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'The One Who Has
Eaten It, Has Only
Eaten a Part':
Exploring Traditional
Zulu Premarital
Sexual Practices

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Public Health and the
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'The One Who Has Eaten It, Has Only Eaten a Part': Exploring Traditional Zulu Premarital Sexual Practices

By Thabisile Buthelezi



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Introduction

While the traditional Zulu culture had positive values and behaviours that discouraged penetrative sex before marriage, alternative sexual practices such as ukusoma (non penetrative thigh sex) were in place to ensure that young people still gratified their physical needs in love relationships, but without having penetrative sex.

These sexual practices were lost during colonisation and Christianisation in South Africa, when sex became a taboo subject. While it might be impossible to revive the traditional practices within the current social context, in this article I argue that it is important that we document and learn from the knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills (relating to sex and sexuality) that underpinned the traditional practices.

First, I discuss the concepts of sexuality and relationships among young people in traditional Zulu culture. Secondly, I discuss the traditional Zulu cultural understanding of sex, in relation to the specific cultural practices of ukuqhetha and

ukusoma. Here, I argue that the traditional Zulu culture assisted young people to understand their growing bodies, gratify the body's physical and sexual needs without ruining their lives.

Finally, and without attempting to call for a revival of traditional culture, I discuss and analyse the implications for youth sexuality within the context of HIV. I challenge the current constructions of sex in Zulu culture as (1) taboo (2) limited to the act of producing babies and within the confines of the marriage institution and (3) strictly a penetrative act.

Virginity Tests

In the context of HIV and AIDS, studies indicate that young people are among the highly affected groups females being the most infected [1]. The persistent increase in teenage pregnancies in many African countries is also a worrying factor. This is because the high rate of teenage pregnancy is proof-positive that young people are engaging in unprotected sex, which puts them at risk of HIV infection.

In addition, research has reported a

direct link between teenage pregnancy, poverty and HIV [2]. The link emanates from the fact that pregnant young females often miss good educational and work opportunities, and end up having little or no income. Their poor state increases their chances of engaging in transactional or intergenerational sex with older men, in order to obtain some income. Hence, in South Africa and beyond, many interventions on HIV-prevention target young people as a group.

In the education sector, major HIV and AIDS intervention programmes are aimed at minimising the risk of infection among in-school youth. For instance, teachers have to deliver on the curriculum that integrates life skills, HIV and AIDS [3]. In addition, and working with other professionals from other sectors such as health, social welfare and non-governmental organisations, teachers have to develop and support peer education programmes in their schools. In the communities, reports indicate an emergence of programmes that promote abstinence, condom distribution and media intervention programmes on HIV and AIDS.

However, several interventions have met with challenges. For example, oftentimes, teachers and parents who are supposed to be discussing these issues with the youth do not think it is the right thing to do. Some believe that talking about sex and sexuality with youth will promote promiscuity. We also find that the interventions that make condoms accessible to young people are perceived as condoning immorality and infidelity.

Based on these perceptions, most adults

welcome or prefer interventions that promote abstinence from sex for young people. As in many other countries, the Zulu communities in South Africa have emphasised abstinence-before-marriage to young people (particularly to the females). To promote this, some communities in KwaZulu-Natal practice virginity testing among young girls, as a way to revive the old traditional practice of *ukuhlolwa kwezintombi*. During virginity testing, girls go out to the open fields where women testers examine individual girls to see if they have remained virgins.

Abstinence

While abstinence is a guaranteed way of preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, the abstinence-before-marriage agenda has not been able to adequately respond to the questions and concerns relating to sexual matters, that trouble young people's everyday lives. For example, how is abstinence-before-marriage helpful in preventing HIV? Many married people (some of whom were virgins on their wedding day) continue to die of AIDS-related infections? Secondly, what should youth do when they feel physically and sexually attracted to the opposite sex?

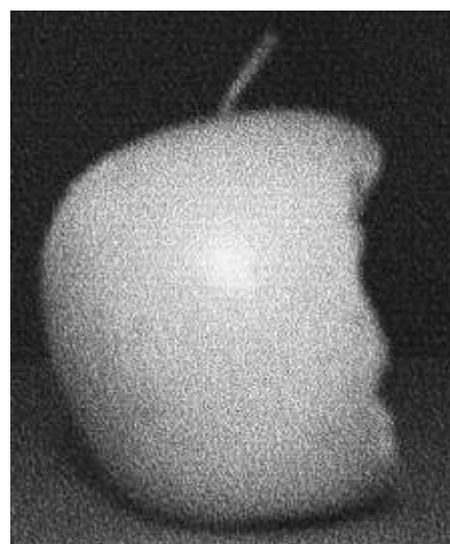
Besides these questions, and of course many others, the abstinence-before-marriage messages create particular constructions of sex. Sex is viewed strictly as a penetrative act performed to produce babies and within the marriage institution. Even more confusing to young people, is that these messages circulate in contexts

where sexuality and sex are constructed as individual, private matters surrounded by a wall of silence. Thus, young people carry this silence into their own relationships, where it becomes a frame within which to discover (or even further confuse) their own sexuality and sexual experiences.

Zulu Culture & Sexuality

The Zulu nation had a holistic view of life. Life was understood as a journey that each person had to travel on earth. This journey begins at birth and ends at death and is marked by different stages or phases. The phases include life at birth, as a toddler through to childhood, puberty (adolescence), youth, adulthood, old age and death. The society had an obligation to ensure that the social context was supportive to an individual person in his or her journey from stage to stage. The cultural practices, customs and traditions of the society therefore formed a regulatory system that assisted the individual to understand his or her journey, and the various stages. Besides, they also assisted the individual to understand other people's journeys in relation to his or her own journey, as well as his or her own social responsibility to support others as they travel through their journeys.

With special reference to sex and sexuality, in traditional Zulu culture, there were many occasions when public discourses about sexuality and sexual activity were held. For instance, during ritual ceremonies relating to the stage of *ukukhula* (the beginning of puberty) for boys and girls, the community openly addressed sexual matters through educational talks, songs, dances, and the offering of advice. At this stage, and throughout youth life, the rules of sexual conduct were inculcated in every young person and were strictly observed. Penetrative sex was strictly forbidden for young people. However, culture appreciated and recognised the physical needs of the growing body and the hormonal changes that occur in young people's bodies at puberty. In this sense, love relationships among young people were allowed, but kept within well-defined social control and regulatory mechanisms.



Love Relationships

Expressions in isiZulu language reveal that in traditional Zulu culture, love relationships among young people were not expected to last too long and were not solely for the purpose of marriage. For example, one expression says '*Okungapheli kuyahlola*' [4] (what does not end, acts as ill-omen). This means in love relationships, the love should both develop further and then culminate in marriage, or it should end. If it lasts too long, it might portend evil. Moreover, when proposing love to a young female, a man would use the following poetical expressions (See Table 1):

Borrowing the imagery of hunting, this poetic expression highlights the fact that the relationship between two young people, was not expected to last forever. It could end at any stage [5]. The relationship could be terminated even when *ilobolo* had been paid and the wedding day set. Hence, the lines "the one who has toasted it, has not eaten it".

Even on the wedding day, *umkhongi* (the main negotiator and overseer of the processes leading to the wedding) had to be alert because it was possible for a female to end the relationship if she changed her mind, because even "the one who has eaten it, has only eaten a part".

Usually, a female would end the relationship if she found another man she loved better. Specific customary practices and behaviours that were socially approved guided women on how to end relationships. Men were not supposed to

TABLE 1

Gege la gege ntaba zonke ziyangigegela
 Akukho ntombi yaqoma inyamazane
 Zala abantu ziya ebantwini
 Noseyishayile akakayosi
 Noseyosile akakayidli
 Noseyidlile usadle icala

Slant and slant all mountains are slanting for me
 There is no girl, who can fall in love with an animal
 They refuse man and go to man
 The one who has beaten it, has not toasted it
 The one who has toasted it, has not eaten it
 The one, who has eaten it, has only eaten a part.

end the relationship, as they were the ones who started it.

While the society approved the termination of relationships between young people, if they so wished, the society carefully guided the young people on how to choose their partners so that most relationships would last longer. Therefore, permission to choose a partner was mainly dictated by the age of maturity. Since youth were organised into various social regiments and categories, the youth leaders in each of these social regiments gave permission to young males and females to start having love relationships (*ukuqoma/ukuqonywa*). This permission was granted when the youth leaders were certain that males and females knew how to conduct themselves in love relationships.

Non-Penetrative Sex

Two young people who had a love relationship could visit each other and spend a night together in a practice called *ukuqhetha*. Ensuring that the woman's parents and brothers do not see him, in the evening the young man would arrive in the woman's homestead. *Amaqikiza* (the youth leaders) gave the young man permission to visit, and they would make all the arrangements. The two lovers would spend the night together either inside *ishulugu* (hut or enclosure for calves) or inside *ixhiba lotshwala* (the storage hut for clay pots and traditional Zulu beer). Mature young females, who had attained status in the society such as the youth leaders, could go to their lover's home where they would spend the night inside *ilawu* (hut for unmarried young males).

During *ukuqhetha*, several alternative and enjoyable sexual practices happened between the two people: for example, *ukucumbazana* (fondling and body-to-body rubbing), *ukucwalana* (dress-hair and polish head-ring), *ukuteketisana* (sexual fantasy which was accompanied by love talks and love praises), and *ukusoma* (pre-marital sexual intercourse using the thighs).

The key aspects of *ukusoma* are that; it is non-penetrative, done by two young people

(male and female) who are in love with each other, and the society allowed it. During *ukusoma*, the young female would keep her thighs together, cross her legs and the young man pushes his penis in between the female's thighs. In that way, sex was safer as the young man would not penetrate the vagina. This practice was lost in most Zulu communities during the colonisation and Christianisation process in South Africa.

Youth, Sexuality and HIV

Thus, traditional Zulu culture was open about sexuality and sexual matters: sexual activity was never casual or indiscriminate, penetrative sex was strictly prohibited and it was obligatory for all members of the nation to practise strict sexual discipline. The rules of sexual conduct were strictly observed. However, colonists and missionaries found these practices and collective discourses about sexual matters offensive.

Thus, sexuality and sex was transformed from the context where it was kept open, to being a tabooan individual, private matter surrounded by silence [6]. Above this silence, religion preaches abstinence before marriage, without any further discussions about sexual matters. There is no guidance on how to deal with sexual urges/needs, sexual intercourse, and how to abstain. In Zulu communities, when the practice of *ukusoma* was abandoned, no alternative sexual practices replaced it.

In the present context, when many young people are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, some advocate that Africans should bring back some of the lost customary practices that promoted safer sex. Based on these debates, should the Zulu nation bring back the practice of *ukusoma*? Obviously, this would be difficult, as it would be impossible to bring back the social control and regulatory mechanisms that ensured that the practice continued, given the changes that have occurred over the years.

However, while the practice of *ukusoma* cannot be actualised within the current context, the attitudes, values, norms,

knowledge that were associated with the practice is still valuable. Some of these are: openness about sex, sexuality and sex education, sexual activity that responds to the sexual needs of the body and not just an act of producing babies. With more open discussions about sex and sexuality, new ways of practising safer will emerge; for instance sexual activity without vaginal penetration.

Conclusion

This article argues that while traditional Zulu culture had positive values and behaviours that discouraged penetrative sex before marriage, alternative sexual practices such as *ukusoma*, were in place to ensure that young people still gratified their physical needs in their love relationships, but without having to engage in penetrative sex. However, the article does not call for the revival of traditional cultural practises, but it argues that we document and learn from the knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills (relating to sex and sexuality) that underpinned the traditional practices.

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Public Health and the Individual Right to Sexual Pleasure and Choice

By Prof. Sophie B. Oluwole



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A couple from a humble family background in East London, South Africa exemplify love and togetherness... They were finalists in the South African 36-hours-of-freedom Most Romantic Couples.

Introduction

The primary aim of this paper is to subject to critical analysis the predominant traditional view that the expression of our sexual feelings is justifiable only if it is for reproductive purposes. History is our witness that different religions and human societies have put in place various principles meant to determine right and wrong acts of sexual expressions. The new agitation is to critique the nature and rational justification of such principles vis-à-vis the undeniable fact that sex is a natural feeling, urge that men and women have.

This, by implication means that it is natural to express our sexuality any time, anywhere and with sexual partners of our

choice either for fun, enjoyment, i.e. coitus or reproduction purposes, and that is in the exclusive sense. However, there is always the argument that as members of a community of human beings, this freedom supposedly carries some reciprocal responsibilities not only to ourselves as individuals but also to society at large. Some have even gone further to say that men and women are under some divine injunctions to limit acts of sexual expression only to that of reproduction.

In other words, the conventional belief is that the determination of matters of sexuality cannot be left to the individual alone but that society as a unit of inter-related persons must set some limits to the expression of individual sexual rights. The

intellectual concern is how to manage the obvious conflicts between the expression of individual sexual rights and the right of society to put in place some social principles meant to promote public health.

One of the major interests of the philosopher is the analysis of the basic concepts generally of sexual rights and social policies about women. The religious and metaphysico-epistemological axioms of the different conceptual views of men and women as key players in sexual action need to be exposed, criticised and rationally justified or falsified as the case may be.

The goal is to identify factual errors, conceptual ambiguities, paradoxes and sometimes outright contradictions that have hitherto beclouded the full understanding and appreciation of contemporary gender discourse and consequently hindered the formulation of cogent policies that can promote the finding of lasting solutions to the enigmatic problems of human rights in the area of sexuality and reproduction.

Sexual Rights and Reproduction

The first popular confusion to be identified here is that between reproduction and sexuality. Historically, the former is treated as the only acceptable reason for an engagement in sexual acts. The logical implication is that sexual activities are right and thus permissible only between married couples of two opposing sexes and only for the purpose of reproduction. This Christian ethics later found its way into the Western statute books and social morality. The convention was to regard all sexual relations outside of marriage and for purposes other than

reproduction as sinful and/or immoral.

The first conceptual conflict in this view is that animals have little or no problem expressing their sexual urge since this is ruled by their instincts. This means that they express their sexuality only when under 'heat'. However, one of the basic qualities that distinguishes human beings from other animals is their capacity to make choices, to decide what to do and what not to do. Yet, human beings are seen as under obligation to obey without question some moral principles and religious laws. Wherein then lies man's natural freedom to make moral choices?

The claim that divine laws restrict sexuality to reproduction negate two basic doctrines of most religions, namely that God made man and woman with the sexual urge and at the same time God gave human beings the freedom to make a choice between right and wrong acts. Here we meet with the first contradiction. If nature or God predetermines the expression of our sexual urge towards others where lies our freedom to choose our sexual partners? Or is it the case that men and women are denied the freedom to make choices and so are mere robots controlled by instincts the way this happens in lower animals? Are human beings like animals playing out our naturally determined sexuality?

This discussion becomes critical and interesting given the fact that different scholars now give different interpretations of sexuality in some holy books. At least, we have been recently told that homosexuality is divinely ordained and therefore not a sin as most Christians claim. At least homosexuality is not explicitly mentioned in the Ten Commandments. However, this argument raises the issue about whether or not as human beings we have the power to exercise control over the expression of our sexual urge and are thus in a position to make choices therein. Do lesbians and gay people experience akrasia or are they like kleptomaniacs who, no matter how they try as individuals they are under some uncontrollable psychological compulsion to sexually relate only to persons of the

same sex?

The relevant issue here is whether or not there can be justifiable reasons for prescribing, advising, moralising or controlling the sexual behaviour of an individual by some external persons or group of persons. To recast our preliminaries above, the vexing problem today is to critically examine the view that divine laws relating to sexuality are fixed and immutable, and that men and women have the right to make sexual choices.

The current view is that individuals, male or female, are absolutely free and under no bondage in expressing their sexual feelings. The orientation is to fully recognize sexual rights as basically different and distinct from, even though related to, reproductive rights. The critique of any ideology that restricts sexual rights to reproduction rights is demonstrable as a violation of the right to engage in sexual activities for enjoyment and coitus purposes. The argument that ensues from this analysis raises the question as to whether or not society there is any justification for restricting sexual rights to the purposes of reproduction.

These are some of the fundamental questions we shall discuss. The basic assignment is to spell out in broad outlines paradigms under which social policies that do not deny sexual rights and at the same time prevent sexual anarchy can be formulated.

Sexual Rights, Reproduction and Family Planning

If we break this traditional umbilical cord between sexual rights and reproduction rights, then society must concede that as individuals, men and women have the right to express their sexual urge the way they want. The logical implication of this position is that there can be no just moral or legislative policies about masturbation, promiscuity, oral sex, prostitution, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, etc.

The possible exceptions here have to do with policies that set some limits to the age of a sexual partner, the condition of health and concession on the part of each. The first point in the discussion of these issues is to engage in conceptual clarifications about

individual rights to sexuality and the rights of society to formulate policies about these in the realm of human affairs.

The boundary between these two must be kept meticulously distinct from the right of the individual to choose whether or not to make babies and how many. This is where the issue of population control comes in and becomes suspect.

One of the reasons why many countries have now moved away from talking about "Birth Control" and opted for the more individual respecting and culturally sensitive slogan "Children by Choice" is that the former violates the ideology of the freedom to choose. The fact that some countries in the North adopt Pro-Natal policies while countries in the South are encouraged to promulgate Anti-Natal policies strengthens the argument that population control policies do have political, racial and cultural undertones. The discriminatory reproduction policies noted above bare witness to this.

Sexual Rights and Sexuality Education

And here comes the necessity for education, the need for continuous public education. Although our individual rights must be respected, knowledge expands our horizon of responsible choices and thus helps the individual set some broad limits to how s/he expresses sexual freedom. The most vexing problem here is that of developing the ability of the individual to make sexual decisions with a full knowledge of the medical and psychological implications on oneself. Sexuality education is aimed at producing men and women who have learnt how to enjoy sexual rights with a full sense of responsibility.

Within the secular realm, many of these questions have to be answered by scientists, psychoanalysts and sexologists engaged in a cross-fertilisation of discoveries and ideas. The fact that the horizon of human knowledge is always expanding makes it imperative that we continue to engage in the criticism of individual rights and moral principles in general. For as one Yoruba saying goes: "Ogbon odunni, were e mi i." This means "The wisdom of one age may be folly in another era."

More knowledge about human sexuality promotes better understanding and clears the way for the formulation of more humane, more justified social policies, moral principles and legislative ordinance.

This presupposes that with adequate knowledge about our body its constitution and how it works; the physical, mental, and psychological effects of our sexual activities on an individual and other members of our community, individuals will be in better mental positions to make rational sexual choices.

Sexuality, Pleasure and Public Health

As noted above, it is individuals who in the final analysis make sexual choices. However, is it not too presumptuous of society to rely entirely on the ability of every individual to behave in ways that would promote public health such that there would be no sexual chaos? The task here is how to delimit the boundary of sexuality without violating individual sexual rights while at the same time society shows a concern for society's well being defined as the well being of its individual members.

A good illustration here is the distinction between legal and illegal prostitution. Some countries have legislated that professional prostitutes operate under specific conditions. These conditions include the need to submit to regular medical examinations and treatment. A corollary aspect of the current discourse on sexual rights is the call for legalized abortion. This is a more controversial issue since it raises the question of uninformed or careless sex. For if an individual wants sex without the intention of making a baby, necessary precautions are expected to have been taken. On the other side of the argument is that these precautions sometimes fail. Under such situations decisions have to be made. And if one may ask, who makes the final decision here?

Sexuality In Old Age

The contemporary scientific view is that men and women do enjoy sex at old age. The problems for older women may not be as precarious as those of older men. The fact that women do reach menopause means that they do not face problems of

unwanted pregnancy. Are there negative effects of sexual activities on the health and psychology of older people? What happens to the sexual rights of widows and widowers, most especially in societies that frown at marriage contracted in old age and/or wife inheritance?

The issue for older men may be in relation to marrying and making babies in old age. The problem becomes a real public health issue when such old men have minimal financial resources and property to be bequeathed to their young orphans. It is undeniable that young men and women do die and leave behind orphans too. However, is the expectation the same for a seventy-five or eighty years old man who married a girl of twenty or twenty-five? What personal and social responsibilities do old men and women have in expressing their sexual rights? Do feminists have to fight, frown, sometimes against young girls who of their own decision marry older men.

Sexuality and Tradition

Some scholars seem to hold the view that African traditional standpoints on issues of sexuality more often than not, impinge on the rights of women in general. I can categorically testify on the evidence of literary and oral texts from different parts of Africa, most specifically from Nigeria that this over-generalisation is false. The importance of language as bearer of cultural views on sexual and reproductive rights and social policies cannot be totally ignored in this matter.

Let me present before you the views of some ancient Yoruba thinkers on some issues of sexuality.

Homosexuality and Adultery

Epo dunun je isu, ikete dunun je'fo. Obinrin dunun basun ju okunrin lo. B'o ba duro, o layungba, b'o ba bere, o layungba. A dia fun Awele onodi oreke. Igba ti won fe Awele onodi oreke tan, ko se'hun meji mo, ale ni nyan kiri. Ko m'eni o to, ko m'eni o to. Ati eniti won jo n gbele atieroona...

(Some things give enjoyment. For instance it is more pleasurable to have sex with a woman than to have it with a man. This is irrespective of the position of the woman. But even then a married woman who sleeps around with family members,

neighbours and even strangers forgets her dignity as a woman)

The Promiscuous Man

Iwori wowo wowo, iwori wosu wosu, Iwori wosu ko to wawo Oyinbo. A dia fun alarobo, abu fun baba oloko. Baba oloko n ta ja a re; awon alarobo n ra a. Baba oloko wa n wo idi alarobo, ko wo oja t'o nta mo titi o fi ta oja nitakuta tan. Ni won ba nkorin fun baba oloko : E o wowo l'oko, E o wowo l'oko. E n wo'di alarobo, E o wowo l'oko.

(A man should learn self discipline before going into business like the whites. This was the mistake of the farmer who was a marketer. Instead of concentrating on the sale of his goods he was more interested in having sex with female buyers. In the end he sold at a loss and was ridiculed for being more mindful of sex than ensuring that his investment is secured.)

Sex And the Old Woman

Apa wu arugbo ti n be ninu ile san, lilo ni won o fi lo o. (The old woman in the house wants sex; it is that nobody approaches her.)

Equality

Ogboogba, ogboogba l'a jo wa, bee l'a o lolori. (We are all equal, we feel so equal that we sometimes believe we have no leader)

The point I am making here is not that each of the statements above is justified. The point is that there is neither explicit condemnation of homosexuality nor the prescription of a particular sexual position as the ideal as some religions have done. The argument against adultery does not seem to be yet outmoded. The promiscuous man is ridiculed while the fact that old women have sexual desires is recognized. Finally there is the caution that equality is misconstrued when confused with absolute freedom.

Conclusion

The task that lies ahead of contemporary society is to guarantee education for girls, boys, men and women to enable them express their sexual rights as distinct from reproductive rights. We should also aim at helping society formulate humane social policies that do not impinge on individual rights but that are also not oblivious of our social responsibilities to promote and protect public health.

Itereleng:ICA - Enabling Youth "Do Things for Themselves"

By John Cornwell and
Thembi Maxamba



YFL HIV/AIDS training in 2003. A participant demonstrates use of the female condom.

Introduction

South Africa, currently 12 years into the country's new democratic dispensation, faces enormous challenges in the arena of sexuality. In spite of its progressive constitution and the practical progress made since 1994 in the field of human rights and gender equity, society remains stubbornly patriarchal and oppressive with extremely high rates of violence against women and children. It is no exaggeration that for millions of people, the right (to education, health care and proper sanitation to name only three) is far from being realised and this is especially true in the area of sexual rights. One very significant consequence of these violations is that, at the end of 2003, 21% of the population (or 5.3 million people) were HIV positive.

Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) is a global network focusing on participatory

approaches and human-centred, holistic development. ICA is present in more than 30 countries, including 12 in Africa. In South Africa, the organisation is known as Itereleng:ICA; Itereleng is a Tswana word meaning "people doing things for themselves", which literally summarises our philosophy and approach to our work, including work on sexuality issues. We believe fundamentally in rights of people to participate in and take control of decisions that affect their lives; in other words, human rights and sexual rights with regard to making informed choices on issues of sexuality.

Areas of Intervention

Our work since the organisation started in 2001 has included a strong focus on youth development due to the fact that 70% of the population is under 35, and 40% of the population are youth or young adults (aged 15-34). The organisation has

been working in both urban and rural areas, where poverty and the continued legacy of apartheid has impacted on young people in devastating ways. Our work in the area of sexual health and rights has included the following:

Since 2002, ICA developed an effective youth development programme called Youth as Facilitative Leaders (YFL) in Gauteng province, which has a core team of 10 skilled youth facilitators and has trained more than 1,000 young people on critical issues facing youth, such as gender, race, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, and children's rights, amongst others. In addition, youth involved in our programmes also acquire life skills, including facilitation skills. In line with our mission to empower youths take control of their lives and destinies, young people now control the direction of this programme and organize all activities and training according to needs expressed amongst the various groups targeted.

We have extended the YFL model of peer facilitation and education to work with rural communities in North West and Gauteng Provinces with a focus on sexuality, sexual rights, HIV/AIDS and addressing gender-based violence.

Since 2002, ICA has also delivered a wide range of training services relating to gender, youth development, sexuality and sexual rights to various organisations, including United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Department of Education, Palesa Corporate Consultants, Centre for Study of AIDS (University of Pretoria), Ditshwanelo CARAS (Centre for Anti-Racism & Anti-Sexism) and Rural Education Access Programme (REAP).

¹ Statistics are from South Africa & Kaiser Family Foundation HIV/AIDS Fact Sheet



Youth enjoy an 'energiser' during YFL programme on Women's Day in Soweto this year

Some outcomes of these collaborations include the development of Girls Education Movement (GEM) clubs in schools in Limpopo Province and heightened sensitization on issues of gender, race and anti-oppression.

Lessons Learnt

Using a holistic approach to tackling development issues has been very effective in enabling young people to take control of their own issues and agenda, and, therefore, find more sustainable solutions. For example, the key to prevention of HIV infection and Gender-Based Violence is self-empowerment. When young people feel confident about themselves, they can be assertive and powerful within their own spheres of operation. They are thus, able to make informed choices about their own sexuality, sexual health and self-development. They in turn are able to make positive impact on their families and communities.

Creation of an enabling environment is also important. Advocacy work with young people driving their own issues, agendas and solutions has been a very useful strategy in our experience. In South Africa and many other countries, young people have often been at the forefront of radical and sustainable change. Operating within this framework, young people are valuable and not merely vulnerable; they are assertive agents of change rather than merely passive recipients.

At ICA, we see young people as change agents; that is, they are part of the solution not the problem - this can be very powerful and effective. Many of the young people involved in our programmes have effected personal and social change.

The best evidence of our approach to sexual rights is captured in the words of Nthabiseng Madonsela, a young woman of 18, who has been involved with our youth programme for the past 2 years:

My life has been changed in many ways by ICA... the way I think. In the past, I attended other workshops and found them boring. At the ICA training programmes, they talked about reality and what was really happening. They let me explore life... we talked about teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. Before this, the message wasn't getting to me. I grew up in a place where most of us were very ignorant. ICA came and we had debates... I discovered that I need to motivate myself and that no one is going to do it for me. I realized that whatever I'm faced with I can do. Nothing is impossible... I'm still using the skills I've gained and will for the rest of my life.

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Reflections on 'Barren' but Pleasurable Sexualities in Africa

By Stella Nyanzi

Introduction

'Sexuality beyond reproduction' is a deeply-nuanced notion which provides a master-key to unlock various doors of meanings associated with sexuality in diverse settings. It avails an opportunity for scholars to focus on sexuality without getting bogged down with the interrelated concept of reproduction. In this reflection paper, I examine the social, cultural, spiritual and political contexts which contribute to a fluid form of sexuality beyond reproduction as presented, availed and maintained through the possibilities of diversity in African sexualities. The main locus of my discussion is within sub-contexts of heterosexualities.

In outline, the paper presents a continuum of sexual cultures; discusses the simplistic, erroneous and widespread tendency of both lay and scholarly observers to collapse the diversity of available enactments of sexualities in Africa, into a rigid and one-track version of patriarchal heterosexuality whose ultimate purpose is reproduction - which is idealised within a setting of highly-moralised monogamy prescribed by post-colonial Judeo-Christianity. Thereafter, conditions in which sex in heterosexual unions does not relate into reproduction are presented. I end with a brief analysis of sexuality among people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHAs).

Conceptual Definition

Sexual culture is fundamental to analysing sexual behaviour. Parker et al [1] define sexual culture as the system of meaning, knowledge, beliefs and practices structuring sexuality in different social contexts. It emphasises the significance of social, cultural, political, economic and religious factors to the construction of sexuality. In this context, sexual culture refers to general expressions of cultural behaviour and not individual expressions of one's sexuality. However Parker et al [1:79-80] also acknowledge that individuals cognizant of the cultural ideals of sexuality, do express variations as long as they are within the parameters that are socially defined as normative. Implicit tensions between collective and individual expressions of

sexuality could arise.

A Continuum

The politics of knowledge-making about Africa (particularly pre-literate, pre-colonial and colonial eras) is such that the authorial positioning of writers about tradition, custom and culture was mainly foreign Westerners from Europe or North America; usually in the form of explorers, colonisers, Christian missionaries, anthropologists, etc. Several Africans in the post-colonies who studied sexualities in diverse African settings were trained abroad in either European or American traditions. This process generated a largely American/Eurocentric perspective. The eyes that beheld the African study subjects were foreign. Perhaps this explains the two-pronged perspective of sexuality in Africa [see 2] either as very simplistic innocent naïve responses to natural sexual drives, or otherwise wanton, savage, over-sexed primitive promiscuous reservoirs of sexually transmitted infections, and indeed highly-libidinous manufacturers of numerous babies. This homogenising approach to sexuality studies in Africa, may explain the overtly heterosexual emphasis of gaze, which variously erodes the diversity in sexual expressions and subcultures inherent among African societies.

Following from a largely western Judeo-Christian capitalist ethos hinged upon the biomedical paradigm which promotes the over-arching prominence of reproductive heterosexuality within the idealised monogamous union, the focus of studies, discourses, policies, programmes and debates in Africa has mainly been on sexuality within the confines of the ultimate goal of reproduction. Thus the perpetuation of a heterosexual normativity, almost to the exclusion of all other forms of sexuality. However, an unbiased exploratory inventory

of sexual mores, norms, behaviours, activities, cultures and expressions abounding in diverse African contexts reveals an abundance of sexualities that go beyond the reproductive terrain (figure 1).

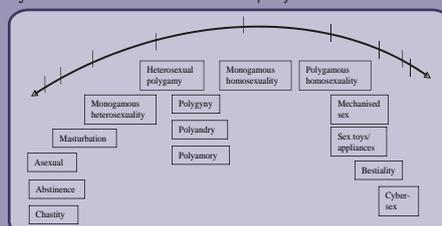
Asexual culture mainly consists of individuals and collectives who decide against sexual intercourse for varying reasons including religion, chastity as a vocation, resolution to retain virginity until marriage, celibate post-menopausal women, or loss of sexual partners through widowhood, separation, divorce, migration, etc. Cessation of sexual intercourse does not necessarily negate sexuality as these individuals may engage in self-sexual-pleasuring, use of erotic stimulants including appliances, and indulgence in cyber-sex which could exclude the physical presence of a partner.

Masturbation - another form of sexual expression, is commonly practised and yet also highly stigmatised because of its condemnation within Judeo-Christianity. As a means of self-discovery, an avenue of sexualisation, and a source of pleasure, masturbation is accessible to the self without need for another partner or the consequence of reproduction. Non-penetrative sex is sometimes perceived as mutual masturbation.

Reproduction is possible within contexts of heterosexual union. However, there are varieties of heterosexuality ranging from socially-sanctioned monogamy to highly stigmatised poly-amorous liaisons; for example commercial sex work. Each form of heterosexuality has different dynamics surrounding negotiation of reproduction. Reproduction presupposes fertility, conception, and carrying a pregnancy to full-term. However sterility, infertility, miscarriages, sexual incompatibility, abortion and still-births are all biological flaws negating reproduction. Similarly, choice, contraception, condoms, social-cultural conditioning, etc can create situations conducive to sexuality beyond reproduction.

Albeit widespread denial of homosexuality among African societies, it is a growing

Figure 1. A continuum of sexual cultures in contemporary Africa



component of the sexual terrain in the continent [3]. In homosexual unions, the reasons and functions of sexuality surpass reproduction. This is perhaps the greatest reason behind the dominant opposition expressed as homophobia against individuals and collectives that choose to identify thus, and those who engage in homosexual activities. The generic labels for homosexuals reveal the inherent variety: lesbians, gay men, bi-sexuals, trans-genders. Within each of these variants is more nuanced diversity; for example the distinctions between femmes and butch dykes.

Bestiality, the practice of having sexual intercourse with animals is sometimes reported in the vox pop, local rumours and gossip, as more common among herdsmen, and pet-owners. Mechanised-sex including use of appliances such as sex-toys, vibrators, etc for erotic stimulation, and cyber-sex are variants of sexuality in contemporary Africa that are on the increase with exposure to globalisation. While they are mainly limited to a social class of the urban-elite who have access to the worldwide-web, these forms of sexuality without reproduction are popular among youths who are still within their reproductive years.

Beyond Reproduction

Children are highly valued in several sub-Saharan African societies. Nyanzi [4] discusses the significance of reproduction to contemporary Africans, and how it is transforming with the reality of HIV/AIDS. Several alternatives are available to a heterosexual couple, beyond sexuality for reproduction (see figure 2).

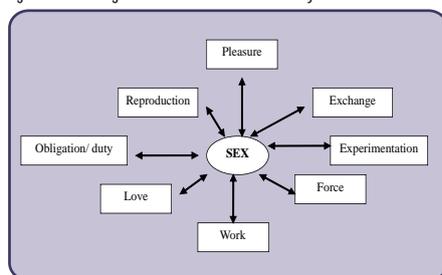
Sexual activity could be entirely for deriving pleasure for self and/or the sexual partner(s). Although the pleasurable of sexual relations among Africans is largely shrouded in silence, or outright denial, there is evidence of customary sexual practices that were designed for mutual pleasure of both male and female partners, for example labia-elongation among some East Africans. Experimentation of self, and the sexual partner(s) is another reason for sexual activity, particularly in the early stages of sexualisation. Here, sexuality is not necessarily geared towards conception, but rather to a deeper knowledge of the explored erotic contours.

In situations of rape, where one is forced, conception is greeted with mixed reactions often resulting into early termination through abortion. Commercial sex workers for whom sex is about work, a source of income, or a mode of employment to support self and dependants, sexuality is really about livelihood. Reproduction in this case could have adverse effects because evidence of the pregnancy to outsiders, the

post-natal period, and breastfeeding, could affect sexual appeal; resulting into loss of clients.

Mundane sexual activity with a regular partner such as a spouse is often obligatory, and out of duty, much more than a strategy to conceive. Thus the prevalence of both indigenous and western-based contraception. Many minors who are below the age of consent including students, variously get involved in sexual activity. For some, sexuality is an expression of love, commitment, or an item of exchange for opportunity, material benefits, finances. Apart from scenarios of early arranged-marriages, it is unlikely that the sexuality of minors is geared towards reproduction. Likewise sexuality for women past menopause cannot achieve biological reproduction, but may be out of duty or for mutual pleasure.

Figure 2. Meanings associated with sexual activity



Sexuality and HIV

Prior to the multiple initiatives for the massive roll-out of antiretroviral therapies in resource-poor settings including sub-Saharan Africa, a positive HIV-diagnosis was a death sentence to many infected people particularly when they advanced to stages of opportunistic infections linked with AIDS. With growing AIDS-related deaths, resultant widowhood and orphanage, the delicate issue of the rights of PLWHA to a normal sexual life vis-à-vis the need for responsible reproduction, steadily became salient albeit silent. In addition to the infectivity and ultimate death of the sexually active PLWHA, the dynamics of this see-saw were further complicated by rising prevalence of infants infected during birth or through their mother's breast-milk. Vertical transmission of HIV accentuates the need for sexuality beyond reproduction specifically in contexts of sexually active PLWHAs who may lack access to interventions aimed at prevention-of-mother-to-child-transmission (PMTCT) of HIV.

Living with and working among PLWHA since the mid-1980s, I was struck by the dilemma they faced as sexual beings many of whom were torn apart by the multi-faceted pressure to reproduce, as well as the fear of dying and leaving young orphans.

Lamin Ceesay, the Executive Director of Santa Yalla Support Society in The Gambia

stated it well.

Ceesay: What pains me most is that I will never be able to marry, or even to father a child because everybody knows that I have this HIV. That is one of the consequences of coming out publicly about my HIV infection. No man can allow his daughter to marry me. No woman can allow to have my baby because they know it will be HIV-positive.

Interviewer: What about the drugs which can prevent spread of the HIV to your child during birth?

Ceesay: I know about them because there are women in our society who have done it and their babies are healthy fat and happy. But then I do not want to get a child when I know that I will die any moment and leave my family behind with the burden of raising these children. It is too painful and too costly. That is why we give out condoms to PLWHAs. Because the need for sex is like the appetite for food. It is better to have protected sex to solve all these problems. Interview 2005

Among PLWHAs, the quest for sexuality beyond reproduction is a solution to the problem of paediatric HIV-infection. However it is simultaneously juxtaposed with the problematic issue of medical ethics, particularly in the light of a human-rights-based environment in which there are growing concerns for the rights of PLWHAs to a healthy sexual and reproductive life.

Conclusion

This essay has explored the variety of layers comprising the sexual terrain, without necessarily focussing on reproduction. As a possible starting point for transcending the narrow perspective that is centred merely on sexuality within the boundaries of reproduction, a map of possibilities is plotted. An alternative model presents diverse meanings drawn from and contributing to sex within different contexts. In both cases, reproduction is only but one angle. Given the diversity of nuances, understandings and enactments of sexuality, perspectives and interventions premised upon minute definitions are not only simplistic, but also limited in scope, effectiveness, appropriateness, and applicability. In order to be meaningful, policies and programmes targeting sexuality must broaden to embrace the wealth of possibilities within the concept as lived out in people's lives.

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By Tolulope Monisola Ola



© 1996 Carlyn Saltman/CCP, Courtesy of Photoshare. Couple communication in "Put Yourself in Her Shoes," a training video.

"We need to remember the power of language: if kids (especially girls) don't have words to describe the parts of their bodies that give them pleasure, then we are robbing them of the tools they need to communicate about and be agents of their sexuality. If we don't distinguish between reproductive sex and sexual pleasure, we are relegating all forms of sexual expression (besides heterosexual intercourse), to the unknown and not-to-be-talked-about margins. If we don't explicitly find healthy ways to talk about sex and sexuality with kids, then we leave it to Disney and beer commercials to define the parameters of sexual expression. And if we try to bring a progressive, sex-positive feel to the question of "Where babies come from," then we are associating sexual pleasure uniquely with reproductive sex; we are not honoring the manifold ways children and adults experience sexuality; and we are bypassing a more realistic explanation of how families create themselves." [1]

Introduction

In the African context, having a child is very important in order to ensure continuity. Thus, sexuality, fertility and reproduction are surrounded by complex

rituals, norms and beliefs. Certainly, fertility is important to all societies and it is one very basic expression of sexuality. The inability to have children has traditionally been a source of pain, anxiety and shame especially in a patriarchal society such as we have in most parts of Africa. Sexual intercourse can be a wonderfully exciting and fulfilling aspect of sexuality. However, when coping with infertility and trying to bear a child, intercourse frequently becomes associated with obligation, work, and failure. When childlessness is the expected and inevitable outcome of all sexual encounters, it now becomes oppressive, unsatisfying, and something to be avoided.

The focus here will not be on the problematic nature of infertility, which tends to focus on sexuality only in relation to disease, stigma, and violence; on the risks and dangers rather than the pleasures. The emphasis on the negative

aspects of sexuality reinforce the stereotypes and fears around it that prevent infertile couples from having pleasurable and fulfilling sexual experiences.

Definitions

According to the working definitions of sexual health provided by the World Health Organization website, sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed [2].

Infertility is a disease of the reproductive system and it is defined as a man's inability to impregnate a woman or a woman's inability to conceive and bear a living child [3].

Given these two definitions, it is clearly evident that the basic requirement for conception and reproduction is sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse is any activity that one engages in for erotic pleasure or reproduction. It includes but is not limited to, vaginal intercourse, manual manipulation of the anus or genitals and mutual masturbation. Reproduction is the whole process involved in making a baby, which begins with vaginal intercourse and includes the entire period of pregnancy, as well as the child rearing period after birth.

Sexuality and Infertility

The relationship between sexuality and infertility can be assessed from either the causative aspect (where sexual dysfunctions are contributory factors to infertility) or the reactive aspect (where the diagnosis, investigation and management of infertility can interact with a couple's or individual's sexuality and sexual expression). All these inevitably affect the sexual self worth of individuals, their sexual desires and the satisfaction they get from being intimate with their partners.

There are many reasons why a diagnosis, investigation and treatment of infertility can have a negative impact on a couples' sex life. The most common and obvious problem when couples are trying to conceive is that the purpose and goal of sexual intimacy changes from pleasure to reproduction. A man feels excessive pressure to perform, which affects his erection or ejaculatory ability. The man and the woman can develop arousal difficulties because of the associated anxiety and stress of the need to perform. In addition, some partners may feel their masculinity or femininity compromised by being wanted only when conception is thought to be more likely to occur. For some men, one or two failures during intercourse may precede a vicious cycle of fear of failure, with anxiety leading to further failure. Failure to impregnate or conceive certainly destroys the self-esteem of many men. These failures all conspire to alienate the couple from the recreational aspects of sexual expression and focus them, sometimes obsessively, on the procreative aspect of sexual intercourse.

Separating Reproduction from Sexuality

Intercourse is great for reproduction but it can acquire other functions other

than reproduction. Human beings are known to have non-reproduction-focused sex, apparently for the sake of pleasure. They engage in sexual relations even when the female is not at a point in her reproductive cycle suitable for successful impregnation. The uses of sex has evolved beyond reproduction to serve additional social functions. It is for companionship, giving and receiving pleasure and sometimes used for commercial or transactional purposes.

In my opinion, it will be useful and helpful if couples that are infertile can move beyond the mind-set that all erotic and intimate activity must inevitably lead to intercourse or penetrative sex, which invariably is associated with reproduction. There is an enormous range of pleasurable, intimate, sensual and other erotic activities that couples can enjoy other than intercourse. Activities such as kissing, caressing, massaging, fondling, holding, licking, sucking, tasting, watching and reading are all often satisfying and enjoyable whether or not they end up with one or both partners being penetrated or having orgasm.

It would be useful for couples to talk to a counselor who can help separate sex from reproduction so that the feelings of frustration, anger and hopelessness, which affect their sexuality throughout the course of investigation and treatment, can be ventilated. This will to a large extent restore a sense of personal worth.

Reproductive Technology

Human reproduction has enjoyed more and more technology support. It is interesting to note that, the more reproductive technology develops, the more room there is for reproductive equality between infertile and fertile couples. In the past, because reproduction could only take place inside a woman's body, her physical integrity is implicated.

Now, reproduction can take place outside the woman's body through what is called Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART). Though, Okonofua [4] opined that ARTs in much of the sub-Saharan Africa countries are inappropriate in the management of infertility because of the lack of material resources, in my opinion, ARTs should be subsidized in the same way contraceptives are.

Conclusion

One of the many myths surrounding infertility is that it is a negative reflection upon sexuality. However, in my opinion the two are completely unrelated. A person who is infertile can still enjoy a completely fulfilling and pleasurable sex life.

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NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS

Guidelines for submissions

The editors welcome submissions on the thematic focus of future issues of the Magazine, as well as other areas of sexuality, sexual health and rights. Themes for upcoming 2006 issues include:

2006

- Cultural, Religious Beliefs and Healthy, Pleasurable Sexuality
- Healthy and Responsible Sexuality: Lessons from People Living Positively

ARSRC seeks articles for submission which are objective, analytical and mirror current/contemporary issues and debates in the areas of Sexuality, Sexual health and Rights in Africa. Articles should reflect a holistic/comprehensive approach to sexuality; taking sexuality discourse beyond health to incorporate broader issues of the expression of sexuality without guilt, fear or ill-health. While priority would be given articles that have not been previously, already published material may be considered depending on how relevant the subject area and focus is to ARSRC's work.

However, for already published articles, full details of previous publication and where to seek permission for reprint must accompany the article.

We particularly welcome articles related to our thematic focus for the following sections:

Region Watch: Topical issues with a country or sub regional focus.

Programme Feature: best practices from programme implementers.

Research Notes: Focus research and methodologies.

Viewpoint: Reactions to previous magazine issues or on a subject area that a reader wishes to express very strong views or opinion.

Length:

Feature articles: 1,000 1,500 words

Research issues: 800-1,000 words

Opinion articles: 400-500 words

Photo

We welcome photos with or without articles and will give

appropriate credit when photo is used.

Presentation

Please submit initially, an abstract with your name, contact address, phone number, email address and details about yourself as you would wish it to appear on the list of contributors.

*****All contributors will receive a copy of the issue in which their contribution has been published.

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Thembi Maxamba is the Training Co-ordinator at the Institute of Cultural Affairs, Johannesburg, South Africa

Sexuality Resources

Useful Organizations and Websites

- International Planned Parenthood Federation
www.ippf.org
- Department of Reproductive Health and Research, World Health

- Organization
<http://www.who.int/reproductive-health>
- Global Action on Aging
www.globalaging.org
- Marie Stopes International
<http://www.mariestopes.org.uk>
- Help Age International

- <http://www.helpage.org>
- The Pleasure Project
<http://www.the-pleasure-project.org>
- Engender Health
<http://www.engenderhealth.org>
- Advocates for Youth
<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org>

Research Reports

Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Report. The International Lesbian and Gay Association, 2006.

Pdf:http://doc.ilga.org/ilga/publications/other_publications/lesbian_and_bisexual_women_s_health_report

This report contains a compendium of information ranging from health-specific topics, such as HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections and breast and gynaecological cancer, to addressing the political and social problems of curative rape and domestic violence.

Sex, Marriage and Fathering: A Profile of Sub-Saharan African Men. Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2004.

Pdf:<http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/summaries/SSA-reg-summ.pdf>

This report provides information about the conditions of Sub-Saharan African men's lives and behaviors that can jeopardize or protect their sexual and reproductive health.

Sexual Rights in Southern Africa: A Beijing Discourse or a Strategic Necessity? Barbara Klugman, 2000.

Pdf:www.wits.ac.za/whp/sexualrights_beijing.pdf

This article explores the meaning of sexual rights as interpreted by various stakeholders during the development of the Beijing Programme of Action and within the Southern Africa Development Community.

Sex in the Context of AIDS: Reflections

on sex in an African Society and its representation in Academia. Rachel Spronk, 2005.

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Adolescent' Access to Reproductive Health and Family Planning Services in Dakar, Senegal. Christine Nare, Karen Katz, Elizebeth Tolley, 1997

Pdf:www.grhf.harvard.edu/HUPapers/97-04.pdf

Factsheets and Briefs

Sexuality and Development. IDS Policy Briefing, 2006

Pdf:www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/briefs/PB29.pdf

This brief examines how development has viewed sexuality as a problem, considering it only in relation to population control, family planning, disease and violence. However sexuality has far broader impacts on people's well-being and ill-health.

Dreams and Desires: sexual and reproductive health experiences of HIV Positive Women. IPPF and ICW

Pdf:<http://content.ippf.org/output/ORG/files/5306.pdf>

The Role of Contraception in reducing Abortion. Susan A. Cohen, 1998

Pdf:<http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/ib19.html>

Creating Youth Friendly Health Services in Sub-Saharan Africa. Cecilia

Moya. Advocates for Youth, 2002

Pdf:www.advocatesforyouth.org/PUBLICATIONS/iag/youthfriendly.pdf

Sexual and Reproductive Self-Determination. UNFPA State of the World Population: Right to Choose; Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health, 1997

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Medical Abortion Implications for Africa. Ipas, 2003

Pdf:www.ipas.org/publications/en/Medical_Abortion/med_ab_africa_web_only_en.pdf

Abortion in Africa. A literature review from the 1990's to present day. Agnes Guillaume, William Molmy CEPED 2004.

Html:ceped.cirad.fr/avortement/gb/index800.html

Manuals and Guides

Reaching Out-of-school Youths With Life-Planning Skills Education. The African Youth Alliance's Behaviour Change Communications Efforts in Arusha, Tanzania. 2005

Pdf:www.path.org/files/AH_aya_chawaku_a.pdf

Sexuality and Sexual Health Online Minicourse. EngenderHealth. 2005

Html:<http://www.engenderhealth.org/res/online/sexuality/index.html>

Books

Masturbation as a Means of Achieving Sexual Health

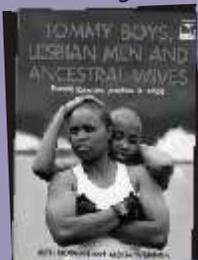
Editors: Walter O. Bockting, PhD and Eli Coleman, PhD

Publisher: The Haworth Press, Inc, New York, 2002

ISBN: 0-7890-2047-5 (Paperback)

This...book shows that masturbation is a critical component in the development of sexual health, explores the power both negative and positive of the act, and outlines viable ideas for future research. It also presents a concise historical overview of societal attitudes, toward masturbation and reports on change in masturbatory behaviour in the twentieth century, including the trend toward an earlier age when women begin to masturbate and the increased recognition of masturbation as a source of sexual pleasure irrespective of relationship status or other sexual activity. The publication also examines the connections between masturbation and other sexual activity, sexual fantasy, and desire.

Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives



Editors: Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa

Publisher: Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2005

ISBN: 0 7619 6206 5 (Paperback)

'We Lesbian women, are born here in Africa, we belong here. Who can say we are Un-African?'

This unique book documents same sexuality in Eastern and Southern Africa and has been co-authored by women activists from six countries. These personal narratives vividly document a range of issues relating to sex and secrecy an incredibly difficult area to research as many African leaders declare it taboo on the basis that these practices are alien to African culture and are an import from the West.

