and orgasm.<sup>11</sup> Taoism teaches that men cannot experience true sexual ecstasy unless they develop the ability to control their ejaculation.

This emphasis on male ejaculation is often misinterpreted. It is not the same as coitus reservatus (withdrawal followed by ejaculation) or the "male continence" practiced by the members of the Oneida Community in the 1800s to prevent unwanted pregnancies. It is not the same as the passive lovemaking of *karezza*, an ancient technique for prolonging sexual intercourse without ejaculation, popularized by Marie Stopes in her 1920s best seller *Married Love*.

Taoism also emphasizes the difference between male orgasm and ejaculation, a distinction rediscovered by modern sexologists. According to Taoism, men deplete their energy when they are driven to ejaculate too frequently. Specific Taoist exercises can enable a man to pleasure his partner and enjoy several "non-explosive" orgasms prior to ejaculation.<sup>13</sup>

The early Taoist traditions recognized the greater capacity of women for sexual pleasure and their vital role in introducing men to the treasures of sexual pleasure and ecstasy. But this mutual, harmonious concern for female and male pleasure did not last. In the Han Dynasty (206-219 BC), male interests began to dominate as Taoist exercises were converted into techniques that focused on men's pleasure, including intercourse with virgins and with numerous women in order to become immortal. Women became the foot-bound pleasure toys of men in the T'ang Dynasty (618-906 AD). During the Manchu Dynasty (1644-1912 AD), the egalitarian Taoist sexual philosophy practically disappeared in male obsessions.<sup>12,13</sup>

For guidance in the customs and proprieties of society and public life, the Chinese looked to the teachings of Confucius (551-479 BC). Early Confucian thought was quite sex-positive. Only in the last thousand years of imperial rule did Confucianism adopt a negative view of sexuality.

Both Taoism and Confucianism appear to have borrowed the basic idea of two vital energies, Yin and Yang, from earlier Chinese who lived centuries before Confucius and Lao-Tzu. Everything stems from the dynamic interaction of *Yin* and *Yang*.<sup>15</sup>

The polarity of Yin/Yang energies is very different from the body-soul opposition that underlies Western thought. Western thought maintains a very clear split between the body and spirit or soul. In Christian thought, salvation and redemption are achieved by subjugation of the body and its passions to reason and to the spiritual soul. In both Taoism and Confucianism, the vital energies of Yin (earth, dark, receptive, female) and Yang (heaven, light, penetrating, male) are complementary rather than opposing aspects of nature. The challenge of life is to achieve a healthy, dynamic balance between these two energies.<sup>8,12,13</sup>

Since both Yin and Yang coexist in every man and woman, in different proportions, everyone can

cultivate, balance, and unite their psychosomatic energies. In sexual play Yin and Yang are aroused and can be channeled from the lower levels to the heart and head. According to some modern interpreters, this can be done in self-pleasuring, and in both heterosexual and homosexual relations.<sup>11,13,16</sup>

Some Taoist masters recommend that a male release his semen according to seasonal changes and infrequently, for example, only two or three times out of ten instances of intercourse, in order to direct and transform the vital life energies. Similarly, women are taught to use proper breathing exercises and meditation as ways of circulating and transforming their Yin energy. The mutual exchange of Yin and Yang essences in intercourse and orgasm is believed to produce perfect harmony, increase vigor, and bring long life.

### Tantric Sexual Traditions

Some suggest that Tantric sexual traditions were derived from ancient Chinese Taoism, or that Taoist sexuality was derived from Tantra.<sup>13,14,17,18</sup> Others believe that the earliest Tantric traditions predate Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism and that they were derived from the pre-Aryan religion of Indus Valley natives and religious symbols brought from paleolithic Europe by the Indo-Aryan invaders about 1800 BC.<sup>19</sup> Whatever their origins, Tantric ideas are found in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Taoist writings in Nepal, Tibet, China, Japan, Thailand, and Indonesia.<sup>2,19</sup>

Over the centuries, the ecstatic, and at times orgiastic, cults inspired by Tantric visions of cosmic sexuality were attacked by ascetic Hindus and Buddhists, denounced by the invading Muslims, opposed by the British colonial government in India, and outlawed by the Chinese communists.

Tantra is a Sanskrit word meaning "thread" or "continuity." Tantra involves active ways of transforming one's perceptions and energies that plunge one back into the roots of personal identity to nakedly experience the truth and reality of oneself and the world. Tantric rituals are kept highly secret, and require severe discipline and every kind of physical, sexual, mental, and moral effort. Instead of recommending abstinence from the pleasures of life as celibate asceticism in other religious traditions do, Tantra cultivates the realization of an ultimate bliss in order to experience awareness of the true nature of reality, beyond all dualistic conceptions. In Philip Rawson's modern wording, Tantra urges its practitioners to "Raise your enjoyment to its highest power and then use it as a spiritual rocket-fuel."<sup>4</sup> The original Tantras use a cryptic "twilight" language difficult to understand. Some modern books on Tantra such as *Sexual Secrets* by Nik Douglas and Penny Slinger are filled with such symbolic terms, while other writers such as Mantak Chia mix traditional with Western terms to more clearly elucidate the meaning of esoteric terminology.<sup>11,17,20</sup>

### Tantric Sexuality

*The ancient teachers...talked about remaining desireless in the height of sexual arousal. They mean that in lovemaking both men and women are typically filled with an agenda of desires — for orgasm, for release, for possessing the beloved. They carry in their minds images of these goals, aim for them, and in this way are incapable of directing their total attention to what is happening in the present moment. Remaining desireless at the height of passion, you are not concerned with the next moment. You have no thought of the future. You are then capable of directly feeling and enjoying all the erotic sensations that are happening to you in the present, while simultaneously remaining slightly aloof as a neutral observer. This "witnessing" becomes possible only when you remain focused on the unfolding love play. You do not know where it is taking you, what will happen, or when it will end. You do not imagine, anticipate, or direct the show. You simply wait, watch, observe, and "ride" the energy. This is the ultimate discipline, the highest meditation.*

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### Hindu Tantric Doctrine (Shaktism)

In Hinduism, Tantric rituals became associated with the worship of Shakti, Shiva's consort. Hindu Tantra reached its most profound external expression in the "love temples" of northeastern India (700-1100 AD).<sup>7,9,10</sup> Right-handed Shaktism is a refined philosophy that focuses on the benign side of Shakti as the energy of nature and mother-goddess. Left-handed Shaktism focuses on Durga and Kali, the violent side of Shakti, and sweeps one into conventionally forbidden expressions of natural impulses to achieve transcendence. Ritual violation of social taboos against adultery and incest, and coitus for otherwise celibate monks, are an important part of these left-handed Tantric rites.<sup>2,19</sup> In Victor Turner's social dialectics of structure-antistructure, Tantric taboo-breaking (anti-structure) rituals may play a vital role in maintaining the flexibility, dynamism, and creativity of a social structure or culture.<sup>21</sup>

Participants in the *Rite of the Five Essences*, a Tantric love ritual, for instance, use the five forbidden *Ms*: *madya* (wine), *mansa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mudra* (parched grain), and *matihuna* (sexual union) in a kind of holy communion.<sup>2</sup> It includes enhancement of the environment with flowers, incense, music, and candlelight, a period of meditation designed to hasten the ascent of the vital energies of the kundalini (see below), the chanting of a mantra, and the couple's visualization of themselves as an embodiment of Shiva and Shakti, the supreme couple.

**A Verse from THE UPANISHADS**  
(8th? — 5th? Century B.C.E.)

The Golden God, the Self, the immortal Swan  
leaves the small nest of the body, goes where He wants.  
He moves through the realm of dreams; makes numberless forms;  
delights in sex; eats, drinks, laughs with His friends;  
frightens Himself with scenes of heart-chilling terror.  
But He is not attached to anything that He sees;  
and after He has wandered in the realms of dream and awakeness,  
has tasted pleasures and experienced good and evil,  
He returns to the blissful state from which He began.  
As a fish swims forward to one riverbank then the other,  
Self alternates between awakeness and dreaming.  
As an eagle, weary from long flight, folds its wings,  
gliding down to its nest, Self hurries to the realm  
of dreamless sleep, free of desires, fear, pain.  
As a man in sexual union with his beloved  
is unaware of anything outside or inside,  
so a man in union with Self knows nothing, wants nothing,  
has found his heart's fulfillment and is free of sorrow.

From the book *The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred Poetry*,  
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**Buddhist Tantric Doctrine**

In Buddhism, Tantra refers to a series of teachings delivered to humans by the Buddha. According to Buddhist Tantra, the most effective means of awakening to the true nature of reality is not by intellectual pursuits, but by experiencing the state of voidness and bliss through one's own body and mind. The Buddhist Tantrik controls his/her body and its psychic powers to attain Buddhahood by coming face to face with the elemental forces of the world and transcending the desires aroused by them.

In Tibetan Buddhism, devotion to male and female deities stresses the interaction of external and internal energies.<sup>4</sup> *Yabyum* is the Tibetan term for the mystical experience of oneness and wholeness men and women can achieve through sexual intercourse.<sup>22</sup> In mystical sexual union, the male and female principles are combined in an experience that resolves all dualities and reflects the union of wisdom and compassion. Because all natural forces and the deity are a union of male and female elements, the highest and most harmonious energies are experienced in such unions as the realization of the inherent luminosity and emptiness of all phenomena.<sup>22</sup>

**Tantra and Yoga**

The system known as yoga was first mentioned in the Hindu *Upanishads* (cighth?-fifth? century BC). Yoga, literally translated from the Sanskrit as "union," means being aware without thinking. It is the silence of the mind that is broken by trying to tell another person

what one experienced in a yoga meditation/exercise.

Yoga is a highly evolved technique of meditation and concentration for disciplining mind and body and purifying the senses from their bondage to limiting concepts. Yoga combines physiological and psychological methods, which involve postures, breathing, and in some cases the rhythmical repetition of proper sound-syllables or *mantras* that suppress the conscious movement of the mind in body.<sup>23</sup> When the whole body is disciplined to aid the gradual suspension of consciousness, one can experience a state of pure ecstasy that is without thought or sensation. In this ecstasy, the yoga practitioner may use ritual, devotion, meditation, the intellect, or physical pleasure to find a complete freeing of the true self from the external world and natural causation.<sup>24</sup>

Both early Tantra and Taoism adopted yogic exercises to gain access to the spiritual through physical pleasure and discipline. The central concept in sexual yoga is a physiology which conceives of the body as interconnected by many channels, or *nadis*, that are conduits for energy. Two main channels run along either side of the spinal column, connecting power centers known as *chakras*, which correspond to the Taoist *tan tien*, located between the loins and throat. The third conduit, the *susumna*, runs from its base in the perineal region to the crown chakra. The *kundalini*, named for the goddess Kali, is the powerful but latent energy source that lies coiled like a serpent at the lowest chakra. The kundalini is also believed to represent Shakti, the feminine aspect of the creative

force, the serpent power or mystical fire in the subtle body. The aim of sexual yoga is to arouse the kundalini or serpent power and channel it upward.<sup>25</sup> Once aroused, the kundalini can be channeled upward through the seven chakras of the subtle body until it merges with the eternal Shiva to confer freedom and immortality. By redirecting the body's most basic and vital generative energies of semen and ovum to the brain, the yoga practitioner hopes to gain spiritual energy, cosmic consciousness, and salvation, the experience of real self completely freed from earthly bonds and joined with all reality.<sup>24</sup>

In developing the idea of kundalini energy, the Tantriks and Taoists may have adopted earlier Persian ideas, using meditation, breathing control, postures, and finger pressure to prolong sexual intercourse without ejaculation. In the process, they added the goal of transforming and circulating the sexual energy upward in the body and in exchanges with a partner, thereby extending the enjoyment of many orgasms without ejaculation.

Orgasm and ejaculation are two distinct processes and can occur apart or together. William Hartman and Marilyn Fithian, for instance, report that men are capable of experiencing multiple orgasms as long as they do not ejaculate.<sup>26</sup> While most Tantric teachers urge males to avoid ejaculation at all times, Taoist teachers place more emphasis on gaining control of ejaculation rather than eliminating it altogether.<sup>11,13</sup>

The IKung of Africa, Sufi mystics, and ancient and contemporary practitioners of yoga, Tantra, and Taoism, have cultivated the awakening of kundalini energy. Descriptions of these experiences bear intriguing similarities to reports of spontaneous experiences of Christian mystics and secular contemporaries. Strange as these reports sound in terms of Western physiology, their consistency and persistence over thousands of years deserve serious attention from Western scientists. There are hints in the preliminary research of neurophysicist and author Itzhak Bentov and psychiatrist Lee Sannella that a serious clinical and experimental investigation of the kundalini experience

## Taoist Sexuality

*The following is a portion of an interview with a 43-year-old Ovarian Kung Fu practitioner and movement teacher, which was conducted by Michael Winn, a Taoist teacher.*

**Question:** How long have you been practicing Ovarian Kung Fu?

**Answer:** For three years.

**Question:** Did you find the techniques difficult to learn?

**Answer:** I found them easy to learn, especially since from the very beginning the benefits were so immediately obvious. I was motivated to practice, but it did require a certain amount of time to completely embody them and make them a part of my life.

**Question:** Did you learn them alone or with a partner?

**Answer:** Initially I practiced alone having just ended a relationship. I immediately found they empowered me with control of my own sexual energy, and rediscovered sexuality as a resource for cultivating myself.

**Question:** What do you mean by resource?

**Answer:** In the sense that the Taoists speak of cultivating one's nature, refining energy for personal and spiritual development, with sexual energy being one raw material from which that refinement is accomplished. I actually had the experience of being able to direct my sexual energy within my body, and watch it transform my body and my emotions.

**Question:** What happens with the sexual energy when you are not interacting and making love?

**Answer:** When I first began doing Ovarian Breathing, I discovered immediately that I could move the sexual energy easily from my genitals throughout my whole body. It's very simple, but very powerful. I can increase my ability to be connected and present in life. Over time I have been able to refine it so that I can share more energy with other people in my work and daily relationships. It doesn't come across necessarily as purely sexual, but I know it is my sexual energy that I have transformed into healing and loving energy.

**Question:** Do you know of anyone who is doing these practices who has had problems with them?

**Answer:** No, I don't. Everyone I know who has practiced them has been quite enthusiastic about the benefits.

**Question:** And there are no side effects?

**Answer:** I have never known anyone, male or female, who

has had any side effects. This practice allows sexual energy to be transmuted and not just conserved. It also refines and spreads it throughout the body, revitalizing the whole body in mind and spirit. So the practice itself removes the negative side effects of sexual desire, which for most people appears as sexual frustration. Sexual frustration is simply blocked sexual energy.

**Question:** Do you feel the sexual cultivation practice is essential to your spiritual growth?

**Answer:** Yes, but it is not essential to have a partner. These practices can be done by a woman who has a commitment to celibacy as a way of utilizing her sexual energy for her own spiritual growth and directing the transformed energy toward service to others.

There is something else that I feel is very important since we are talking about the benefits. From the beginning these practices were very transformative, enhancing my sense of being in control of my own energy and my own destiny. I have grown more responsible and able to use my energies more creatively.

**Question:** Is the Tao all about controlling your emotions and energies? How does this figure in being effortless and flowing free?

**Answer:** I think about my life as a river. Before I practiced Ovarian Kung Fu, I felt in my emotional and sexual life as if I were a leaf on a current, and it was the current of circumstances that would sometimes direct me. Now, knowing these Taoist practices, I feel that I am more like a raft, and I can use the current for the purpose of following the river. When I look at my past and all the suffering that I went through in some of my emotional and sexual relationships, and I look at friends now, I see that the Taoist practices allow us to be in the river in a way that's harmonious and flowing without being knocked against the rocks. We are the navigators.

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may reveal important new insights, much as modern medicine has benefited from clinical investigations of acupuncture and Ayurvedic herbal medicine.<sup>27,28</sup>

### Blending East and West

To understand the Tantric and Taoist sexual systems and appreciate their rich messages, one has to go beyond the surface of sexual acts, rituals, and roles to get in touch with the cosmology, philosophy and world view that frame these exercises. One also has to deal with Eastern erotics, the way the Taoists and Tantriks interpret sexual feelings, ideas, fantasies, excitements, and aesthetics — what is beautiful or ugly, luscious or nauseating, dull or titillating.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, too many manuals, especially those presenting Tantric sex, are exotic recipe books or tourist brochures for a sexual Shangri-la. Fang-fu Ruan rightly notes that many books on Oriental sexology, while useful, "...are limited by either concentrating on a specialized topic or presenting a popular treatment of their subject. Some, by treating sexuality as a domain of pleasure independent of the changing contexts of medicine, religion, family life, reproductive strategies, or social control, effectively reinforce stereotypes of exotic Oriental cultures."<sup>12</sup>

Complicating any effort to evaluate the extent to which Westerners, raised with very different, even opposing world views and erotics, can understand, practice, and incorporate these sexual systems into their daily lives, is the fact that, while some proponents rhapsodize about the potential for ecstatic and cosmic experiences in Tantra and Taoism, very little can be actually known about the subjective experiences of men and women who practice these systems.<sup>11,20</sup>

These ancient traditions celebrate the naturalness of sexual pleasure and the spiritual potential of sexual relations, a view that may fit well with many people's sensitivities and yearnings. They also accept female sexuality and women's unlimited sexual potential, a view that is congenial with contemporary feminist awareness. Contemporary sexuality can be enriched and broadened by a reawakening of the experience of sexuality as integral to whole-person connectedness. It can also benefit from seeing sexual satisfaction as a fluctuating, non-goal-oriented, continuum of responses that includes pleasuring, orgasm, and ecstasy.<sup>30</sup> Can these ancient and yet very modern views be translated into the Western consciousness without being trapped by faddism? Advocates of yoga and acupuncture have succeeded in similar challenges.

In Western religions, spirituality refers to a loving, personal union of a human being with the Creator who has no gender or sex, although we are said to be created in "His image and likeness." In the Bible, sexual pleasure is commonly associated with an original sin — a fall from grace. Sexuality tends to be viewed as antagonistic to spiritual liberation.<sup>31,32</sup> In the words of Joseph Campbell, in the West, "eternity withdraws, and nature is corrupt, nature has fallen...we live in exile."<sup>1</sup> Neither Hinduism nor Buddhism have a concept of an original sin or primeval fall. Tantric and

Taoist sexual union is viewed as a way to spiritual liberation, a consciousness of and identification with the Divine, and a way of becoming enlightened through one's embodiment and interaction with another. Can Western religious thought incorporate these sex-affirming Eastern views without scrapping much of our religious myths and beliefs? Can the spiritual and cosmic sense of sexuality be expressed in a Western world view without sanitizing or weakening sexual passion, or reducing its playful element?

*"These ancient traditions celebrate the naturalness of sexual pleasure and the spiritual potential of sexual relations..."*

Despite these questions and challenges, we need to remember that nuclear physicist Werner Heisenberg acknowledged that Indian philosophy helped him make sense of some of the seemingly "crazy" principles of quantum physics. And Western science and medicine increasingly acknowledges the value of ancient traditions, such as Ayurveda, the Hindu system of medicine, and techniques of acupuncture originating from China.

The life cycles of past civilizations clearly suggest that as they degenerate, their cultures tend to exaggerate the great primordial insights that led to their greatness. Western cultures have overvalued individualism at the expense of the environment, separated human nature from nurturing nature, and turned everything, including the human psyche, into objects to be manipulated, controlled, and exploited. The resultant technological superiority has given human-kind dominance in our global village. It has given Western culture the leisure and affluence that has allowed women to regain some of the gender equality they experienced in the pre-Axial era. However, the violent, exploitive extremes of Western intellectual and moral assumptions contain the seeds of self-destruction. History suggests that Western culture may avoid self-destruction and achieve a transformation into a new global consciousness if it can integrate values that will bring forth a more balanced culture, respectful of the unity and harmony of all reality. Jaspers and others see in this renaissance the possible advent of a second Axial Period.<sup>5,6,33</sup>

Many critics have deplored the objectification of sex and the Western obsession with sexual performance. Christianity, for the most part, has not been able to integrate sexuality into a holistic philosophy or see sexual relations, pleasure, and passion as avenues for spiritual meaning and growth. There have been a few prophetic efforts in this direction, but many Christian churches are having difficulties dealing with sexual pleasure, apart from reproduction, and along with the spiritual dimension. For individuals or couples, the Eastern views may have rich meaning, but they will not help with the problem Western religions face in accepting and affirming alternates to



heterosexual, exclusive monogamy in today's world.

Eastern sexual and spiritual traditions can help Westerners break out of the prevailing reduction of sexuality to genital activity. Taoist and Tantric sexual practices highlight all the senses and involve the whole energies of both partners in slow, sensual dances that are rich variations of what Western sexologists label the "outercourse" of the Sensate Focus Exercises. In addition, Eastern thought may help refocus our understanding and appreciation of male orgasm. The obsession in sexually explicit films and videos with ejaculation as the affirmation of masculinity leaves the male with an inevitable flaccid vulnerability that requires denial in a vicious cycle of repeated "conquests" followed by inevitable detumescence. Taoist practices can help a male achieve some parity with the multiorgasmic woman by controlling his ejaculation, much to the benefit of both sexes.

### Conclusion

Over the centuries, Tantriks and Taoists adopted philosophies and practices involving yoga from others and Yin and Yang from earlier Chinese, and borrowed aspects of the cultures of the pre-Aryans and (possibly) the paleolithic Europeans. Some Americans have already borrowed from the riches of Eastern sexual views. In the future this cross-fertilization may increase and become more sophisticated. The outcome could lead to new icons, archetypes, and meanings for sexual relations as expressions of love, passion, commitment, procreation, playful fun, and friendship as well as mystical transcendence and spiritual oneness.

The Western technological imperative needs a strong antidote to regain its health in the 21st century. Western culture may find a corrective to its highly successful, but dangerously exaggerated technological imperative (Yang) in the ancient Eastern tradition of the nurturing potential of a panerotic sensuality (Yin). The health of Western culture can be improved by learning from key elements of the Taoist and Tantric traditions. At the same time, Eastern cultures are also caught up in the current revolution of human consciousness that some see as the advent of a second Axial Period, which is based on gender equality and a global and cosmic consciousness, sensitivity, and shared responsibility. This requires mutual collaboration and cross-fertilization on all sides.

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# A THEOLOGY OF SEXUAL PLEASURE

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*"My story undergirds my belief that we are born both spiritual and sexual. One of the tasks of life is integrating into wholeness these two aspects of our being."*

A comment which I hear very often is "What is a Baptist minister doing in the field of human sexuality? It seems incongruous!" What a sad commentary on the perceived relationship between religion (especially that of Baptists) and sexuality! The perception most often offered is of a "Jerry Falwell" type, denouncing such forms of sexuality as persons with a homosexual orientation. Actually, the fact is that being a minister in a local congregation led me to this new form of ministry as a sex educator and sex therapist. My story undergirds my belief that we are born both spiritual and sexual. One of the tasks of life is integrating into wholeness these two aspects of our being.

Early in 1965, while I was serving the First Baptist Church of Gloucester, Massachusetts, my high school youth group asked me if I would offer some sessions on sex education. My feelings were mixed. I felt excited, challenged, scared, and perplexed. Excited because they were asking for something I did not have the courage to ask for when I was their age; challenged because sexuality is an ethical and moral issue and the church was certainly the proper arena for sex education; scared because I had no idea how the congregation would view such a venture; and perplexed about what I should tell them. What do they need to know? Where would I get my information? Could I be honest, truthful and open with them? What if there was conflict over my answers to their questions? Could I lose my job? I turned to two other clergy in the community and together we decided we would support each other and together offer a four-session course. Among our congregations we had about 60 young people. We asked them to bring signed notes from their parents saying they could take our course. The night the course opened, we had several hundred young people show up — all with signed notes from their parents. We had to go to the sanctuary of the largest of the three congregations. There we were in a sanctuary, under the cross, talking about sex. I must admit it did throw me at first.

The kids were great! I learned more from them during that four weeks than they learned from me. How eager they were to learn! How incredibly incisive were their questions! How sensitive they were to my discomfort! The course was a hit. In fact, within six weeks, the Board of Education of Gloucester asked us if we would offer a course for Junior Highs and hold it in the high school facilities. For that course, we

recruited all of the local clergy who would participate and offered a concurrent course for parents. Again, we had a large turnout and a tremendous success. Then other churches and councils of churches heard about our program and asked me to run similar programs for them. Soon I was traveling all over New England setting up sex education programs. It became very apparent to me how hungry our people are to know about their sexuality and how closely our sexuality is bound to our spirituality. Eventually I ended up in this ministry full time. It constantly amazes me how many ordained clergy are in the sexology field. Their stories are not much different than mine.

In this paper, I would like to share a theology about sexual pleasure that has evolved as a result of study, my own thoughts, and experiences in this ministry. I am going to offer some biblical, scientific, and cultural contributions which I believe are important to developing a theology of sexual pleasure.

## The Bible and Sexual Pleasure

Contrary to the belief of many Christians, the Bible is not a sex book: that is, the writers of the Bible were not as concerned about the *acts* of sex as they were about human relationships and the *motives and consequences* of sexual acts. There is no question that writers were well aware of the forces of passion and love as one reads, for example the beautiful love song of the *Song of Songs*, with its powerful climax:

Love is as powerful as death; passion is as strong as death itself. It bursts into flames and burns like a raging fire. Water cannot put it out; no flood can drown it (8:6-7).

It is tragic that so many within the Christian faith have dwelt on a few scriptural references and force-fit them into their own concepts of sexual morality. It is hard to understand the Christian mind that can be so flexible and non-literal regarding such topics as semen and menstruation (Lev 15:16-30), treatment of a disobedient son (Deut 21:18-21), women in church (1 Cor 14: 34-35), submission of wives (Eph 5:6), slavery (Eph 6:5), and the proper dress and behavior of women (1 Tim 2:9-15), but when it comes to topics like masturbation (Gen 38:6-10), homosexual practices (Gen 19:1-28; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:9-10), transsexualism and transvestism

(Deut 22:5), and sex and the unmarried, there is rigid inflexibility and a claim of absolute literal interpretation of the Bible.

Regarding the passages above about masturbation and homosexuality, I would make the following comments. First, it is a gross misinterpretation to associate Genesis 38:6-10 with masturbation. This passage is about the sin of Onan, which occurred when Onan refused to fulfill his obligation under the Levirate law to impregnate his dead brother's wife, Tamar. Not having our current scientific knowledge regarding coitus interruptus as a poor and unreliable method of birth control, Onan used this practice to keep from inseminating Tamar.

Second, since the topic of homosexuality, which is such an important issue in the church today, is going to be covered elsewhere in this journal, I will limit my comments. Most helpful to me in understanding the biblical references to homosexuality have been Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*,<sup>1</sup> John J. McNeill, SJ, *The Church and the Homosexual*,<sup>2</sup> and James B. Nelson, *Embodiment*.<sup>3</sup> From these writers, it seems apparent that the Bible does not speak about homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Furthermore there is some question as to whether biblical authors, especially Paul, are talking about homosexuality at all. Some scholars now believe that Paul is referring to pederasty, a practice common in his time. If homosexual acts are what Paul is talking about, then it seems that he is discussing these acts as if they were being engaged in by heterosexual persons (see Rom 1:26-27).

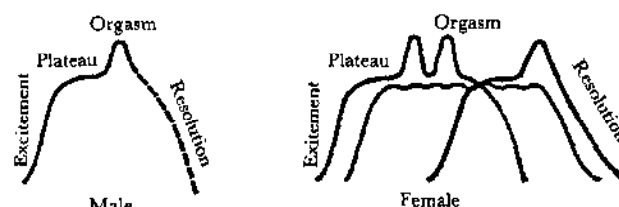
Truly, if Jesus Christ is the central figure in history for Christians and the focus of God's humanizing action, then it is an important fact that he never refers to any of the sexual practices described above. Using Jesus Christ as our norm, all practices and biblical texts should be judged in light of his person and teachings. When he was asked: "Teacher...what is the greatest commandment in Law?" Jesus answered by quoting from Leviticus and Deuteronomy. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind." This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments" (Matt 22:36-40; also Mark 12:28-34 and Luke 10:25-28). Jesus himself makes love the central core of his message and ministry. Nowhere does he, even in his teachings of self denial, condemn sexual pleasure. His concern always seems to be the wholeness, the spiritual well-being, and loving relationships of persons.

### Science and Sexual Pleasure

In the last 25 years, there have been many great contributions to our understanding of sexual pleasure coming out of the medical and behavioral sciences. There are three major contributions which to me are foundation stones for understanding the natural function of sexual pleasure and its theological significance.

**Masters and Johnson** — William Masters, MD, and Virginia Johnson of St. Louis can be credited with beginning the movement towards understanding the physiology and chemistry of human sexual functioning. As a result of their groundbreaking work in *Human Sexual Response*<sup>4</sup> they were also instrumental in describing the dysfunctions that occur when the physiological and/or chemical system is blocked from functioning. They describe the dysfunctions, their etiology and treatment, in their second book on *Human Sexual Inadequacy*.<sup>5</sup>

Masters and Johnson divide the sexual response cycle into four phases: excitement (or arousal), plateau, orgasm, and resolution. Masters and Johnson described in detail each of these phases in both the female and male.



Masters and Johnson, 4 Phases of Sexual Response

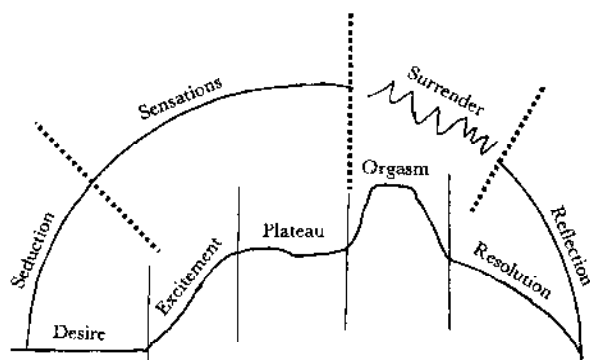
As a result of their work, we discovered that males and females are born sexual and that sexual responses occurs from before birth until death. While still in utero, females vaginally lubricate and males have erections. These phenomena occur while males and females are asleep, every 40-80 minutes, until death unless interrupted by disease or chemical interventions. If human beings respond sexually from before birth until death, then this has important implications for our understanding of our creation as sexual beings with the potential for sexual pleasure as a natural part of our life.

The fact that sexual response is pleasurable has theological significance. It could be said that the Creator intends sexual pleasure for the human creature. For example, females have an organ, the clitoris, which has no other function than sexual pleasure. While it has an analog in the penis, the penis has other functions such as urination and as a way of transmitting sperm. Pleasure is intricately woven into human sexual response. If sexual pleasure was intended only for procreational purposes within the marriage bond, then God has played a terrible joke on the multitudes throughout history who never married or could not have children or who theoretically could have had over 30 children during their child-bearing years! Must not our theology take into account the fact that we have the capacity to experience sexual pleasure at birth and that sexual pleasure can be experienced until death?

**Helen Singer Kaplan** — In the late 1970s, Dr. Helen Singer Kaplan of Cornell University proposed an important fifth stage to the sexual response cycle, which precedes the original four. She called this the desire phase. She found that people could be blocked

from sexual pleasure and response before excitement or arousal could take place. Such people have an aversion to sex and to sexual pleasure. So Dr. Kaplan did a study of the components of sexual desire. She wrote this up in a very helpful book, *Disorders of Sexual Desire*.<sup>6</sup> Among the causes of a lack of desire were such factors as childhood sexual trauma, child sexual abuse, rape, negative attitudes towards sex, low self-esteem, and religious orthodoxy that repressed sexual expression. It is amazing to me how many people I see suffering from a lack of sexual desire who blame their dysfunction on their religious upbringing. To me this is an indictment of Christian theologies that have failed to take into account a theology of sexual pleasure or even a theological affirmation of sexual expression other than for procreative purposes.

*David M. Reed* — An important contribution to our understanding the psychological nature of sexual response was proposed by Dr. David M. Reed of Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. His theory has yet to be published, but in my judgement is crucial to understand the importance of sexual pleasure. He calls his theory ESP, or the theory of the Erotic Stimulus Pathway. He describes ESP in four phases.



David M. Reed, *The Erotic Stimulus Pathway*

Dr. Reed's model is based upon a theory of psychosexual development. When young people begin to date, they are experiencing the first stage of ESP, the Seduction phase. This important stage has two components: first, seducing oneself into being interested in another person and second, learning how to seduce the other person into being interested in you. For young people this stage is enough in itself.

For example, I will never forget my first date. I can remember how excited I was when my 7th grade classmates told me that Julie liked me. I can remember how that relationship progressed during the 7th grade. We used to send notes to each other, then we started talking on the telephone to each other, and finally she invited me to the end-of-the-year dance. It was a formal dance. The time I spent picking out my clothes, taking a long bath, getting ready, combing my hair even amazed my parents. Then, even though I was only 12 years old, I went to the medicine cabinet in our bathroom and splashed a lot of my father's Old Spice aftershave lotion on my face. My father drove us to the dance and picked us up. It was a wonderful

evening — in fact it was perfect! There was no sex — I am not sure that I really even knew much about sex then, but it was a very important learning experience. I was developing the art of seduction, which later would play a vital part in sexual pleasure. I still think of that wonderful date whenever I wear Old Spice.

The next phase of ESP is the Sensations phase. Our senses are nature's aphrodisiacs. They are all that a person needs to gain and maintain sexual arousal and pleasure. The importance of touch, vision, hearing, smell, and taste can not be overstated. Touch is a chief means of healing and pleasure, but all too often, touch becomes a way of controlling and punishing. Then it becomes abusive and a person so abused will have great difficulty in deriving pleasure from this very important sense. Seeing and hearing one's beloved and the sight and sound of sex can be very stimulating unless one is taught that the body is gross and the sounds of sex are frightening. The smell and taste of sex also stimulate, unless one has been told the smell is bad and to taste sex is wrong because the sexual organs are dirty. As a sex therapist I have learned how important the senses are to helping a couple with a dysfunction. The fewer senses the couple uses the more difficult it will be to help them become functional. Sexual function depends on sexual pleasure and that pleasure is based on our sensations. Yet how do we educate our children with this knowledge?

The third phase in ESP is called the Surrender phase. For orgasm to take place as a pleasurable experience, one needs let go and give control over to the experience. If one has been taught to be overcontrolled or there are power struggles in the relationship, then the psychophysiological response will be affected.

The fourth and final phase, the Reflection phase, is most important. How a person feels immediately after the sexual experience will act as feedback to future sexual experiences with that person. If the immediate reflection is positive; that is, warm, loving, pleasurable, then the desire will be stimulated for the next time. If, on the other hand, the reflection is negative; that is, the person did not like the way s/he experienced his/her response, or is negative about the partner or the situation, then the feedback will act to lower desire for the next time.

A common problem in long term relationships is that couples forget the importance of the seduction phase and go right for the sensations or orgasm phase. An example is the couple who lets sex go until the last experience of an already busy day just before going to sleep. Typical is the couple who has a "quickie" at 11:20 p.m., between sports and Nightline (or Johnny Carson), during the weather report. When this occurs over time, then even the sensations begin to lose their power. It is interesting that in working with couples involved in extramarital affairs, one of the major experiences that makes the extramarital affair exciting is that the Seduction phase is reintroduced into a relationship. Keeping seduction alive in a long term relationship is vitally important and should be taught as part of a person's preparation for marriage.

Again, it is impressive how important sexual pleasure is in human relationships and sexual function. Yet how often do we prepare our children or help adults within the context of the church to experience the fullness of God's intention for sexual pleasure? Where is a theology for this important aspect of life?

### Sexual Orientation and Sexual Pleasure

In recent years, there have developed a number of theories regarding erotic responses and sexual orientation. Alfred Kinsey and his associates<sup>7</sup> saw sexual orientation on a bisexual continuum from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual, based on experiences and fantasies with other persons. He offered a seven point continuum from 0 to 6, as follows:

Exclusive heterosexuality	Predominant heterosexuality with incidental homosexuality	Predominant heterosexuality with more than incidental homosexuality	Ambisexuality	Predominant homosexuality with more than incidental heterosexuality	Predominant homosexuality with incidental heterosexuality	Exclusive homosexuality
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Source: McCary, J.L. *Human Sexuality* 3rd ed. (New York: Basic Books 1971), p. 339

Kinsey Sexuality Scale

Kinsey believed that a 0, or exclusively heterosexual person, would be one who never had any type of genital homosexual experience, desire or fantasy. A 6, or exclusively homosexual person, would be one who never had any type of genital heterosexual experience, desire or fantasy. In between these two extremes would be gradations of homosexual and heterosexual experiences, desires or fantasies. Almost any textbook on Human Sexuality has information on the results of Kinsey's study on sexual orientation based on 5,300 men and 5,900 women.

Interestingly, cross-cultural research indicates that the majority of societies that have existed are non-repressive regarding sexuality, unlike the United States which is one of the more repressive cultures to have existed. Ford and Beach<sup>8</sup> and Marshall and Suggs<sup>9</sup> indicate that in non-sexually repressive societies, the majority of people are in the 2 (predominantly heterosexual with more than incidental homosexuality) category.

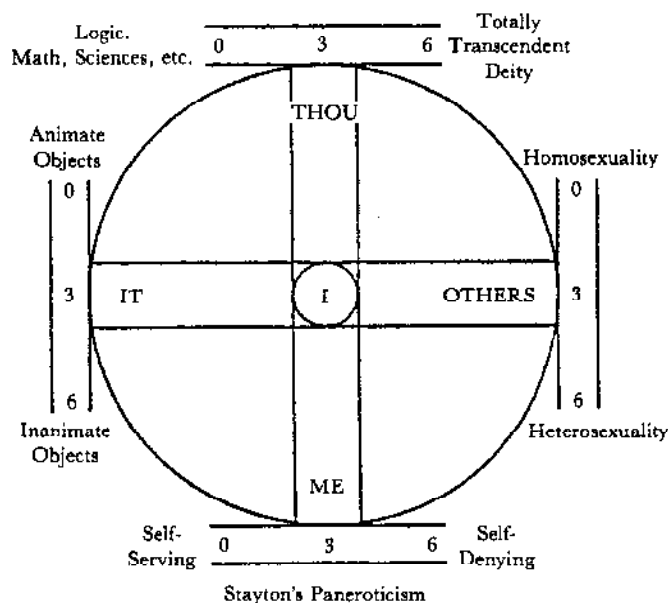
Significant in the research is the indication that people are born with bisexual potential. Most of the well-known researchers in the field, from Freud to Kinsey to Masters and Johnson, agree about the bisexual potential of the majority of people. In fact, there is no research to indicate that humans are born to be zero on the Kinsey scale. To the contrary, evidence indicates that humans are born sexually neutral, or Kinsey three, and have the potential of developing in either or both directions between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Further, only in sexually repressive cultures, such as our own, do we find such a high value on exclusivity at either the 0 or 6 end of the scale. One needs to remember that we are talking about erotic potential, not necessarily lifestyle or life experience. In my judgment, this information

has profound implications regarding theology, as will be discussed later in this article.

Another researcher, Fred Klein,<sup>10</sup> deepened Kinsey's concepts further by creating a grid for describing sexual orientation and its complexity. Klein identifies issues of sexual attraction, sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, lifestyle, and self-identification, using the Kinsey Rating Scale to get a profile. This multi-dimensional grid has been very helpful to the therapist in working with persons who feel confused about their sexual orientation.

In my experience as a sex educator and sex therapist, I have not been fully satisfied by either the Kinsey or Klein models, because I find that people are sexually aroused by more than other people of the same or opposite sex. In my 25 years as a psychotherapist, I have found that sexual orientation is a very complex phenomenon. In 1980, I was asked to be an issue editor on the subject of human sexuality for a nursing journal, *Topics in Clinical Nursing*,<sup>11</sup> where I presented an expanded model for looking at sexual orientation. In Francoeur,<sup>12</sup> this model was named Stayton's Paneroticism.

The thesis of my model is that potentially anything in the universe can have erotic value for someone. Sometimes this can be very appropriate, at other times, inappropriate. For example, being turned on erotically by the beauty of nature or good music is totally appropriate in this model, while being turned on by hurting oneself, someone else, or acting out sexually with children is totally inappropriate. As I listen to people in my practice discussing their sexuality, I am convinced that there is nothing in this universe that someone does not turn on to. As a theologian and as a psychologist, I am concerned about all the dimensions of a person's relationships, sexual and non-sexual, whether with the self, others, the things in their life, or with whatever is ultimate in their life. I have tried to reflect this concept in the following diagram.



In considering this model, it is my premise that besides responding erotically to another person or persons, humans can also find sexual pleasure in relating to their own bodies. In working with an individual, it is very important to assess the relationship with the self. If we introduce a Kinsey-type rating scale, we would find at one end of the continuum a person who is totally self absorbed. Pathologically, we call this narcissism. At the other end of the continuum is a person who would deny him or herself any pleasure. We would diagnose this person as having a martyr-complex syndrome. The ideal of health would be someone in the 3 range, who holds in creative tension the ability both to serve self or deny self when either would be appropriate. This would also be true sexually. Self pleasuring in the context of a healthy self-image can be very helpful in developing one's sexual response cycle. An almost unanimous perspective in the field of sexuality today is that autocroticism is healthy, desirable and important to adult sexual adjustment. Masturbation is a lifelong and enjoyable practice for many people in our culture. In cases of sexual dysfunction, it is common to recommend masturbation as a part of the treatment plan (if it is within the person's value system). Does this not have implications for Christian education? Young people should be given an understanding of masturbation and its health-giving benefits throughout the life cycle. We emphasize the importance of healthy self-esteem, yet, almost all Christian sexuality education curriculum either presents masturbation as negative or ignores it as if it did not exist.<sup>13</sup> The church, too often, instills guilt rather than affirmation for this practice, thus causing one to be cut off from an important part of the relationship to the self.

Another dimension of a person's relationship is to objects. Again, if we introduce a Kinsey-type scale, we would find at one end of the continuum inanimate objects; at the other end, the animate world. In relation to inanimate objects, erotic responses and sexual pleasure occurs with almost any object. The more common responses reported to the therapist are clothes, art, rubber, vehicles of transportation, nature, explicit erotic material, money, and parts of the body. This list can be supplemented with literally thousands of other possibilities.

In sex therapy it is not unusual to hear people report being sexually aroused by art, music, particular foods or drink, a particular setting such as the seashore, a stream, a mountain lake, vacations, or strenuous activities like sports. Particular clothes, parts of the body, certain smells, or good communication are also often listed as important to a person's ability to experience erotic feelings. I consider these healthy and positive aspects of a person's sexual orientation. There are also unusual, but harmless, objects or activities, such as rubber artifacts, dressing in clothes of the opposite sex, or particular articles of clothing which are needed for erotic arousal. Finally, there are the unusual, but harmful "turn ons," such as being aroused by weapons, infliction of pain or inappropriate acting out sexually that is against the public morality.

On the other end of this continuum are those who find they are aroused erotically by animate objects, such as a favorite pet or a particular type of animal. It is a fact that many people, especially in our culture, get their touching needs met through their household pets. While this does not usually lead to sexually acting out, the pet can still become the object of the person's preference for an emotional outlet. The vast majority of these experiences do not result in childhood, adolescent or adult pathology unless the person is discovered in the act of having sex with the animal and made to feel shame or alienation from family or friends. It is in the process of being discovered and the reaction of the discoverer that psychological damage can occur. Of course if animals are the only recipients of a person's sexual feelings, then it is appropriate to refer the person for therapy.

Because sexual orientation is set very early in life, probably by 5 or 6 and not later than 7 years of age, it is very difficult, if even possible, to change a person's orientation through therapy later in life. Through therapy the person can explore other possible erotic alternatives and learn to control the need for harmful erotic behavior. In some cases, such as pedophilia (adults who are sexually attracted to children), the medical profession can now help the person control the impulse to sexually molest children through the use of medication, combined with psychotherapy.

Probably the most controversial dimension in my model is the one in relationship to the Thou in one's life. In the years that I have been presenting this model, I have talked with scores of deeply spiritual persons who have experienced sexual pleasure and response during periods of meditation, prayer and communion. While this may sound blasphemous or pathological to some, it seems to make perfect sense to others who have experienced the sensuality of spiritual feelings. Indeed, the Bible frequently pictures humanity's relationship to God with the language of marriage. The Bible talks about the bride and the bridegroom, the marriage of God and Israel, of Christ and the Church, and of our oneness with Christ, so that it does not seem out of context to see a whole relationship with our Creator God as having an erotic component.

As a young person, one of my favorite events was the occasional Sunday night "Singspiration" at our church. Some of the gospel tunes that we sang were very sensual indeed. I especially remember "I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses. And he walks with me and he talks with me and tells me I am his own." What sensual feelings that tune used to evoke in me. As Francoeur<sup>12</sup> states in response to this transcendent dimension:

A few artists and poets, like the Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) and the Romantic William Blake (1757-1827), England's greatest visionary poet, have captured the transcendental dimension, human sensuality, and eroticism. The mystical writings of two medieval Spanish saints, Theresa of Avila and John of the

Cross, contain many examples of transcendental erotic expressions in poetry and meditations. In more recent times, the work of anthropologist Loren Eiseley and the astronomer-poet Carl Sagan have touched on the domain of transcendental cosmic sensuality. The Tantric Buddhist tradition of sexuality with its symbolic lingam/yoni (the male and female principles) and the temple sculpture of Hinduism express the transcendental/erotic dimension in the Eastern cultures.

If "nature's intention" is to create persons who are fully sexual in every sense of the word and every dimension of their relationships, then how do we present this aspect of our creation in a theological framework? What pleasures are appropriate and what are not appropriate? This is the challenge for the theologian of today.

### **Culture and Sexual Pleasure**

Our culture has developed several barriers which hinder the development of a creative theology for sexual pleasure. The first barrier is that our culture is sexually traumatized. We are bombarded daily by a type of unnatural sexuality which is highly commercialized, exploitive, and presents women as sex objects. This view is found in our advertisements and in the visual, spoken, and written media. We are led to believe that the only highly sexual person is the person with the perfect body, bodily dimensions and weight, and who is young, and not religious. Rather than presenting another, healthier view, the church is seen as anti-sexual, except for procreational sex within marriage. Many people in our society grow up with a model of a celibate marriage, because they cannot imagine their parents having a meaningful, highly eroticized sexual relationship. If children grow up to believe that, at best, they should be suspicious of their sexuality and, at worst, to hate their sexuality, then they do not have a good foundation on which to build a healthy attitude toward experiencing sexual pleasure.

The second barrier to a theology of sexual pleasure is that our culture values sexual ignorance. While valuing knowledge and education generally, when it comes to sexual self-knowledge the value is reversed and we go on the premise that it is better not to know. Most parents dread the day their child becomes sexually aware or inquisitive. The common scenario is that the child asks some question about sex; the mother turns the answering of the question to the father (if the boy asks), and the father becomes tongue-tied and stammers through some evasive and incoherent jumble of words. If the daughter asks, the mother gives her a booklet put out by the Kotex Company. If we give our children anything, it is usually the basics of sexual plumbing and some anatomy, but usually nothing about what will make for being a good lover. Somehow there is a fear that if children are given a good knowledge and understanding of sexual response and pleasure, they will immedi-

ately go out and "get into trouble." The fact is that most childhood and early adolescent sexual acting out is a form of experimentation based on sexual ignorance.

The third barrier to a theology of sexual pleasure is that our culture is sexually secretive. Sex is presented as the great mystery and the more mysterious it is, the more healthy and pleasurable it will be when marriage occurs. Sex is presented as so personal, so intimate, that it is inappropriate to share one's deepest fantasies and sexual thoughts with anyone. Strong judgements are often made on the person who has erotic fantasies that do not coincide with 'normal' heterosexual, monogamous, and married sexual intercourse. Lustful thoughts and sexual passion are not to be admitted to by the Christian, so that such thoughts are kept down in the recesses of the most secret place within.

The fourth barrier is that the church has not valued sexual pleasure, nor included sexual pleasure as a value in Christian education curricula. Basically there are two opposing sexual value systems within the church.<sup>14</sup> Both are just as ancient as the other and each has prominent spokespersons throughout history. The first sexual value system is the one most identified with the church. It is based on a procreational ethic, which sees male sperm as the bottom line because the sperm is the "seed of new life." Women are seen in this value system as having the role of nurturer and supporter. Like the child who asked his/her parent where s/he came from, and the reply was: "Well Daddy planted his seed in Mommy and that seed grew up and became you!" In this unscientific explanation, there is no concept of the egg carrying life, just as the sperm does. In this view, procreation requires intercourse with another person of the opposite sex, within marriage, and in a manner which promotes pregnancy. For the purist in this value system, birth control, abortion, masturbation, homosexuality, premarital sex, alternative sexual lifestyles, and erotic sexual behaviors other than intercourse would be prohibited. The focus of concern for this value system is entirely on the "acts" of sex carrying the moral value.

The second sexual value is based on the nature of relationships, rather than various "acts." This view holds that the Bible and Christianity are about human relationships. The bottom line of this value is Jesus' statement, cited earlier in this paper, on loving God, one's neighbor and one's self. Various sexual "acts" and lifestyles are measured against the norm of what are the motives and consequences of the "acts" and how do they enhance relationships with self, others, and God. This view holds that there is nothing inherently sick or sinful about the "acts" of sex that are done mutually, without coercion, without harm to any of the participants, and out of sight and sound of unwilling observers.

These two sexual value systems are not compatible. The first does not value sexual pleasure, but emphasizes the procreational nature of sexuality. The second values sexual pleasure as enhancing the quality and intimacy of loving relationships. If we are to develop a

theology of sexual pleasure, it will have to come out of a value system that emphasizes the dimensions of a persons relationships — with self, others, the "its" in life, and the Thou.

### Defining a Sexual Theology Based Upon a Pleasure Principle

It is my thesis that love, spirituality, and sexuality are inextricably bound together. As I have tried to point out in this paper, nature's (and God's) intention seems to be to create persons who are sexual in the fullest sense of the word, with a sexual system that responds to sexual pleasuring. "And God saw that the Creation was GOOD" (Gen 1:31). How then do we take all the information above and work it into a theology of sexual pleasure that is relevant for dally Christian living? *The New Britannica-Webster Dictionary and Reference Guide* (1986) defines theology as follows: "The study and interpretation of religious faith, practice, and experience, esp., thought about God and his relation to the world." If we take the last part of this definition, that is, God and God's relation to the world, then it is important to ask "What is in the mind of God regarding our creation?" There are several ways of exploring the mind of God.

One of those ways is through the Bible. A powerful description of God in the New Testament is that God is Love (I John 4:8-9). Jesus certainly presented a God of love in his ministry and he affirmed this when he responded to the Pharisees with "the great commandment" to love God, oneself and others. John affirms love as central when he states that "...God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). Love seems to be a central reality in the mind of God and is not abstract or static, but dynamic and active. The love described above also defines God's relationship to the world and how God wants humans to relate to each other.

Another way to sort out the mind of God is through the findings of scientific research. If all of creation is from God, then the more we can learn about creation, the more in touch we will be with the mind of God. In the works that I have cited above of Masters and Johnson, Kaplan, Reed, and many others not cited, we have learned much about human sexual function. I am in awe at our creation as sexual beings. Our capacity for love, for relationship, and our ability to respond to intimate relationships with such deep and meaningful sexual pleasure is a humbling experience. To restrict sexual pleasuring to the procreational function, and to validate sexual pleasure only when it occurs in heterosexual relationships, diminishes the creative capacities God gave humans for expressing love.

Finally, the mind of God can be discerned whenever humans seek wholeness, that is, to integrate mind, body and spirit. The quest for wholeness and spiritual oneness with God and with each other is experienced in every period of history and among all peoples. When the integration of love, sexuality and spirituality are experienced, God's intention is born anew in the world. Sexual pleasuring does not hinder

either spiritual growth or service to humanity. The current focus on sexual meaning in our time is a reaction of humans striving to understand the nature of their sexuality. Many are fearful of implications. Maybe one of those implications will be the rediscovery that the entire universe is our potential sexual orientation and that we can find sexual pleasure in all the dimensions of our life. That will happen when we join our sexual self with our spiritual self and seek appropriate ways of expressing that pleasure in all our relationships.

*And we ourselves know and believe the love which God has for us. God is love, and whoever lives in love lives in union with God and God lives in union with him.*

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# SEXUALITY AND STUDY COMMISSIONS IN CHURCHES AND SYNAGOGUES

**The Rt. Rev. David E. Richards**

Counselor and Organizational Consultant with Performance, Inc., Coral Gables, FL

**A**t this time it appears that many religious bodies, both Christian and Jewish, are finding it necessary to respond to questions arising among their constituencies regarding issues relating to sexuality. Study reports and resolutions appearing in both local and national settings often engender debate over sharply differing viewpoints within congregations and national structures. In some instances, the debate results in the withholding of funds by contributors in an effort to force compliance with a particular and strongly held point of view.

Appeal is often made to the Holy Scriptures, but interpretations vary and the citing of the same critical passage sometimes is employed to defend positions that are quite opposite to one another. Frequently, the issues are seen as fundamentally ethical ones, and this may result in one group accusing another group of holding viewpoints that are patently immoral. Currently it is difficult to see how the debate will be resolved. There are indications that some divisions within groups are so sharp that schism, or the breaking apart of certain groups, could possibly occur. Feelings run very deeply about sexuality-related issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and sexuality and HIV/AIDS education for young people in a religious group setting.

The following comments suggest not the content but the approach and scope of study commission reports aimed at helping religious groups address issues of human sexuality. A matter of great concern these days is spirituality, however, by and large most religious committees and commissions dealing with sexuality omit any consideration of the intimate connections between sexuality and spirituality. In addition, these groups might begin from, or at least include, a major consideration of sexual health rather than focusing exclusively on sexual ethics and sexual pathology. The latter concerns are extremely important, however a foundational view of sexual health is required in order to see each of these in their proper perspective.

## **Studying Sexuality in a Group Setting**

In centuries past, religious groups were frequently divided by issues of faith and belief. It appears now that divisions could occur in these times not on the basis of who believes what or why, but rather on the basis of who loves whom and how, and how sexuality becomes integrated as an aspect of being human.

One of the major problems in any group working together on issues of human sexuality is that this work cannot be done without each participant's sexual attitudes, history, and conduct somehow or other coming into play. Any comment a person makes on the subject of sexuality is connected to some extent with her or his own sexual life. Talking about sex, even in a purely academic or theoretical way, is still a deeply individual experience and inevitably has the potential for being personally self-disclosing. Some members of a group working on sexuality issues may not wish to be open about their own sexual feelings and experiences. Propriety as we customarily know it in most religious groups does not allow for revelations and self-disclosures of such a deeply personal nature. This means that one of the issues the group needs to address initially is the safety they feel with one another in an encounter that may require a closeness and intimate sharing that could be disquieting and uncomfortable for some. This factor cannot be overlooked if the group is to work cooperatively and collaboratively.

## **Addressing the Topic of Human Sexuality**

Sexuality and sexual behavior demand our attention today in unprecedented ways. Never before in human history has this topic been of such central and pervasive concern to so many persons. While historically sexuality has always been a source of fascination and curiosity, it now impacts on a global scale with an urgency that is magnified by the alarming rate of the growth of the world's population, by the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, by greatly increased awareness of the incidence of all forms of sexual abuse including sexual harassment, by the increase in teenage pregnancy, by the divergent perspectives surrounding homosexuality, and by new insights regarding psychosexual development, sexual behaviors, and gender.

Sex is no longer viewed as a purely private affair, the management of which can be left entirely to personal choice and preference. It cannot be hidden from the younger generation until they are "ready" to become sexual. It is no longer simply a spicy topic used to entertain and to increase the media's readership and viewership. In the age of AIDS, sex can no longer be viewed as a source of risqué fun for those who choose to be permissive. We are beginning to understand that neglecting sexual health leads to

serious problems with vast and extensive implications for societies all over the world.

When a religious body decides to address the topic of human sexuality, there is no approach through which this can be done helpfully without considering the totality of this issue which is now, and always has been, of universal importance. A so-called theology of sexuality needs to integrate the psychology, the sociology, the physiology, the morality, and the spirituality, of sexuality and sexual behaviors.

There are, in my judgment, at least four subthemes that need to be considered:

- sexual health: its meaning and definition;
- sexual pathology: the importance of diagnosis and treatment;
- sexual ethics: values, morality, and behaviors; and
- sexuality and spirituality: their connection and interrelationship.

It is likely that there are more than these four aspects of sexuality that need to be addressed in a comprehensive and holistic treatment of the subject. However, a good beginning might be made by attempting to study the whole realm of human sexuality under these four categories.

#### *Sexual Health*

Sexual health has rarely been the focus of religious commentaries on sexuality. However, any comprehensive statement needs to include a description or examination of what is meant by sexual health. Literature on this topic is extensive. Sexual health as a topic has been addressed by the World Health Organization and by various professional groups, and is the main theme of the Sex Information and Education Council of the U.S. A consideration of sexual health and some agreement about what this term means can help to establish the base or normative foundation for all other discussions and considerations.

#### *Sexual Pathology*

Sexual misconduct has become a prominent issue of concern in our society. The news media has highlighted incidents of rape, sexual harassment, and incest, and covered the stories of abuse survivors and abuse perpetrators. The sexual misconduct of clergy has attracted special attention in the past few years. There are treatment facilities that currently offer valuable services to clergy and other professionals who experience severe sexual problems. The Rev. Marie Fortune and The Center for Domestic and Sexual Violence in Seattle, as well as many other organizations, have created an array of useful resources in dealing with this area. Some care facilities specialize in the treatment of sexual compulsion and sexual addiction. The area of pathology is of concern to churches and synagogues because they offer a means of relieving the pain and healing the destruction that are caused by the neglect of sexual health.

#### *Ethics and Morality*

Ethics and morality obviously form an essential part of the whole theme of sexuality. In recent years, however, it seems that sexual rules are the only matters involving sex about which some churches and synagogues are concerned. This preoccupation with rules greatly limits the influence religious bodies may have in this area. Rules cannot and dare not be overlooked, but the simplistic insistence upon enforcing rules will not deepen understanding regarding sexual health. Education and preparation for ethical behavior is broader, more complex, and more demanding than simply stating, restating, debating, and arguing about what is right and what is wrong.

#### *Sexuality and Spirituality*

Sexuality and spirituality are closely related, but only recently has this relationship begun to be explored. However, as the world has taken up anew and afresh an interest in spirituality, it has become clear that spirituality cannot be disconnected from sexuality. The tendency to allow this to happen has led to the neglect of sexual health that is now so pervasive. Surely the religious bodies must have something significant to say on this subject.

#### **Conclusion**

Spirituality, as historically understood, is a means of bringing about human transformation and deepening one's awareness of all aspects of human experience. Religions throughout the world have encouraged spiritual disciplines and insights as avenues for the holistic discernment of life's meaning and purpose. While sexuality is understood as biological and emotional, it is also important to understand how it contributes to the spiritual significance of human interactions.

While there seems to be an increasing interest in secular circles in what might be thought of as non-institutional spirituality, at the same time, it is important for religious institutions to struggle with defining for themselves and for their constituencies the relationship between sexuality and spirituality, and to discover in terms that minister to the contemporary person just how these major components in life interrelate.

*The Rt. Rev. David E. Richards, formerly Director of the Office of Pastoral Development for the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church, is a member of the SIECUS Board of Directors. He is currently working with others in developing a program for a Center for Sexuality and Religion. The proposed center would establish an interfaith, interdisciplinary forum for religious bodies of all faiths and denominations to enter into dialogue with professionals in a variety of fields related to human sexuality. Its goals would be to share sources of knowledge and guidance in order to help religious groups address and respond to complex sexual issues and dilemmas, to enhance cooperation and the exchange of ideas within groups, and to begin to resolve differences that emerge not only between denominations, faith groups, and jurisdictions, but within local and denominational groups as well.*

# SEXUALITY EDUCATION RESOURCES FOR RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS

## A SIECUS Bibliography

**T**his bibliography serves as a companion piece to the SIECUS annotated bibliography, *Current Religious Perspectives on Sexuality*, which was published in August/September 1991. The selections include a brief description and are listed by denomination to familiarize readers who are interested in the availability of specific religious resources. The distributors and/or publishing houses are marked with an \* and follow the resources.

*Sexuality Education Resources for Religious Denominations*

was prepared by Laura Steele Clapp, library assistant and Pamela Papish, Columbia University, with the assistance of Jim Shortridge, director of Library Services.

Copies of this bibliography, together with *Current Religious Perspectives on Sexuality*, can be purchased from SIECUS at the following costs: 1-4 copies/\$2.50 each; 5-49 copies/\$2 each; 50+ copies/\$1.50 each; plus 15% postage/handling (p/h). SIECUS is located at 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 2500, New York, NY 10036; 212/819-9770.

### Episcopal Church

#### SEXUALITY: GIFT OR BURDEN?

*Dorothy F. Rose & Dorothy J. Brittain*

Outlines seminar to help adults clarify their values and understand their feelings regarding sexuality. 1980, \$3.

\*Diocese of Central New York, 310 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, NY 13202; 315/474-6596

### Evangelical Lutheran Church

#### AIDS AND CHRISTIAN YOUTH: A Guidebook for Adult Workers with Youth

*John Kerr*

Designed to assist youth group leaders educate youth about HIV/AIDS. 1987, \$2.10.

#### THE CHURCH AND THE CHALLENGE OF AIDS (Adult Forum Series)

*James M. Childs, Jr.*

A study guide about HIV/AIDS for adult groups. 1987, single copies/\$.80 each, \$8.80 per dozen.

#### FULLY HUMAN (Witness Series)

*Mark Wickstrom*

Thirteen-session course for senior high school students. 1990, Student book, \$3.95; Teacher's guide, \$4.

#### MINISTRY AND SEXUALITY: Cases, Counseling, and Care

*G. Lloyd Rediger*

Examines sexual problems that members of the clergy may need to confront and provides models of intervention and treatment. 1990, \$11.95.

#### SEX, LOVE, OR INFATUATION: How Can I Really Know?

*Ray E. Short*

Written for teenagers and young adults on HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Revised and expanded edition 1990, \$4.95.

#### SEXUALITY: Fact and Fantasy (In the Image Series)

*Karen G. Bockelman (Student book) & Anita A. Johnson (Teacher's guide)*

Six-session program for senior high school students and young adults. 1982, Student book, \$3.95; Teacher's guide, \$4.85.

#### SINGLES ASK: Answers to Questions About Relationships and Sexual Issues

*Harold Ivan Smith*

Addresses questions about HIV/AIDS, relationships, dating, and sexuality from a biblical perspective. 1988, \$9.95.

\*Augsburg Fortress, 426 South 5th Street, Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440; 800/328-4648.

### Judaism

#### AIDS — INSIGHT AND STRATEGIES: A Resource for Religious School and Congregational Program Development

*Dr. Betsy Katz & Linda Haase*

Includes curriculum guidelines, learning activities, and HIV/AIDS education resources for all ages, from Kindergarten level to adults. 1991, \$10.

#### COURSE ON HUMAN SEXUALITY FOR ADOLESCENTS IN RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS, YOUTH GROUPS, AND CAMPS

*Annette Daum & Barbara Strongin*

Sixteen-hour curriculum designed to help teens cope with changing sexual mores. 1981, \$2.50.

#### DRUGS, SEX, AND INTEGRITY: What Does Judaism Say?

*Daniel F. Polish et al*

Presents ideas expressed in the Torah and Talmud as well as contemporary views of Judaic law. 1991, \$10.

#### LOVE IN YOUR LIFE:

##### A Jewish View of Teenage Sexuality

*Roland B. Gittelsohn*

Spiritual framework for discussion about teen sexuality within a Jewish context. Topics include information on love, premarital sex, birth control, anatomy and physiology of sex, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, abortion, homosexuality, dating, intermarriage, and spiritual aspects of sexuality. 1991, \$9.95.

#### LOVE, SEX, AND MARRIAGE:

##### A Jewish View

*Roland B. Gittelsohn*

Discusses changes in the last decade in the mores of sex and marriage and offers advice on commitment and relationships for high school students and young adults. 1980, \$7.95.

\*Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 838 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10021; 212/249-0100.

### Lutheran Church

#### LEARNING ABOUT SEX SERIES

1988. Six texts: *Each One Specially* (ages 3-5), \$6.50; *I Wonder Why* (ages 6-8), \$7.95; *How You Got to be You* (ages 8-11), \$7.95; *The New You* (ages 11-14), \$7.95; *Lord of Life, Lord of Me* (ages 14 and up), \$7.95; *Sexuality: God's Precious Gift to Parents and Children* (adults), \$7.95. Complete set, \$45.95. Six corresponding videocassettes, \$12.95 each; set of six/\$59.75.

\*Concordia Publishing House, 3558 South Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, MO, 63118; 800/325-3391.

## Presbyterian Church

### CHRISTIAN REFLECTIONS ON THE ISSUES OF ABORTION

*Office of the General Assembly*

Collection of articles on contraception and abortion. 1986, \$4.

### THE COVENANT OF LIFE AND THE CARING COMMUNITY:

#### **Covenant and Creation**

*Office of the General Assembly*

Theological positions on contraception and abortion. 1983, \$1.50.

### GOD'S GIFT OF SEXUALITY:

#### **A Study Guide for Young People in The Reformed Tradition**

*Curriculum Services*

Assists youth in examining sexuality within a biblical context. Topics include puberty, anatomy and physiology, STDs, and relationships. 1991, Leader's guide, \$15.95, Younger youth/Older Youth guide, \$6.95, Parent's guide, \$6.95.

### NAMING THE UNNAMED:

#### **Sexual Harassment in the Church**

*Council on Women and the Church*

Reports on problems regarding sexual harassment and explores ways of involving the church. 1982, \$2.50

### PROBLEM PREGNANCY/KEEPING THE COVENANT: Guidelines for Ministry

*Justice for Women Committee*

Guidelines for evaluating and/or establishing ministries to women and men with problem pregnancies. 1990, \$1.

### TEENAGE PREGNANCY:

#### **The Kids Next Door**

*Curriculum Services*

A six-session Youth Elect Series Course for adolescents in grades 10-12 and their parents; part of *Christian Education: Shared Approaches*, a curriculum for 12 Protestant denominations. 1983, \$3.30.

*\*Presbyterian Publishing House, Order Services, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396; 800/524-2612.*

## Roman Catholic Church

### HUMAN SEXUALITY:

#### **A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning**

*United States Catholic Conference*

Bishops' statement that provides guidance on questions and concerns regarding human sexuality. 1991, \$9.95.

### THE SEXUAL CHALLENGE:

#### **Growing Up Christian**

*United States Catholic Conference*

Explores issues surrounding premarital sex. 1990, single copies/\$.95 each, 12/\$19.95.

*\*United States Catholic Conference, Publishing & Promotion Services, 1312 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005, 800/235-8722.*

### SEXUALITY: God's Good Idea

*Carolyn Nystrom & Matthew Floding*

Addresses teenagers' questions about sexuality and God, based on the scriptures. 1988, Student's edition \$3.95, Teacher's edition \$4.95.

*\*Harold Shaw Publishers, PO Box 567, Wheaton, IL 60189; 800/742-9782.*

## Unitarian Universalist Association

### ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE

*Fred & Betty Ward*

A participant-oriented program for teens and young adults. May be used separately or as a supplement to *About Your Sexuality*. 1990, \$14.95.

### ABOUT YOUR SEXUALITY

*deryck calderwood*

A complete multimedia program for junior high school level and above. Revised edition 1984, \$89.95.

### AIDS: Your Community

*Warren J. Blumenfeld & Scott W. Alexander*

An interfaith guide to community based ministry. 1991, \$15.45.

### THE WELCOMING CONGREGATION: Resources for Affirming Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Unitarian Universalists

*Rev. Scott W. Alexander, editor*

Includes tips on getting a program started, guidelines for enhancing religious education classes and youth groups, and a section on Christian workshops. 1990, \$24.95.

*\*Unitarian Universalist Association, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108; 617/742-2100.*

## United Church Board for Homeland Ministries

### THE SEARCH FOR INTIMACY

*Bill Stackhouse & Manfred Wright Saunders*

For grades 10-12; part of *A Youth Elect Series Course for Older Youth*. 1981, \$43.50.

### SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION:

#### **A Study for Teenagers**

*Marie M. Fortune*

A curriculum for presentation at five consecutive weekly sessions or on a weekend retreat. 1984, \$3.95.

### TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT SEXUALITY

*R. Kenneth Ostermiller*

Views sexuality as a gift from God, and thus a reflection of God's love for us as part of creation. 1991, \$1.95.

### VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY:

#### **A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers**

*Marie M. Fortune*

Resource tool for those working in the areas of child, spouse, incest, and elderly abuse. 1991, \$15.95.

*\*Pilgrim Press, 700 Prospect Avenue East, 4th floor, Cleveland, OH 44115, 800/537-3394.*

## United Church of Canada

### CONTRACEPTION AND ABORTION:

#### **Recommendations for the 1980 Report as Amended and Approved by the Twenty-Eighth General Council of the United Church of Canada.**

*United Church of Canada (UCC)*

Outlines the United Church of Canada's position on contraception and abortion. 1989, 25 copies/\$2.50.

### GIFT, DILEMMA AND PROMISE

*United Church of Canada (UCC)*

Affirmations on human sexuality including official statements. 1984, \$4.50.

### MEMBERSHIP, MINISTRY AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

*United Church of Canada (UCC)*

A new statement of the United Church of Canada by the 32nd General Council. 1988, 25 copies/\$1.75.

*\*Division of Mission in Canada, 85 Street Clair Avenue East, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M8; 416/925-5931.*

## United Methodist Church

### FAITHFUL WITNESS ON TODAY'S

#### **ISSUES: Human Sexuality, 1985-1988**

*United Methodist Church*

Study booklet contains policy statements approved by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church. Updated annually, 1-9 copies/\$.70 each, 10-99/\$.65, 100 or more/\$.60.

*\*Discipleship Resources, 1908 Grand Avenue, PO Box 189, Nashville, TN 37202-0189; 615/340-7284.*

### GROWING LOVE IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

*United Methodist Church*

Official marriage manual of the United Methodist Church. 1991, Couple's manual \$3.95, Pastor's manual \$10.95.

*\*Abingdon Press, PO Box 801, 201 8th Avenue, South, Nashville, TN 37202; 800/251-3320.*

## SEXUAL BACKLASH

Debra W. Haffner, MPH

I have recently finished reading Susan Faludi's excellent book, *Backlash*. As many SIECUS members know, I rarely endorse books or videos. In fact, it is SIECUS policy to not offer quotes for book jackets or video covers, not wanting to create a "SIECUS seal of approval." However, sometimes I read or see something that I think is so important that I make an exception, and this is one of those times. Buy this book. Read this book. It may be one of the most important books that you will read this year. It was for me.

Faludi dramatically outlines the backlash against women that we have been experiencing for the past decade. Through critical investigation of the news and entertainment media, supposedly objective research studies, government policies, and far right organizations, Faludi illustrates the powerful forces that have been trying to convince women that the women's movement was bad for them and that we were better off in traditional roles as wives and mothers. Her interviews with far right activists Beverly LeHaye and Connie Marshner and Operation Rescue's Randall Terry are alone worth the price of the book.

Having read the book, I have become newly sensitive to the many areas of backlash in our society. While reading the book, a reporter from *The New York Times* asked for my reaction to Mattel's new doll, "Bundle Baby," which comes in a sack designed for little girls to wear. When a button is pushed, the doll kicks the child to simulate intrauterine kicking. Another button allows the child to hear a fetal heartbeat. According to Mattel, the doll is designed to teach little girls "the magic of motherhood." It seems to me that the toy is a form of backlash training for 3 to 8 year olds. I told the reporter that while encouraging nurturing behavior among both little boys and girls is beneficial, encouraging little girls to "experience" pregnancy as preschoolers is *not* a good idea.

Conservative columnists have been having a field day with Hillary Clinton. One columnist suggested that she is an ideal role model for today's young women because she has subjugated her own career to her husband's goals and another suggested that if women can't stand the heat, "perhaps they should go back to the kitchen." Backlash at its best.

We have recently been observing a sexual backlash in the media, with some surprising messengers. In a recent column, Dear Abby endorsed a reader's concept of a "Great American Sex-Out" using the "Great American Smokeout" formula. Abby wrote, "Thank you for a potentially lifesaving suggestion. Now, if people will just say no — and make it stick — we will be a much healthier society." A recent *Newsweek* article on safe sex ended "Already there is anecdotal evidence that high school students in some cities are getting the message that sex is no fun at all when you're dead...It took nearly three decades for social attitudes to harden against smoking, but when they did, millions of people who could never quit gave it up rather than be pariahs. A similar shift is occurring with respect to heavy drinking and even drugs. And it will happen with sex; it has to happen. People want to live." A December editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* seemed to endorse the notion of sin, stating "...but we will say this for sin; it at least offered a frame

of reference for personal behavior. When the frame was dismantled, guilt wasn't the only thing that fell away; we also lost the guidewire of personal responsibility." The editorial also appeared as a full page advertisement in *The New York Times* labeled "When was the last time you had a good conversation about sin?" The message seems to be that *everyone* — regardless of age, personal circumstance, or personal values — would be better off if they just gave up sexual behaviors.

Nowhere is this sexual backlash more evident than in the growing fear-based sexuality education movement. When I entered this field 17 years ago, the opposition's tactics were simple. They worked strenuously to keep sexuality education out of schools and they largely failed in their efforts because the American people, then as now, wanted sexuality education for their children. Today, the opposition has become much more sophisticated. Rather than simply opposing sexuality education, which they recognize is counter to the community's wish for its children, they now promote a new brand of sexuality education, which SIECUS has dubbed "fear-based education." Hiding behind such titles as "abstinence education," these programs are designed to instill fear, shame, and guilt in young people about their sexuality. They are the backlash response to comprehensive sexuality education.

SIECUS has identified more than 16 fear-based education programs. These programs go by such innocent names as *Sex Respect*, *Teen-AID*, *AANCHOR*, *Challenge Program*, and *You Are Unique*, and rely on scare tactics, inaccurate and biased information, gender stereotypes, outdated portrayals of the American family, and anti-choice, homophobic, and sexist values. Even worse, they withhold needed information about prenatal care, contraception, sexual orientation, and abortion from young people. They lack respect for cultural and economic differences, contain subtly disguised religious messages, and present only one side of controversial issues.

Fear-based education programs teach that premarital sex is always dangerous. *Sex Respect* tells young people that there is "No premarital sex if you want to be free," and that "There is no way to have premarital sex without hurting someone." The risks that they list include disease, pregnancy, cervical cancer, abortion, guilt, doubt, fear, disappointment, self-hatred, pain of exploiting someone or being exploited, stunted growth in personal identity and social relationships, being fooled into marrying the wrong person, hanging on to a relationship to save face, and using sex to avoid intimacy. I cannot help but wonder what the eight out of 10 married Americans who had premarital intercourse think about this.

What they forget to tell young people is that contraception will prevent an unplanned pregnancy...that a latex condom vastly reduces the risk of a sexually transmitted disease...that abortion is safe and legal...that if you suspect a pregnancy, you must seek immediate medical attention...that sexuality is a natural and healthy part of life and that forming a sexual identity is a critical developmental task of adolescence. Fear-based education programs put our children at risk of unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and transmission of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Fear-based education programs are being proposed in communities around the country. In recent months, we have been contacted by diverse communities in such states as Connecticut, Idaho, Louisiana, California, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Florida. Every week, parents in two or three communities call SIECUS for help in fighting the opposition's attempts to implement fear-based education programs. We have identified more than 45 communities that have faced a struggle between fear-based education and comprehensive sexuality education during this school year.

SIECUS is leading the fight against fear-based education. Through a new grant from the Ford Foundation, we will be

*Continued from previous page*

able to coordinate the national response to these efforts. We are working with the national media to educate the public about this threat. We are developing a clearinghouse of materials, and preparing case studies of communities that have successfully fought these efforts. We are developing a kit of materials for communities to use to develop and implement comprehensive sexuality education.

SIECUS' *National Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education* have been distributed to more than 7,000 schools and organizations. The *Guidelines* will help communities design effective education programs for children at all levels. They provide a framework for encouraging young people to postpone sexual involvement while providing accurate prevention information to those who are involved in sexual behaviors.

SIECUS will provide indepth assistance to communities that are targeted by the fear-based education proponents. We will work to assure that all young people receive the information they so badly need. And we will continue our efforts to halt the backlash against sexual rights and sexual pleasure.

We need the help of our members and SIECUS Advocates. Please notify SIECUS if there are local attempts to implement fear-based education, or if you learn of other examples of sexual backlash. Become active in your community and state. Be sure to sign up as a member of the SIECUS Advocates Network.

Sexual backlash is only a part of the backlash against women, civil liberties, and pluralistic values. We need to understand the backlash, and we need to develop effective strategies to respond. Together, we can make a difference.

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## **BUILDING BRIDGES:**

### **Gay and Lesbian Reality and the Catholic Church**

Robert Nugent & Jeannine Gramick  
Mystic, CT: Twenty-third  
Publications, 1992, 218 pps., \$9.95  
pb.

*Building Bridges: Gay and Lesbian Reality and the Catholic Church* is the most recent in a series of contributions on issues affecting gay men and lesbians within the Catholic Church by Jeannine Gramick and Robert Nugent of New Ways Ministries. The book offers 14 essays arranged in four topical sections: educational and social concerns, counseling and pastoral issues, religious and clerical life, and evolving theological perspectives.

While the fourth part is useful to a broad spectrum of readers, both heterosexual and lesbian or gay, engaged in pastoral ministry, education, activism, and church life in general, the essays in other parts have more specific target audiences.

The essays in the first two sections may be most helpful for Catholics in all walk of life, who are beginning to explore issues about lesbian and gay rights, and myths surrounding what is "natural" and "normal." However, in these chapters, the writers engage readers who assume that homosexuality is the "problem" that lesbians and gay men either (immorally or foolishly) choose or are biologically afflicted with. This is painful and discouraging for a lesbian or gay reader weary from years of answering the most ignorant and stereotypical questions about homosexuality over and over. The authors would accomplish more if they did a critical analysis of heterosexism and the compulsory nature of heterosexuality in the United States, rather than attempt to answer every objection to gay rights and every strange and inaccurate myth about lesbians and gay men. I would like to see them engage the various institutions —

legal, medical, and religious — who claim they have the right and the power to define and enforce what is normal for all. Doing this, they could spare themselves and their readers many agonizing, absurd, yet still predictable questions, typically about homosexuals being child molesters.

While the essays grouped under educational and social concerns are problematic in their approach to the issues of rights, myths, and what is "natural," — all the essays on religious life and evolving theological perspectives are quite good and worth the cost of the book.

Gay and lesbian lay Catholics will most appreciate the essays in Part Four. They detail and analyze the "official" statements on homosexuality made by various national bishops' councils, as well as Vatican documents, and argue that the U.S. Bishops Conference has precipitated discussion of this issues on a grand, worldwide scale. No one else I know of has collected, translated, published, and analyzed these papers written by bishops and bishops' councils in Europe and the United States, as well as the Vatican. These two authors provide a community that often feels under siege with a much needed and deeply appreciated perspective on how much has been accomplished in a relatively short time.

Gramick and Nugent are very important people in the demanding and often frustrating conversation between gay and lesbian Catholics and the Church hierarchy. Their lives have been made "difficult" by bishops who would prefer that they take up another line of work. But they both have remained faithful to the goal of providing diverse people on life's journey with another helpful tool, and the lesbian and gay Catholic community and their advocates can be deeply grateful.

*Reviewed by Irma Levesque,  
founder of the Lesbian and Gay  
Catholic's Group, Church of St.  
Francis Xavier, New York City.*

## **GOD'S COUNTRY:**

### **A Case Against Theocracy**

Sandy Rapp  
Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park  
Press, 1991, 139 pp., \$29.95 hc,  
\$14.95 pb.

In *God's Country*, Sandy Rapp rails against fundamentalist Christians who have spent the 1980s working to chisel away basic privacy rights as established by the pre-Reagan Supreme Court. It is Rapp's thesis that "many U.S. citizens...do not understand what is happening" and "do not know how to counter what is happening" vis-a-vis the fundamentalist attack on privacy rights.

Rapp is particularly concerned about reproductive rights for women and civil rights for lesbians and gay men. Her approach is random criticism, directed at anyone and everyone who might be obstructing these rights. Convinced that no one disciplinary field can adequately address the systemic homophobia and misogyny that fundamentalists play upon, Rapp deliberately eschews "the lenses of various focus fields" in order to consider as a whole the "crystallization of the 2,500-year-old patriarchal agenda."

One big problem with this book is that in rejecting focus, Rapp has written a book that lacks focus. In chapters with titles such as "Psychology," "Religion," and "Politics," Rapp tries to address such sweeping topics as HIV/AIDS, homophobia, the causes of homosexuality, Freud, Kinsey, creationism, censorship, cross-cultural misogyny, the history of abortion rights in the United States, Jesus, Paul, biblical exegesis, Mesopotamian myths, ancient Hebrew culture, and New Age spirituality. She covers all this and more in less than 140 pages.

*God's Country* does have some strengths. At one level, the book aims to be a primer for confronting anti-choice and homophobic rhetoric. To that end, the book can serve as a helpful resource. The chapter



on abortion is particularly relevant, although one must slog through a lot of Rapp's own rhetoric to find the valuable tidbits embedded there. Rapp is at her best when she writes briefly of her own experience confronting anti-choice demonstrators and lobbying for the lesbian/gay civil rights bill passed in Suffolk County, New York.

Despite the forcefulness of Rapp's writing, the weaknesses of the book are many. There are important aspects of responsible criticism that Rapp does not take very seriously. She never clearly defines her target audience, claiming to address the "many U.S. citizens" who she thinks are unaware that their privacy rights are being threatened. Rapp also never clearly defines who it is that is threatening these rights. At different points in the book she lambasts televangelists, fundamentalist Christians, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the anti-choice movement, and the Republican Party, with particular attention to Ronald Reagan and George Bush. These are the people, blurred together in a right wing mass, who are identified as "theocrats," proponents of government by religious authority. Although it is fair to say that the people in these categories are extremely conservative and reactionary when it comes to public policy, lumping them all together in such a fashion undermines some of the book's impact.

It is also bad politics to be so imprecise about who is perpetrating what injustice. Rapp consistently uses passive voice, trying to convince us that something bad is being done but never naming the person or party who is doing it. I believe that we in progressive movements are past the point where it is acceptable, for example, to blame a faceless mass of people, generically labeled "society," for the homophobia that lesbians and gay men encounter every day. The gay and lesbian movement has come too far in naming the nature of the oppression and the oppressors to take such a dangerous step backward.

As a Christian, I take umbrage at Rapp's shallow interpretation of

Judeo-Christian history and scripture. She is understandably put off by the way fanatical groups use the Bible to beat up on lesbians, gay men, and women seeking abortion. Rather than simply sticking to her premise that biblical injunction should not be the basis for legislation, Rapp attempts to rebut the fanatics verse by verse. Such rebuttal should be left to people who themselves hold the Bible as sacred text. By stooping to the level of the Bible thumpers, Rapp demeans the very text that inspires many progressive Jews and Christians to fight the battles that Rapp advocates.

As an alternative to Judeo-Christian traditions, Rapp posits a New Age philosophy. In this section of the book, which bears little relation to the rest of *God's Country*, Rapp airs some disturbing views about HIV infection. She quotes an alleged psychic as saying that "the trigger" for an illness such as HIV/AIDS may be "an imposed judgement" such as societal homophobia. "When any individual is in agreement with such judgement," the psychic claims, "an illness can manifest." In other words, internalized homophobia might leave a person more susceptible to HIV or opportunistic infection. Rapp denies that this New Age perspective blames people with AIDS for their diagnosis, but it sounds to me too much like a new twist on the old "AIDS is God's gift to homosexual men and IV drug users" theory.

Rapp has tried to write a book that in simple and straightforward language explains why certain members of the far right are off base in their legislative attacks on lesbians, gay men, and abortion rights. Her goal is admirable, however, *God's Country* is too undisciplined and unfocused to be the textbook that Rapp wants it to be, and too simplistic to be the guide that either the pro-choice or lesbian and gay movements need it to be.

*Reviewed by Elizabeth Edman, MDiv, Chaplain to AIDS Health Services, Jersey City Medical Center, Jersey City, New Jersey.*

## SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Joan H. Timmerman  
New York: Crossroad, 1992, 160 pp., \$12.95 pb.

The author's rationale for writing this book is to suggest that there is a connection between sexuality and spirituality. In her introduction, she states, "Sexuality is integral to spiritual growth and depends on it." She then sets to demonstrate this to us by providing us with known facts from the fields of sexuality and spirituality, and to look at these facts in a new context within a Christian tradition. Short case studies add a touching and realistic effect to the book.

The first chapter, "Real Sexuality and Other Concepts," starts with an overview on sexuality, spirituality, and "sacramentality." The section on sexuality is quite memorable. Timmerman cites the example of a well known actress with a self-image based on physical features and a sex-goddess stereotype. The actress is quoted as saying, "My beauty is all I ever really had...My life is over." As explained by the author, this example illustrates how sexuality is driven by physicality, which, in turn, is driven by spirituality. Although this example is simplistic, it demonstrates an interdependent relationship between sexuality and spirituality.

The next chapter, "The Sexuality of Jesus and the Human Vocation," will probably elicit a mixed response from readers. The chapter begins with interpretations on Jesus' personal lifestyle. These interpretations question Jesus' celibacy and questions the possibility of marriage: "It is already commonplace to acknowledge that the Gospels do not address the issues of Jesus' personal lifestyle...the absence of direct statements about his celibacy would point to the probability that he was indeed married for at least part of his life...that Paul, when he was justifying his own celibate status, did not call upon the example of Jesus..." These interpretations may provoke readers to question their own beliefs about Jesus' personal life as a non-sexual

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## ACCESS DENIED

Produced by Julie Clark, Dolly Meieran, & Dana Nasrallah, ReproVision, 718/622-1130. Distributed by Women Make Movies, 225 Lafayette, New York, NY 10012, 212/925-0606. 1991, 1/2" and 3/4" video, \$50 rental, \$225 purchase.

Recently, while on vacation in Florida, I was changing stations on my rent-a-car radio and came across the National Right to Life Network. I almost turned past the station, but then I chose to listen as a female doctor described a young woman strapped down by two assistants while "the abortionist" injected her with a sedative. The young woman woke after the procedure and screamed "My baby, my baby! What did you do to my baby?!"

This is one example of the powerful ammunition being used in the controversial war over abortion. The lines are clearly drawn: it is a battle of women's rights versus the rights of unborn fetuses. The war is being fought everywhere across the country, on city streets, in the courts, in state and federal legislative bodies, on the radio, and most visibly and relentlessly — before the doors of abortion clinics.

*Access Denied* is a 28-minute documentary compiled by ReproVision, the film/video offshoot of WHAM (Women's Health Action Mobilization). ReproVision describes *Access Denied* as "agit-prop" or agitating-propaganda. Clearly, it is an attempt to inform and activate people to become engaged in the pro-choice movement. This video focuses largely on clinic defense and presents a

wide range of reproductive health issues such as changes in the law as a result of recent Supreme Court decisions, the lack of clinical trials of RU486 in this country, the dearth of comprehensive sexuality education, cuts to Title X funding, and challenges to the reproductive rights of minors.

The film powerfully weaves these issues together by intercutting recent interviews with reproductive rights activists with black and white film clips, circa 1950, of women in more traditional roles, such as homemakers in the kitchen and nurses pushing baby carts side by side. The most effective footage comes from the front lines of the battle in front of abortion clinics. Anti-choice activists blockade entryways, sing hymns praising Jesus, and are shown being physically carted away by police.

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and celibate human being, and some may choose to believe that he was a sexual being. This chapter raises an important point — by denying Jesus' sexuality, we may also be denying our own sexuality and its potential for enhancing spiritual development.

The longest chapter of the book concerns the "Stages in Sexual-Spiritual Growth." The stages include: sexual unfolding-spiritual awakening, making and breaking commitments, commitment in marriage, pregnancy and parenting, loving again after loss, and keeping one's vitality while aging. The author states early in this chapter, "I do not propose a definable norm which all are expected to reach, or attempt to describe a chronology that links a particular stage with age." She provides much detail for each stage, especially the first stage which includes sexual decisionmaking steps and first sexual intercourse. Her sexual decision-making steps are not innovative (she is providing us with known facts). What makes it unique is how she

connects it with spirituality. For example, according to the author, intimacy is the combination of love and sex. She proposes, "Intimacy for us as human beings is the way to the experience of God as immanence, as Spirit....Sexual intimacy is the only effective analogy for expressing the meaning of intimacy with God." With respect to religious leaders and premarital sex she states, "Better to spend energy and wisdom learning what the empirical realities are, while giving people the meanings that enable them to extend the range of the sacred through their sexual lives." This same statement could apply to parents; this particular chapter would benefit parents in attempting dialogue with their children on sexuality.

The remaining three chapters are shorter than the previous ones. "Cycle of Changes" illustrates how sexual-spiritual growth takes place by shedding taboos. "Theology of Spirit" discusses the doctrine of God, the theology of morality, and moral decision-making. Although the word "moral" is associated with righteousness, the

author's approach is nonjudgmental and nonalienating. "Being and Doing" describes how being, more than doing, is the traditional concern of spiritual growth counselors and offers guidelines to improve self-worth. She includes a brief discussion of the counseling needs of people with HIV/AIDS. Timmerman's statement encouraging abstinence in new relationships seems too harsh and simplistic for people with HIV/AIDS who seek sexual intimacy from their partners.

Overall, *Sexuality and Spiritual Growth* has an attractive presentation, with focal points at the end of each chapter, sections clearly presented, and somewhat diverse case studies. The author's writing style is the most difficult feature of the book. Reading certain sections requires thoughtful analysis due to ambiguities in her presentation. However, Timmerman succeeds in her attempt to integrate personal spirituality and sexuality.

*Reviewed by Marcia M. Zorrilla, risk reduction curriculum intern, Women's Action Alliance, New York City.*

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during a snow storm. Opposing them are the people conducting clinic defense who wear day-glo orange vests and talk about how their personal experiences led them to become involved. These escorts act as a shield surrounding the woman trying to enter the clinic on three or four sides until she makes it into the door. Anti-choice advocates surround them, holding up large photos of unborn fetuses, and verbally and physically try to prevent the woman from entering the clinic.

As stated above, this film is self-described as agit-prop, and thus uses some extreme examples to illustrate how serious this issue is for the rights and lives of all women. Some members of the review committee found it to be anti-religious and pointed out that it contains some misinformation. However, *Access Denied* can be an effective tool to mobilize involvement in the pro-choice struggle and ends with constructive suggestions for what people can do to keep choice alive, such as writing letters, joining a women's self-help group, or getting involved in clinic defense.

*Reviewed by Elena F. Deutsch, HIV and health coordinator, SafeSpace, New York City.*

## **SELFLOVING**

Betty Dodson, Box 1933, Murray Hill Station, New York, NY 10156, fax orders/requests for information to: 212/679-4240, 1/2" video, \$45, bulk prices available.

Betty Dodson has created a breakthrough video on female sexuality for adults. *Selfloving* is a healing, spiritual, educational, and enlightening journey for women of all ages. A group of women attending one of Dodson's Selfloving workshops explore their potential for sexual fulfillment and embrace their identities as sexual human beings. The skillfully placed narration acts as a guide to the delicate wayfaring the group undertakes, as each woman courageously and openly shares her thoughts, feelings, and physical self. Dodson reminds the group — and

thus the viewer — that orgasm/sexual energy is creative energy and that through this creative energy women can access the "Goddess within."

This sexually explicit video opens with an informative autobiographical overview, in which Dodson provides a context for the program based on her work. Author of three books on self-pleasuring, she states, "(I realized) husbands and lovers would come and go, but my relationship with myself was a constant." Later she adds, "masturbation is the ongoing love affair that each of us has with ourselves throughout our lifetime." She describes the role of masturbation as a holistic aspect of the broader sexual context within women's lives and the importance of learning how to enhance one's experience with sexual pleasure through masturbation.

A common theme among workshop participants is the desire for better orgasms. The video allows the viewer to follow, along with the workshop participants, a multi-step process that involves integrating sexual sensations with the sexual response cycle, along with specific techniques, to learn how to improve the quality of one's orgasms.

*Selfloving* illustrates the various components of the workshop, which include: exercises on breathing; a discussion about how participants feel about their orgasms; physical postures that access various aspects of the body's energies; a panoply of variety and beauty of female genitalia and reactions to the viewing process in a "genital show and tell"; discussion about the "beautiful, erotic and touchable" self and healing aspects of self-loving; use of vibrators and vaginal barbells to improve sexual response; the role of fantasy; an "erotic recess"; an eye-gazing ritual; and a final segment about release, intensity, laughing, and crying, followed by a group body massage. The video is designed to capture the workshop participants' responses to the whole process and to serve as a teaching model for others.

Some possible discussion questions that arose upon viewing the video are: first, whether the women in the group found it more or less

inhibiting to learn enhanced self-pleasuring in a group setting; second, what influence did the aspect of being filmed have for the participants; and third, how could this model be applied to an all-male group.

One concern about this depiction of self-pleasuring is the emphasis on hand-held vibrators, rather than manual self-stimulation. Some sex therapists, educators, and lay persons may worry about how to achieve similar results without mechanical aids. In addition, because the nature of the medium requires an hour-long distillation of a weekend workshop, the orgasm sequence gives the impression that orgasms are (and perhaps should be) of a lasting duration. This role modelling about length and intensity of orgasm, not unlike the depictions in some sexually explicit commercial erotic media, could lead to unnecessary pressure on the viewer who may expect that she has to experience orgasm in the same manner. Despite these areas of concern, the video is a skillful integration of whole person sexuality that encompasses body-mind-spirit and presents images and ideas for the sexual empowerment of women.

*Selfloving* may be best suited for use by sexuality professionals (such as therapists, counselors, and educators) as a complementary tool for the treatment or educational process. It would also work well for the individual male or female viewer to broaden an understanding of female sexuality and to gain insightful guidance for sexual enhancement.

This program has been conducted internationally, with weekend celebrations for women in several European countries as well as experiences throughout the United States. By allowing women to have a safe space for sexual discovery and sexual expression, Dodson has offered a great gift — to allow women to come home to themselves. And, as she herself concludes the video, "I wish you many happy orgasms!"

*Reviewed by Patti O. Britton, SIECUS deputy director and Jim Shortridge, director, SIECUS Library Services.*

# SIECUS NEWS

**GUIDELINES UPDATE:** SIECUS distributed more than 7,000 copies of the *National Guidelines for Sexuality Education* during the first six months of their release. Due to the nationwide demand, the book is now in its second printing. The *Guidelines* have been distributed internationally as well, and translations into Cantonese and Mandarin may be developed for use in schools in The Peoples Republic of China. SIECUS staff recently presented on the *Guidelines* at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and conducted a *Guidelines* workshop at a conference on comprehensive health education jointly sponsored by the National Education Association, the American Health Foundation, and the U.S. Office of Education.

**HIV/AIDS TRAINING WORKSHOPS:** Over the winter SIECUS sponsored three "Train the Trainer" workshops in Anchorage, AK; Burlington VT; and Lincoln, NE. Two trainings were also delivered in Tucson, AZ to community and school-based educators. Upcoming SIECUS HIV/AIDS trainings will be held in: Syracuse, NY (May 19-20); Portland, OR (August 20-21); Seattle, WA (August 25-26); St. Paul, MN (October 29-30); Durham, NC (November 16-17); and Philadelphia, PA (January 7-8, 1993).

**SIECUS TRAVEL:** During the fall and winter SIECUS staff presented speeches in Washington, DC; Minneapolis, MN; Burlington, VT; New Orleans, LA; Atlanta, GA; San Diego, CA; Greenwich, CT; New York, NY; and Philadelphia, PA. Executive Director Debra Haffner spoke in London, England about the *Guidelines* and integrating comprehensive sexuality education into the British national curriculum. Director of SIECUS' National AIDS Initiative Carolyn Patierno delivered the keynote speech at a workshop sponsored by the New York City Board of Education for the Chancellor's expanded HIV/AIDS Program. Deputy Director Patti Britton gave the keynote speech at a workshop of educational administrators, school board members, and teachers, sponsored by the Tucson Education Association.

**MEDIA COVERAGE:** In recent months, SIECUS has been featured in more than 100 articles, including the *Boston Globe*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *US News and World Report*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post*. SIECUS staff have recently appeared on ABC's *World News Tonight*, *CBS Morning News*, CNN's *Crier & Company*, *Crossfire*, ESPN, and programs on local television stations.

**NCSSE UPDATE:** SIECUS' National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education (NCSSE) held its semi-annual meeting on April 10th in New York City. More than 30 representatives from 20 organizations were present. The coalition is now comprised of 57 organizations. The meeting was very successful, and was highlighted by a presentation of the Children's Television Network special, "What Kids Want to Know About Sex and Growing Up." The program aired May 13th on PBS and featured SIECUS Board President Bob Selverstone. A 24-page parents' guide

accompanies the videocassette of the program, which will be available at local video stores. The guide may be obtained by calling 1-900/407-2000 (a \$2.25 charge will be incurred to cover the cost of the booklet), or by sending \$2.25 to: Children's Television Network Parents Guide, Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462. The coalition's next meeting is scheduled for October 1992 in Washington, DC — further details will follow. Any national non-profit organization interested in joining this expanding and vital force for comprehensive sexuality education should contact Deputy Director Patti Britton at SIECUS.

**NEW BOARD APPOINTMENT:** Patti Britton is currently serving on the board of NaSHEC (National School Health Education Coalition), a 60-member coalition of health, education, and youth-serving agencies, which advocates to assure comprehensive health education and services for all school-based youth.

**NFSEM ANNOUNCES NATIONAL FAMILY SEXUALITY MONTH:** The National Family Sexuality Education Month (NFSEM) coalition, of which SIECUS is a member, is celebrating October as National Family Sexuality Education Month. NFSEM, a coalition of more than 50 members, is supported by Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which encourages parents in their roles as primary educators of their children. This year's theme will help families to communicate about making healthy choices. The annual NFSEM campaign kick-off meeting will be held on June 12th at the Center for Population Options in Washington, DC for all invited coalition members. For more information, call Mike McGee at PPFA: 212/261-4627

**GRANTS AWARDED:** SIECUS is grateful to the many foundations and corporations that are supporting our efforts in 1992. The Compton Foundation continues to donate generously to ensure the continuation of NCSSE activities. The Public Welfare Foundation provides general support to SIECUS programs and initiatives. The Ford Foundation has made a generous grant to promote comprehensive sexuality education and to assist in a nationwide effort to combat fear-based education. The Dyson Foundation has provided a grant to assess the current status of school-based HIV/AIDS education in the United States. A report highlighting the trends in the states and suggesting recommendations for improvements will be published in the fall. The development of an upcoming booklet for teens on communicating about sexuality and HIV/AIDS has been made possible by a grant from Carter-Wallace, Inc.

**NEW FROM SIECUS:** The 1990-1991 SIECUS *Annual Report* and a 1992 *Publications Catalog* insert listing new SIECUS publications are now available. Copies can be obtained free of charge by writing to: SIECUS, 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 2500, New York, NY 10036.

**NEW POSITIONS:** SIECUS is pleased to announce the following new staff positions: Director of Public Policy and Public Policy Associate. Interested professionals are asked to send a cover letter, resumé, and salary requirements to: Personnel, SIECUS, 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 2500, New York, NY 10036.

# Conference and Seminar Calendar

**SIXTH ANNUAL NATIONAL PEER HELPERS CONFERENCE, "PEER HELPING: CREATING A COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY,"** June 20-23, 1992. Pre-Conference Basic and Advanced Training from June 17-19. Loyola University, Lake Shore Campus, Chicago, Illinois. Contact: Nancy Phillips, 217/525-3456, fax 217/789-4388.

**13TH ANNUAL GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTS COALITION INTERNATIONAL (GLPCI) CONFERENCE, "FREEDOM, FRIENDS AND FAMILY,"** July 3-5, 1992. Workshop topics will address parenting and effective skills, positive discipline, and understanding teenagers; family planning, including adoption; alternative insemination, and surrogacy; social issues concerning HIV/AIDS, racism, activism, coming out; and death and dying; relationships, including married gay issues, partner communication, and co-parenting/step parenting; and relaxation. Hyatt Regency, Indianapolis, Indiana. Contact: GLPI, PO Box 50360, Washington, DC 20091, 201/583-8029.

**SUMMER 1992 GRADUATE PROGRAM IN HUMAN SEXUALITY, "SEXUALITY IN TWO CULTURES,"** June 29-July 24, 1992 (New York City); July 25-August 15 (Copenhagen, Denmark). Sponsored by New York University's School of Education, Health, Nursing, and Arts Professions. Three programs, one in New York City and two in Copenhagen, will offer lectures from American and Danish faculty, discussion groups, films, and activities, with an emphasis on cross cultural issues in human sexuality. Contact: Office of Special Programs, New York University, SEHNAP, 32 Washington Place, Room 62, New York, NY 10003-9903, 212/998-5090.

**ADVANCED SEXUAL ABUSE TREATMENT SYMPOSIUM,** August 5-8, 1992 (Breckenridge, Colorado); and October 14-17 (San Antonio, Texas). Contact: Barbara Murdock, Meta Resources, 1997 F Kimberly Village Lane, Marietta, GA 30067, 404/933-0215.

**FIFTH NATIONAL CATHOLIC HIV/AIDS MINISTRY CONFERENCE,** August 6-11, 1992. Sponsored by the National Catholic AIDS Network (NCAN). For persons beginning or presently engaged in Catholic Church sponsored HIV/AIDS ministry and Catholics working in HIV/AIDS service organizations. Will cover current medical information; address issues of spirituality, rituals, and prayer; and provide opportunities for fellowship and renewal. Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois. Contact: NCAN, PO Box 422984, San Francisco, CA 94142, 415/565-3613.

**NORTH ATLANTIC TRAINING INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH EDUCATORS, "NATICHE '92,"** August 10-14, 1992. Sponsored by Training Center for Health Professionals, Cicatelli Associates, and JSI Research and Training Institute, Region I Family Planning Training. Will provide skills training designed to strengthen professional competence and productivity of educators; methods, techniques, lesson plans, resources, and materials for sexuality education; peer assessment and feedback; self assessment of skills, knowledge, and attitudes as an educator; and updated information on selected topics. Wells College, Aurora, New York. Contact: Anne Terrell, Planned Parenthood Tompkins County, 314 West State Street, Ithaca, NY 14850, 607/273-1526.

**FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON TRANSGENDER LAW AND EMPLOYMENT POLICY,** August 24-August 30, 1992. Sponsored by Gulf Coast Gender Community with Bar Association for Human Rights, Association of Women in Law, and University of Houston's student legal society. For attorneys and other legal professionals, human resources professionals, and members of the transgender community, all of whom have an interest in the current status of, and in strategies for, progressive changes in either the law and/or employment policies as they pertain to the transgendered community. "There are many people...in both the legal and employment professions who are not transgendered but who want to help. There are transgendered people...who are still scared of the laws and for their jobs." Hilton Southwest, Houston, Texas. Contact: Phyllis Randolph Frye, Attorney, 5707 Firenza, Houston, TX 77035-5515, 713/723-8368.

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SELF-HELP/MUTUAL AID,** September 2-4, 1992. Sponsored by the Canadian Council on Social Development. Government Conference Centre, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Contact: Golden Planners, 126 York Street, Suite 404, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 5T5.

**SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, "ALCOHOL: DRUGS OF ABUSE, IMMUNOMODULATION AND AIDS,"** September 9-12, 1992. Sponsored by the University of Arizona, Department of Family and Community Medicine and NIAAA-Specialized Alcohol Research Center. Tucson, Arizona. Contact: Dotty Sherwood-Cooney, Program Coordinator, or Ronald R. Watson, Program Advisor, 602/626-6001, fax 602/626-2030.

**SIXTH ANNUAL ALABAMA AIDS SYMPOSIUM,** September 30-October 2, 1992. Sponsored by the Alabama Department of Public Health with 47 Alabama agencies, organizations, and institutions. Will provide an interdisciplinary exchange of information about HIV/AIDS in order to share problems, seek solutions, build skills, identify options of prevention and care, and plan for the future. Civic Center, Montgomery, Alabama. Contact: Joan B. Huffstutler, Chief, AIDS Education Field Services Branch, 2451 Fillingim Street, Mobile, AL 36617, 205/471-7322.

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DRUG POLICY REFORM, with Professional Seminars "Drugs, Medicine and Health" and "Drug Policy and the Law,"** November 11-14, 1992. Conference topics will include the prevention of drug abuse, the spread of HIV/AIDS among IV drug users, and legislative strategies and drug policy reform. "Drugs, Medicine and Health" will focus on the pharmacology of drugs; treatment, HIV/AIDS, recent research, medical use of prohibited drugs, and treatment of pain and other current issues related to drugs, health, and healing. Loews L'Enfant Plaza Hotel, Washington, DC. Contact: The Drug Policy Foundation, 4801 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20016-2087, 202/895-1634, 202/537-3007.

**ELEVENTH WORLD CONGRESS OF SEXOLOGY, "YOUTH, SEX, LOVE AND FAMILY,"** June 1-5, 1993. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Contact: Professor Isaac Charam, Sociedade Brasileira de Sexologia, Praca Serzedelo Correia 15, Sala 703, Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro, RJ Brazil 22040, 021/256-2991.