

Sexuality in Africa Magazine & Monographs



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Third Annual
International
Colloquium on
Gender, Sexuality,
History and Culture

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The Social and Cultural Construction of Desire and Pleasure

The role of culture in the construction of desire is more real than is often imagined. Desire is defined as a physical or emotional longing for an object or a person, with pleasure being an immediate or a long term objective. For the desiring subject, desire is a simple matter of a felt need or want. Within the context of sexuality, desire is usually seen as a natural feeling that is driven by libidinal force, creating a tension that is ultimately resolved in the form of sexual pleasure. Desire is therefore generally perceived as something biological or psychological, but above all, personal, individual. Often, the desiring object does not appreciate just how much this 'personal' feeling is manipulated or conditioned by the culture of the society in which the person lives.

Most western philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Hobbes and David Hume (as well as psychoanalysts and psychiatrists from Sigmund Freud to Immanuel Kant and Jacques Lacan), agree that sexual desires are automatic body responses powered by libidinal energy or force over which the desiring subject has little *a priori* control. In other words, the activation of sexual desire is not subject to reason *a priori* (i.e. before its onset). Language itself cannot represent or describe *a priori* cognition of desire - you cannot say 'I want to desire' or 'I want to have a desire for ...'; you simply desire. However, society has always functioned as the gatekeeper of desire.

The conditioning role of culture in matters of desire is best understood against the backdrop of the prohibitions in place in the relevant societies. As observed by R.W. Cornell, some of the most prominent examples are '[t]he incest taboo, and specific laws about rape, age of consent and homosexuality, all [of which] prohibit sexual relationships between certain people.' Even in the absence of written laws, cultural taboos impact on sexuality. Culture mores and observances socialize us into believing what may or may not be desired, what even if desired may not be pursued, how our desires may or may not be expressed. Cultural proclivities are reinforced through public and private institutions of society, including formal education sector, religious institutions and the informal sectors of society. Stated or unstated prohibitions are unconsciously internalized by members of the society.

The powerful role of culture in determining tastes and desires is also observed in the culinary department: for example, lizards are just as loathsome in some cultures as they are desirable and pleasurable food in some others. The difference is not in the actual taste of lizards but in the culture of the different societies. The analogy is an apt reminder of similar differences in cultural perceptions of sexuality.

Between individual rights and social rights

The idea that 'public good' must supersede private desire is as old as the earliest human communities. While many old communities such as the Greeks believed that 'there is no disputing about taste,' they simultaneously believed in the right of society to circumscribe individual appetites in favour of social tastes. The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud has elaborately described the pattern of repressions that take place in the individual when the force of personal desire comes in conflict with societal laws and conventions. Many societies have not been able to resolve this conflict between individual sexual desires and public perception of public good.

In contemporary times, the United Nations has adopted sexual rights as a part of human rights. The objective of sexual rights activism is to try and dissolve existing taboos and recriminations about sexuality, and particularly to place sexual health and sexual rights 'in the larger context of gender and social equality.' Even so, some allowance is constantly made for the need for societal intervention where a threat to the common good is perceived. The sexual rights and sexual well-being of women, of the physically challenged, and of non-heterosexual persons have been the subject of much disputation in the past decades, and continue to be so.

Gender relations as power relations

Gender relations have also been described as power relations, and laws regarding sexual desire as a mere expression of the will of the dominant groups in human societies.

Significantly, most societies privilege heterosexual male desire, either by enacting prohibitive laws on other groups or by promoting social mores and cultural observances that tend to circumscribe the sexual desire of the others. Double standard is much in evidence here. As an example, the

policing of female sexuality is common to most societies, while heterosexual male desire is allowed significantly greater latitude. Cultural factors may attenuate or exacerbate the stricture placed on the sexuality of dominated groups in different societies.

Sexual Desire and Some Cultural Peculiarities in African Societies

Africa has been shown to be a hotbed of sexual diversity and sexuality controversies. Issues relating to sexual orientation and sexual pleasure have been hotly debated and have also become subject of contested legislations. While culture is dynamic and there is increasing evidence of liberalization of the sexual ethic on the African continent, many old traditions and customs relating to sexuality have tended to endure. Africa remains a prime example of how traditional culture continues to impact on aspects of sexuality.

In many parts of Africa, virginity and widowhood customs continue to place severe restriction on the actualization of female sexual desire, while the man is not subject to such restrictions. The corresponding notions of *ibale* (virginity) and *isupo* (widowhood betrothal) as practiced among the Yoruba are examined in the article by Ojo in this volume. Also in this volume, the paper by Cunniah examines the clash of conservatism and postmodernism in the consideration of sexuality issues in Republic of Mauritius. In their own paper, Cloete et al demonstrate that although there has been legislation favouring same-sex unions in South Africa, cultural attitudes continue to be unfavourable.

The contest between personal desire and social perception of public good will continue into the foreseeable future. Finding a balance that will be humane and just is a constant challenge to all civilized societies.

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Against Desire And Pleasure: Tradition, Morality And The Woman In African Culture

By Ronke Ojo

The issue of sex, sexuality and morality in African culture has profound implication on women. Whether for procreation or carnal gratification, the traditional African considers sex a thing not to be trifled with. Hence, traditionally, sex is restricted to family life and only persons who are joined in marriage are expected to have sex. In the view of Kosemani (2005) 'when it comes to the question of what the African scale of value is,' sex relates to the totality of the human condition. Any deviation is faced with stigmatization.'

However, as pointed out in many studies, sexual morality within the African context is also 'gender-skewed, as it places specific stricture on females' (Oloruntoba-Oju 2006). The big burden that tradition places over a woman is inimical to the evolution or development of authentic sexual feelings on the part of the woman.

Tradition, Sex, Morality and the African woman

The woman bears an exceptional burden in Yoruba culture. First of all, a woman is considered beautiful only if she has good character. She is assessed according to her *iwa* ('character'). According to Kosemani (p.169) 'the Yoruba will say *iwalewa*, that is, good character is a symbol of beauty, such that if a beautiful woman fails to exhibit *iwa rere* - good character' then she is not considered beautiful at all. This censure impacts negatively on her sexuality.

Secondly, the woman bears the responsibility of nurture. In his discussion of mother-father-child relationship in the African society, Osho (2005) notes that the father works and plays outside of the home most of the day, leaving the child to the care of the mother. The woman also acts as protector by being sensitive to everything that happens to the husband and the children. She ministers to all his needs. She moulds her children into manhood or womanhood as the case may be. She serves as role model to the child. Despite all odds, she must demonstrate good character. Again, all this places a burden on her sexuality.



Caption: A video still of actors from the entertainment - education drama series Tsha Tsha in South Africa. Credit: A © 2004 Mmabatho Kau, Courtesy of Photoshare

Against Desire and Pleasure; Woman as 'SexPot'?

There are two concepts or practices relating to the idea of the woman as *sex pot* in the African (in this case, Yoruba, Nigerian) context. These are *ibale* (virginity) and *isupo* ('widowhood betrothal'). What this article highlights is the negative effect of these concepts and practices on female desire, sex and pleasure within the African context.

Ibale

In traditional Yoruba society, a girl must keep her virginity until the wedding night, when her betrothed, *the superman* will perform his first assignment of breaking the vaginal track with the penis. This is an assignment that must be carried out by the newly wedded before the two marrying families retire to their houses. The exact reason for this is to prove the morality of the family of the bride and chastity of the newly wedded bride. The bride must prove her chastity by experiencing sex for the first time that night. Meanwhile, the family of the groom would be waiting impatiently for their son to confirm the level of chastity of the bride, while the bride's family would be expectantly waiting to have blood sample from their daughter's vagina wrapped in white linen. If she proves her worth, by keeping her virginity, *ibale*, till that night, her family would then begin their real celebration. If the result is the reverse, the family of the bride is thrown into utter shame and reproach while she, the culprit, is returned to her family.

This sort of orientation for female sex in the traditional community is antithetical to the concept of desire and pleasure. The conclusion that may be drawn here is that, for the Yoruba woman in traditional society (and also in contemporary society wherever the practice is still strong), sex is bloody, painful, full of anxiety and unpleasurable. The practice epitomizes the concept of the female as *sex pot*; she is used but she is not allowed to have an independent sexual desire or inclination.

Isupo and other Surrogate Sex

Isupo is 'surrogate marriage' or marriage by inheritance, a practice whereby a widow is given in 'marriage' to her dead husband's relation. A Yoruba woman who proved her worth at the *ibale* ceremony may not be truly heroic until she commits herself totally to the family of her husband through sex. When her husband is alive she is 'wife' to all members of her husband's family; male or female, including even toddlers born to her groom's family before the day of her marriage. This tradition is not only to ensure that she respects her husband and her family, but also to prepare grounds for her to get a replacement in case of the sudden death of her husband, or when her husband could not give her required attention sexually because of other wives. (Africans being polygamous by tradition). Either way, she may use the sexual favour of other male members of her husband's family. In case of the demise of her real husband, tradition allows her a 'choice' as she will be asked to pick any of the men. This is not a perfect

choice, however, as she is not allowed, or encouraged to make her choice beyond the family walls. Desire is circumscribed and the prospect of real pleasure is diminished.

The *ibale* practice is still common in some villages in Nigeria. My own experience of the late 1960s confirms the drag of this practice even after independence. I can vividly remember several cases. One of them occurred at Gbadaefon, a popular village in Akanran Local Government of Oyo state. A particular woman had five children with three different men under the same roof, of the same parentage and in the same family. No trouble ensued as each of the men involved regarded the act as keeping the woman in the family. Her *superman* husband who 'took' her *ibale* (as Yoruba call the act of deflowering) was already aged and could not continue to put her in the family way. The younger brother took over and the woman gave birth to two kids. After this *the superman* did not like the demeanor of another younger brother who was always picking a fight with the woman. He persuaded the woman to change over to his other (youngest) brother, and, without any qualm, the arrangement worked splendidly. The woman had twins with the youngest brother. The three men saw no problem with this arrangement in as much as the woman remained in the family.

Here again the concept of the woman as 'sex pot' in traditional practice is well epitomized by such traditional practice. The woman in this example was truly a traditional woman who, without knowing it, was simply a subject of a *dominating overman* or what Nietzsche called *superman*.

Overman/Superman Validating Scale

In Ojo (2005), a rating scale called Overman/Superman Validating Scale (OSVS) was administered on some rural women to verify the contemporary reality of the concept of *isupo* and related notions that show the *overman/superman* as the controller or determinant of women's sexual 'desire'. The women were asked questions such as:

- *in case your husband is impotent, would you still stay with him?*
- *if he is sick for many months and he suggests that his brother should 'help him do,' would you do?*
- *if he could not satisfy you in bed, would you invite his brother to help you do?*
- *if he travels and does not come back for several weeks, would you prefer his brother or his elderly son to help him do?*
- *in case your husband died, would you allow*

his elderly son to take over?

- *in case by mistake your brother-in-law met you naked and asked to do, would you do?*
- *in case your brother-in-law's wife died, would you 'help' by allowing him to do?*

There were several limitations to the study noted above (unreadiness to divulge information, secrecy and restriction). Out of the 160 questionnaires that were administered, only 125 were valid. as other target refused to respond. 90% of those who responded did so with a strict warning that the information must not be divulged. However, of the 125 valid questionnaires; 80 respondents indicated readiness to comply with all the traditions contained in the questionnaires; 32 respondents would not comply, while 13 respondents would follow their parents' advice. It may be concluded, despite the limitations noted above, that some of these traditional practices are still extant in Nigerian villages.

The role of culture in sustaining such practices cannot be overemphasized. The practices do not conflict with moral etiquette in the investigated villages, provided the woman does not go outside of her husband's family for sex. Many a times, when a woman is 'mistakenly' impregnated by a family member, the child from this act is not considered a 'bastard' in as much as the child resembles the family member or at least looks like an ancestor.² On the other hand, a woman is tagged promiscuous if she fails to abide by the tradition. Sometimes a spell may be cast on her (or so she may believe) for flouting tradition and for failing to continue the lineage of the dead husband.

Conclusion

To reverse the elements that militate against the development of a healthy female sexuality, desire and pleasure in the African context, there is need for a moral war against the claims of the two leading religions (Christianity and Islamic), as well as African claims, of men superiority over women. The attitude of African women who see themselves as *weaker vessels*, and the complacent acceptance of religion and traditional ethos that perpetrate men dominance over women in all matters, including expression of sexual desire, need to be reoriented. Relevant enlightenment programmes are needed in the African rural and sub-rural settings where dwellers are mostly illiterates, or at most school drop-outs. As White (2000) eloquently suggests, 'education helps in the development of virtues of the mind'.

Endnotes

¹However, much deviant behaviour may go unnoticed because of the general secrecy of human nature as well as the typical respect for tradition and fear of stigmatization in African cultures.

²Conversely, within the culture, a child who is fathered by a real husband but behaves in a way antithetical to the ethics and moral ethos of the family is the 'bastard.'

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BROKEN PIE:

The Expressed And Compromised Sexuality Of People With Disabilities

By Olayinka Falola Anoemuah
& Foluke Idowu

“In a pastry shop, the choice of apple pie rather than meat pie is a matter of choice of taste, not superiority. However, in the experience of sexuality of women with disabilities, broken pies are left in the kitchen not even brought into the shop for display because they are considered not fit enough”

(Analogy from a discussion of the sexuality of women with disability at a meeting of psychologists)

The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities was adopted and opened for signature at United Nations Headquarters in New York as from 30 March 2007. The purpose of the Convention is to seek to promote and ensure the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities who currently represent 10 percent of the estimated 6 billions of the World population. The convention also seeks to advance the basic rights and human dignity with ultimate aim to improve their social life and development on equal basis with others in society where they live. The States Parties to the convention recognize that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal, including environmental, barriers. They also

emphasize, among other issues, the importance of mainstreaming disability issues as an integral part of relevant strategies of sustainable development. Sexuality is one of the areas that need focus for PWD since it is generally shrouded in silence in most societies, in spite of that fact that the mass media is increasingly being sexualized.

Wellness and Health in Disability
Wellness and health are terms used to connote not only the absence of disease but a state of whole inner feeling of adequacy, which exists in a continuum. It is individual, specific and defined. It involves the traditional concept of body, soul and mind. Wellness and health are very relevant in sexuality and disability discourse since disability is conventionally conceived as state of incapacitation and ill health. Studies have revealed that persons with disability or even in state of terminal illness remain



Caption: A limbless groom slips a wedding ring on the finger of his bride at a village in Kenya. The man was born without hands and allegedly dumped at a children's home in Dagoretti township in Kenya
Credit: A © 2009 Suleiman Mbatiah, Courtesy of Photoshare

sexual beings and long to express their sexuality when and where the opportunity does not exist (Motalinagoane-Khau 2006; Oschwald and Powers 2002; Katz 2005).

Wellness models tend to emphasize the role of harmony (Newman 1982) or a sense of coherence in maintaining wellness (Antonovsky 1979, 1987). According to them, individuals cannot be labelled 'ill' or 'well,' but instead exist somewhere in a continuum between these two poles at any given time. According to Nosek (1996) the harmony model is applicable to older adults or to those with physical disabilities because the sense of chronic condition does not disqualify individuals from wellness as long as they are able to maintain harmony. The common characteristics of those functioning well were that they perceived their life activities as meaningful and considered their life events comprehensible and manageable. Nosek (1996) cited the wellness model developed by Abood and Burkhead (1988) in support of the notion that wellness models and programmes should not discriminate between people with and people without disabilities. Rather, they should be all inclusive. Findings revealed that physical functioning seemed to have little relevance to determining the individual's wellness; rather, it sets stage for the interaction of all the other components.

Sexual Expression and Disability in Nigeria

In Nigeria, traditionally, sexuality was treated as a reproductive health issue, especially for persons with disabilities. People with disabilities are usually viewed from the notion of survival; thereby they are not considered or involved in the sexual matters, as a result of this, many persons with disabilities thought they could not date, marry or have sex. Despite the fact that they have their share of sexual fantasies, there was desire but little hope of fulfilment. They are viewed by some persons as asexual and do not have a sexual life. So many research findings, for instance, Olaleye et al 2007; ILP 2002; Anderson and Kitchin 2000 and Becker et al 1997; already proved this as untrue. Their more limited social and sexual

involvement result, not from lack of interest, but rather from, lack of opportunity.

Disability certainly interferes with the sexuality of people with disabilities. Studies indicate that disabled persons have their first kiss, date and sexual encounter later than their able bodied peers. Disability affects the way they experience and express pleasure, eroticism and desire. It also affects their personality.

The age of the person at the onset of the disability may be an aggravating factor. If the disability happens at childhood, the most important support the child receives is for survival and development like his/her able bodied peers. If the disability is acquired during adulthood; the person evolves a new personality in terms of emotional and physical abilities. Traditionally, their family members marry for them. This is more common among the uneducated ones. However, as more persons with disabilities are getting educated this practice is diminishing, although educated women with disabilities find it more difficult to get married than their able bodied counterparts who even change relationships and/or engage in polygamous marriage especially if they are comparatively rich.

Lack of economic empowerment deprives the physically challenged woman of the ability to negotiate sex. This makes them more prone to abuse, especially those with intellectual disability (Olaleye et al, 2007). This indicates that power relations favours males than females like able bodied persons in the area of economy and sexual abuse. There is therefore the need to provide more support services, safety information and reporting mechanism for people with disabilities, particularly the females.

Changing Modes of Sexuality Expression: Sexuality of People with Spinal Chord Injury (SCI)

There are more males than females with Spinal Chord Injury (SCI) (Sipski, 1991) due to greater exposure to SCI risks such as diving, climbing and motoring, among others. Due to incontinence and loss of sensation people with SCI experience a change in the mode of

expressing their sexuality.

The sexual pleasure of people with SCI is compromised and most times might be experienced without necessarily involving the genitalia. The most important issues in their experience of eroticism and sexual pleasure is therefore to know what they want and to communicate their sexual needs with their partners in order to be able to have sexual pleasure or achieve their goal for engaging in sexual act (for example, conception, in the case of a female with SCI).

According to Whipple (1990) females with SCI are most of the time still able to perform reproductive capability of menstruating, conceiving and giving birth. The passive role during sex tendency becomes a blessing in the case of females with SCI as they can both enjoy sex and give as much sexual satisfaction to a male as their able-bodied counterparts (Billings and Stokes, 1982, cited by Whipple 1990)

The sexual function may be even more compromised for males with SCI because they do not have erections that are timely and long enough to sustain sexual intercourse. Culturally, they may become less assertive than the females with SCI since sexual prowess is seen as an integral part of maleness.

Recent studies in Nigeria among young people with disabilities reported that almost half of the respondents (47%) have knowledge of masturbation and almost all of them (42 out of 48 persons) engaged in it. About 48% of those that masturbated were doing it because they did not always have their sexual partners around. This shows that, among people with disabilities especially the young ones masturbation becomes a major way of attaining sexual pleasure.

Clearly, with adequate information, during rehabilitation or at group and individual counselling sessions, the capacity of persons living with disability to cope with their sexual needs will be enhanced.

Disability and Societal Bias

A lot of biases and concerns still exist however in the society, especially about the reproductive abilities of people with disabilities, especially the women. Such

questions as can they have children? Will they have normal children or will they have children with disabilities as themselves? Will they be able to go through pregnancy like other able bodied women? Despite these concerns, women with disabilities are increasingly able to become pregnant and go through childbirth even though the attention they deserve from researchers and health care providers is not usually given.

In the Nigerian situation, medical services or system is still conservative as regards those whose reproductive capacity might be compromised, especially males with SCI. However, there are available medical procedures and other services that can be provided to enhance their reproduction. These include freezing the sperm immediately after the injury, invitro fertization (IVF) and adoption.

Conclusion

Sexuality discourses have given limited attention to concerns of people with disabilities. It will therefore be beneficial for people with disabilities if information and issues bordering on their sexuality could be included in rehabilitation processes and in the schools of persons with disabilities. Peer group and individual counselling is also another useful tool that can be explored to help PWD deal with sexual issues that are of concern to them. Economic empowerment is a needed strategy among people with disability. Above all, societal attitude must change and reflect a passion for uplifting persons with disabilities rather than the present attitude of looking down on them. Such a change of attitude, along with the other measures suggested above, will enable them to be free to negotiate sex, give expression to their desires and enjoy fulfilled and pleasurable lives.

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Mrs Foluke Idowu is the founder of the Independent Living for People with disabilities (ILP), a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) providing support services for the independence and integration of people of all ages and genders who have disabilities by seeking improved systems, products and practices through research, field initiatives and collaborative work with other agencies. Trained as an accountant, Mrs Idowu sustained a spinal chord injury some 22 years ago in a road traffic accident, after which she founded ILP about 10 years ago. Mrs Idowu holds a masters degree in social works and she has attended fellowships and conferences on disability and development work in Nigeria and elsewhere. She is married with children, the last one after her injury.

Being Straight and being Gay: Identity or Multiple Desire: The Case of South Africa

By Allandise Cloete, Laetitia Rispel,
Carol Metcalf & Vasu Reddy

Contrary to most African countries, the South African Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. In December 2006, South Africa became the fifth country in the world and the first in Africa to legalise same-sex marriage (Calitz, 2009). In the light of this legal equality, gay men and women have become more visible in South Africa and have made their voices heard in the public sphere (Graziano, 2004 a, b). Terms like LGBTI, coming out and gay slowly became absorbed into everyday talk and used interchangeably with words such as *sexual orientation and acceptance of differences*.

However, even though the rights of gay men and women are protected in South Africa because the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, anecdotal evidence suggests that gay men and women do not enjoy these rights. Hate crimes and violence directed towards gay men and women who are open about their same-sex identity remains persistent, and evidence shows that such violence is gendered and reflects deep-seated social and cultural prejudices (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy & Moletsane, 2010).

This contested social context also frames the hidden nature in which sexual relationships between men take place because of social norms, prescriptions and stigma. Identity formation for men who have sex with men (MSM) in heteronormative societies becomes for most MSM an internal and incessant struggle between what is expected as a man and between his same sex desires.

In this context, men tend to have clandestine relationships with other men whilst still conforming to what is expected of them by society to fulfil their prescribed gender roles. Reaching such men in HIV prevention campaigns is challenging. In this study, we conducted the Johannesburg/eThekweni Men's Study (JEMS) to begin to explore same-sex identity and to describe the sociocultural context in which sexual identity is constructed.

Same - sex desires and identity

For some focus group participants, being gay is having sexual desires and engaging in sex with other men:

Okay, I think it's at least to say that I am a man who is sexually and emotionally attracted to other men. (Participant, Banana Boys focus group, Durban)

Other participants ascribed being gay to a process of identity formation, and acknowledged that some men who do not identify as gay nevertheless engage in same-sex behaviour. Thus same-sex behaviour is not synonymous with self-identification as gay. Many focus group participants talked of men who have sex with other men who continue to fulfil their prescribed gender roles. These men, according to some participants like to explore:

I think others, they just like exploring like if he is a straight guy he would just say, he would just want to feel how is it to sleep with another man. (Participant, Westbury focus group, Johannesburg)

I think in the African community to have children, is [an] incredibly high [priority]...In a sense having mistresses or boyfriends on the side seems to be more of the norm perhaps than in the white and coloured [mixed race] community. (Key Informant, Cape Town)

There was agreement among focus group participants that men who engage in sex with other men, but who do not identify as gay are confused. Some participants speculated that such men are in fact fearful of disclosing their sexual orientation and accepting their identity as gay:

I call them, in my opinion, confused, I have friends that were married and that are okay with

switching over. They were married because of circumstances in their lives, maybe family, religion, or whatever, then decided that they needed to come out and tell the truth and switch over and they were comfortable; but you also get the other one that is in the closet still, dating women, or marriage or whatever and then, on the side, then doing men. Now, all of that tells me they are somewhat identifying less I suppose, or do not identify, or I do not know what words is used, but they are confused to me. (Participant, Muslim focus group, Cape Town)

Socio-cultural norms, religion and family versus same-sex identity

Gender roles and responsibilities, as defined by heteronormative norms and value systems, were considered to play a major role in the process of identity formation. What is expected of a man is that:

You must marry and you must have children. (Participant, Muslim focus group, Cape Town).

These social expectations were emphasised by key informants. Because sexual relationships between men are considered unacceptable to many people, men who engage in same-sex behaviour, have secretive relationships with other men, while fulfilling their expected gender roles and responsibilities.

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Identity formation was also influenced by religious affiliations. For many this also meant having to engage in secretive relationships with other men.

According to some participants, rejections from fundamentalist religious groups did not matter much, as long as their identity was accepted by family members:

My mother sent me away to Cape Town thinking when I came back I will be straight... and when I came out of there I was worse. I said no, you can sleep. I will do the cooking; I will do the cleaning; and one day I said: There is nothing you can do, I am just a woman like you are and that is it, even though I am trapped in a man's body, but I am a woman like you. That is what I told my mother, and she accepted it. (Participant, Westbury focus group, Johannesburg).

Straight men who are gay

Sex between men occurs in diverse circumstances and situations. Men who engage in same sex practices and yet do not self-identify as homosexual or gay, especially in male-dominated settings such as prisons, migratory work camps, and mines are commonplace in African contexts. Moreover, some cultural circumstances have brought men in the lower-social strata to be expected to take on subordinate roles that carry cross-gender behaviours. For example, studies have described men who take other men as their wives in gold mining communities in South Africa (Moodie, 1988). These men were obliged to cook, clean and attend to a man in a superior social position. The sexual positioning in these relationships was referred to as *metsha* which refers to non-penetrative sexual rubbing without anal sex.

In our study it is important to note that even though most participants used the term gay to describe their sexual orientation, we did not explore the meaning of the term in their contexts, thus limiting the interpretation of the data. With regard to same-sex desires and identity issues, data revealed that group participants described homosexuality in terms of *loving* and having sexual desires for other men. In a psychological sense they described homosexuality in terms of an identity. In our study, loving and having sexual relationships with men and identifying as gay were not mutually exclusive. Men can love and have sex with other men whilst identifying as *straight*. Such men were labelled as *straight men who are gay*, by some group participants. Group participants and key informants revealed that some of these men are married or have girlfriends but because of the social context that prescribes heteronormativity, many of these men continue to have secretive relationships with other men.

In countries with concentrated epidemics, there is evidence that many HIV infections occur as a result of men who do not identify as gay but who have sex with other men (Msonza & Kernohan, 2008). For example in Senegal, Dakar, 88% of MSM also reported having vaginal sex, and 20% reported having anal sex with a woman (Niang et al., 2002, cited in Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 2006); a study in China reported that half the MSM reported having sex with a woman, and one third of them were married (Liu et al., 2006 cited in UNAIDS, 2006).

Conclusion

Understanding the social context in which sexual identities is constructed is important when designing HIV prevention programmes and services. The latter is necessary especially with regards to meeting the needs of individuals with diverse sexual behaviours in a non-discriminatory and non-judgmental manner. We recommend more in-depth ethnographic type of research that will illuminate how MSM manage and (re)construct their social and sexual identities, negotiate for safer sex and navigate their everyday lives within South African communities.

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Gay and lesbian people can now get married legally. Charles and Hompl-Januarie, above, celebrate their wedding, and the marriage of Nozipho and Thulile Ngcobo is reported in the press, below.



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Ms Allanise Cloete is a research specialist at the HIV/AIDS, STI and TB, programme of the Human Sciences Research Council. She has a Masters in Anthropology obtained at the University of the Western Cape. Her research interest lies in same sex cultures and HIV/AIDS and in the design and implementation of positive prevention interventions.

Prof. Laetitia Rispel is an adjunct professor at the Centre for Health Policy, School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. She was the principal investigator of the JEM Study.

Dr. Carol Metcalf, MBChB, MPH, is an independent public health specialist who served as an investigator on the JEM Study. Her areas of interest include HIV prevention among gay and bisexual men.

Dr. Vasu Reddy is a chief research specialist at the Human and Social Development programme at the Human Sciences Research Council.

THE HYPOCRISY OF SEXUAL CONSERVATISM IN POSTMODERN MAURITIUS

By Bruno Clifford Cunniah

March 2006 marks a turning point in the history of sex in The Republic of Mauritius as, for the first time, the multiethnic population of the island was confronted with a real image of local sexual practices. Until then, the conservative forces (religious and governmental) have had the tendency to conceal anything remotely connected to sex. In a country where pornography and prostitution are still illegal but yet readily available, a small video involving college students made the country step officially into postmodernity.

Titled "The Show," the videoreceived national attention due to the Bluetooth technology which allows multimedia materials to circulate from one terminal to the other. For the first time in its young history, the country was forced to open its eyes to new sexual configurations at work in a society that where all things related to sex are usually illegal and hardly ever discussed in the public sphere. Embedded in social as well as sexual conservatism, The Republic of Mauritius, came face to face with crisis of a sexual nature.

The Video Episode and its Aftermath

The video, probably shot in July 2005, depicts a fifteen year old female student of a reputable college having sex with four older boys. Seven months later, the headmaster of a secondary institution of the district of Plaines Wilhems was informed of the existence and of the circulation of pornographic material depicting one of his students. Immediately after, he informs the Parent Teachers Association, as well as the Ombudsperson for Children. The PTA in turn contacts the police. The Ministry of Education took all the necessary steps to protect the young girl's identity (though this is an impossible task in such a small island) while the young men involved in the video were prosecuted.



Various charges were pressed against the men, including 'Dealing in obscene matter', 'Misuse of computers' and 'Sexual intercourse with a female under 16 years old.' However, it is to be noted that in the beginning, the young woman refused to press any charges against her partners simply because she hadn't at any time been coerced into having sex. Later, we would learn that she intentionally made the video so as to get back to her ex-boyfriend who had dumped her. The truth is that both her and her partners underestimated the power of technology to diffuse multimedia material. Since the scandal caused by "The Show" back in 2006, many other local porn videos involving students have been circulated but they have all been ignored both by the authorities and the media. The question is why?

Ethnicity and Sexual Ethics

Almost every insular community is embedded with ethno-cultural myths which are often made up of clichés used to keep a state of status quo throughout patriarchy. With its multicultural population, the island of Mauritius fits perfectly in the above category. If at a superficial level, all the components of its population seem to live in harmony, deep inside lies ethnic tensions which are just waiting to emerge. In this context, one can only imagine the various sexual ethics that different people have to live up to.

In practice, each ethnic community possesses its very own system of sexual codes which represent the religious and moral values associated to a particular vision of life. This type of organization is important in the sense that it allows an individual to secure his/her attachment

to a particular philosophical system while belonging to a group which has fundamental rights in a given social context. In other words, the individual exists more than ever as a representative of a value system which defines him as well as the group he belongs to.

An insular setting usually encourages a communal vision of life instead of an individualistic conception of life. If "The Show" turned out to be such a big scandal, it is because of the discrepancy that has arisen at the level of sexual ethics between an individual conception of life and that of the particular group that same individual belong to. The scenario created by the actors of the video clip is thus at the opposite end of the cultural practices of the group they belong to. In the context of a patriarchal society where feminine roles are seen as deeply rooted, it is no wonder that the behavior of a young girl breaking all the codes of monogamy poses a threat to the powers that be.

In practice, the fact that the young girl comes from an Hindu background where women are usually expected to be subservient, is in itself a cultural shock to the 'guardians of the temple'. While no charges were kept against her by the civil authorities, it was a totally different story when it came to the moral and religious voices who could only condemn such a behavior. In fact, common knowledge dictates that if the protagonist had been from another ethnic group, the scandal would have had much less echo in the media. This is due to the fact that in a multicultural society, women from different backgrounds enjoy various levels of freedom. As an example, had the girl come from a Creole or Franco-Mauritian environment, where women are usually more emancipated, the shock would have been much less.

Religion and Sexual Ethics

In Hindu mythology, a woman usually has a dual status as shown by the E.D. Vishwanathan: "In Hinduism, on one side woman is the object of worship of saints and seers, and on the other side, she is looked down upon and depicted as the cause of all problems in the world" (231). One of the most important texts of

Hinduism, namely the *Mahābhārata*, shows that the woman is almost always associated to sin as illustrated by the words of the Panchachuda fairy: "There is no creature more sinful than women [...] She is poison. She is a snake" (XL). Even the famous *Kāma-Sūtra* reduces the woman to a reproductive role in which her virginity is essential to occupy the inferior position conferred to her by society. By analyzing the role of women in Hindu mythology, one can easily imagine the uproar caused by the girl pictured in the sex video.

In Mauritius, the result is an uneven shift in sexual ethics. Ultimately, in order to protect the extremely fragile social texture of the island, the authorities have thus chosen to ignore the numerous other sex videos that came out following "The Show".

Most religions favor a passive role for women in everyday life and more so in a sexual context. However, the role played by the Hindu girl in "The Show" is far from a passive one. Not only does she trash the taboo of virginity, she also does away with the principles of monogamy underlying the Mauritian society. But what is more shocking to the conservatives is that she participates in an orgy not as a victim but as a leader. A close analysis of the video shows that she is the one who dictates to the men what she wants to be done or not. At every moment of the encounter, the only one who is in control is the young Hindu woman, a far cry from the position assigned to her by the religious authorities and by her community at large.

Conclusion:

Tradition, Sex and the Postmodern World

Beyond the phantasmatic nature of "The Show", the fact remains that the sexual behavior depicted is anchored in reality. The video causes uproar because it questions the very relationship between women and men in the face of postmodernity. The blackout of sexual matters in the context of the Mauritian society has favored a silent culture which is very much influenced by globalization. Access to the internet and to satellite television has little by little changed the attitudes of Mauritians towards sex. Over and above the hypocrisy linked to mainstream culture and irrespective of ethnic affiliation, a gap has started to emerge between the conservatives and the new generation concerning sexual matters. The result of such a gap can be seen in "The show".

The video, which got national attention in 2006, is far from representative of the sexual behavior of the Mauritian population as can be seen by the survey published recently in the March 2010 edition of "Essentielle." However, it shows beyond the shadow of a doubt that many of the normative standards linked to sexual activity are being influenced by factors as diverse as postmodernity, late capitalism and technology. In Mauritius, the result is an uneven shift in sexual ethics. Ultimately, in order to protect the extremely fragile social texture of the island, the authorities have thus chosen to ignore the numerous other sex videos that came out following "The Show".

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A TAPESTRY OF HUMAN SEXUALITY IN AFRICA

The 4th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights was held from 7th - 12th February 2010 at the UNECA Conference Centre, Addis Abba Ethiopia. Amongst other insightful events at the conference was the launch of “*A Tapestry of Human Sexuality in Africa*”, published by Jacana Media, in association with Action Health Incorporated and the Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre. The book is a collection of research reports of the 2007 Sexuality Leadership Development Fellowship Programme of the African Regional Sexuality Resource Centre. The publication which was launched on 10th February 2010 had in attendance over 100 conference delegates.

The launch commenced with introduction of the guests, including Dr. Rosemary Coates, the launcher; Mrs. Adenike Esiet, Executive Director of Action Health Incorporated; and three of the book contributors namely, Njoroge Mbugua, Liesl Theron, Mzikazi Nduma.

Welcome Remarks

Mrs Esiet joined in welcoming the participants, introduced the ARSRC and provided information on the process for the book development. In her remarks, she stated that, ARSRC is a project of Action Health Incorporated, established in 2002 as the Africa Regional Component of the Ford Foundation's Global Dialogue on Sexual Health and Wellbeing. She provided the objectives of the centre and the four programming strategies where she elaborated the centre's key achievements since inception. One of this was the sub-regional dialogue held in following 4 focal countries: Egypt, Northern Africa; Kenya, Eastern Africa; Nigeria, Western Africa and South Africa, Southern Africa. She stated that the book is the second edition that the centre is publishing. Mrs. Esiet reiterated that the first edition titled “*Human Sexuality in Africa: Beyond Reproduction*” was launched at the 3rd Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights in Abuja, Nigeria, in 2008. Mrs. Esiet stated that the book was birthed by the SLDF 2007 cohort. Mrs. Esiet ended her remarks by recognizing and commending professionals including the contributors and the past SLDF faculty members, some of whom were present at the launch for their contribution to this intellectual process, she thanked Ford Foundation for supporting the process as well as the participants for attending the launch.



L-R: Liesl, Mzikwazi, Nike Esiet, Dr Rosemary Coates and Njoroge during the launch of the book

Comments by Contributors

The three contributors shared their experience during the three week SLDF programme and during the writing book chapters. Below are the comments of the three contributors present at the launch.

Mzikazi Nduma, a psychologist and a visiting scholar at the University of Alberta, Canada noted that the fellowship was a significant step in her career development process as a sexuality leader. A key lesson for the fellow was that difference does not necessarily mean absence, taboo or neglect. Her chapter titled “*Distress and Dating in Butterworth, the Eastern Cape, South Africa*” explored challenges of young people with marriage problems, and its effects on sexuality issues and HIV/AIDS prevention messages. Key lessons from the research were that distressed young people or young people with marriage problems respond differently to available preventive messages and that young people who are distressed opt for seemingly 'easy' options such as drinking, drugs, risky driving. Nduma noted that distressed young people use sex as escape. While analyzing the data, she observed intergenerational transmission of risks. The young people who were interviewed who seemed to be at risk of unsafe sex, pregnancy or were in relationships characterized by gender based violence had parents who experienced these same challenges.

For Mr. Njoroge Mbugua, who currently works with Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, his research work focused on “*Coverage of Gender Based Violence by Kenyan Print Media-2000-2006.*” This

research provided a lot of insight into the reasons why the media often do not give prominence to issues of sexuality mostly as a result of political issues. Mbugua's motivation for the research topic was hinged on the fact that media is a vital institution in a democratic country such as Kenya. Following his participation at the SLDF training, he developed a curriculum that integrated sexuality concepts into gender issues. The curriculum is currently used by Kenya Police College and Criminal Investigation Department Training School.

Liesl Theron from South Africa stressed that her participation in the SLDF programme provided a better understanding of other sexuality issues and urgencies, adding that the programme was a comprehensive exposure to sexuality issues on the continent. She stated that, being an open LGBT person, sensitizing other fellows about other issues that were not in the programme was an added benefit as the programme provided constituted an advocacy forum. Her research focused on “*Accessibility of Shelters for LGBT People in Cape Town, South Africa.*” Key findings from this research include the fact that gay and lesbian people experienced some form of verbal, emotional or physical abuse and that only women's shelters were more open to lesbian and transgender people, while homeless shelters are hostile to them.

Book Launch

The book was launched by Dr. Rosemary Coates, Professor of Sexual Health in the School of Public Health at Curtin University

BOOK LAUNCH

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THE THIRD ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON GENDER, SEXUALITY, HISTORY AND CULTURE IN AFRICA HELD AT THE INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED LEGAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, NIGERIA ON JUNE 19TH, 2010.

The Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre (ARSRC) co-sponsored and participated at the 3rd annual international colloquium organized by the Gender Studies Group, University of Lagos, Nigeria with theme: Gender, Sexuality, History and Culture in Africa.

Drawing from the felicitation message of Marjorie K. McIntosh, Distinguished Professor of History Emeritea, University of Colorado at Boulder, USA, the colloquium brought together scholars interested in issues of gender and sexuality within African contexts, topics that are just beginning to receive careful academic study and people dealing in practical terms with the kinds of problems that grow out of human sexuality and gendered definitions.

The participation of the Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre (ARSRC) at the colloquium is based on her efforts to promote a better understanding of human sexuality in Africa through the provision of a forum aimed at expanding and shaping discourse, thinking and action in favour of healthy, responsible and pleasurable sexuality in the continent. In her goodwill message, the Executive Director of Action Health Incorporated said that sexuality issue has gained considerable ground globally,



Ms Allanise Cloete, a delegate from the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa delivering her address during the Colloquium

both as a public health issue and as a focus of research in the social sciences in the last three decades. Sexuality plays a major role in interactions and power relations between genders. Gender involves both women as well as men. Hence understanding gender means understanding opportunities, expectations, responsibilities and constraints as they affect both men and women in any given society. Understanding sexuality enhances

comprehension of gender and these issues are intersected with culture, ethnicity, race and power. All these, she stated reveal the utmost need for a forum to explore the intersections between sexuality, gender, history and culture to assess the impacts of these in the society.

Scholars at the colloquium were drawn from various universities within the host country, Nigeria as well as countries such as Cameroun, India and South Africa with 67 thought provoking papers received and 57 presented. The lead papers presented are listed below.

The Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre (ARSRC) also utilized the opportunity to exhibit her numerous publications and materials. At the exhibition stand, the ARSRC played host to 245 participants who received various free/complimentary copies of her publications. The free provision of materials exhibited by ARSRC especially to young professionals in the field of gender and sexuality will be a thing to remember by the participants, as part of the continuing programme of nurturing and building the professional capacity of individuals in the emerging field of sexuality. Indeed, the colloquium was a success and participants wait in anticipation for the 4th annual Colloquium.

S/NO	TITLES	AUTHORS	CONTACT
1	Masculinity Ideologies and the African experience: Bursting the Seams of Gender Relations in Africa	Chimdi Madoagwa (Ph.D)	Dept. of English, University of Lagos
2	Sex, Morality and African Culture: Implications on Women	Ojo, Ronke Christiana (Ph.D)	Dept of Adult Education, University of Lagos.
3	A Name My Mother Did Not Call Me: Queer Contestations In African Sexuality	Taiwa Olorunfoba-Oju (Ph.D)	Dept of English, University of Ilorin.
4	Gender, Culture and Sexuality in Nigerian Advertising: The Changing Roles of Women in Society	Abigail Ogwezezy-Ndisika (Ph.D)	Dept of Mass Communication, University of Lagos.
5	Gender, Sexuality and Sexual Harassment	Crisi Oaegemane (Ph.D)	Dept of Philosophy, University of Lagos.
6	Sexuality in the Nigerian Cities: Is it Really Wayward?	Opuyemi Oyejide	Dept of Psychology, University of Ibadan.
7	Sexual Harassment in University of Lagos: The Story So Far	Chinyere C.P. Nnorom	Dept of Sociology, University of Lagos.
8	Recruitment of Female Sex Workers in South-South Nigeria: A Re-Assessment of the Network and Investment	Justus Adim Nzemeka	Dept of History and Strategic Studies, University of Lagos.
9	Sexuality and Education in Nigeria (1980-2010): A Case Study of Lagos State	Chimaroke Okochua	Dept of History and Strategic Studies, University of Lagos.

BOOK LAUNCH

Cont. from page 13

in Western Australia and President of the World Association for Sexual Health. Dr. Coates started by reflecting on the book title, “*A Tapestry of Human Sexuality in Africa*” which brought remarkable insights about the diversity of Africa that comprises of culture, ethnic groups, languages and landscapes. She added that there is a rich diversity in the chapters and emphasized that the book was a tangible outcome and testament not only of the contributors but also to the profound commitment of AHI and faculty of the SLDF programme.

On overview of the book, Dr. Coates explained that ten of the eleven chapters were written by participants of the workshop while the first chapter was written by the editor of the book, Dr. Oka Obono. The topics covered were Gender and Sexual Based violence, LGBT, Sexual and Emotional Intimacies, HIV/AIDS, Problems of PLWHA, FGM, Sexuality Education,



A cross section of participants

Communication, Rites of Passage and the Role of the Media. She added that rites of

NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS (Guidelines for Submissions)

The editors welcome submissions on the thematic focus areas of the Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre. These include: Issues in Sexuality, Sexual Health (including issues relating to HIV and AIDS), and Sexual Rights.

Short length articles will be published in the Sexuality in Africa Magazine, while journal length and journal quality articles will be published in the Sexuality in Africa Journal, following adequate peer assessment. The objective of these publications is to foster the dissemination of gender and sexuality information, with particular focus on African society and culture, and to publish related research findings while contributing to the promotion of healthier and positive sexuality attitudes, practices and policies.

Articles are expected to be objective and analytical, and to mirror current/contemporary issues and debates in the area of Sexuality, Sexual Health and Sexual Rights in Africa. Articles should also reflect a holistic/comprehensive approach to sexuality, taking sexuality discourse beyond health to incorporate broader issues on the expression of sexuality without guilt, fear or ill-health.

Priority would be given to articles that have not been previously published; however,

already published material may be considered for publication, depending on its relevance to ARSRC's focus. For such already published articles, full details of previous publication and copyright obligations must be provided.

Sexuality in Africa Magazine

Preferred themes and focus areas will be published from time to time. In addition, we welcome articles relating to the following sections of the magazine:

Region Watch: Topical issues relating to a specific country or sub-region.

Research Notes: Report of current research in Sexuality by the author or of other researchers that the writer may wish to report.

Viewpoint: Reactions to issues raised in previous editions of SIAM or elsewhere.

Programme Feature: Report of contemporary best practices by implementers of Sexuality programmes.

Length: 1,000 – 1,500 words

Photo: We welcome relevant photos which may accompany articles or be submitted

independently. Sources must be indicated and all published photos will be appropriately credited.
Sexuality in Africa Journal

Articles can be on a variety of themes or issues. They may draw from but are not necessarily bound by the themes published for the Sexuality in Africa Magazine. Submissions should reflect a high standard of research comparable to such journals worldwide. Presentations must be focused and well referenced.

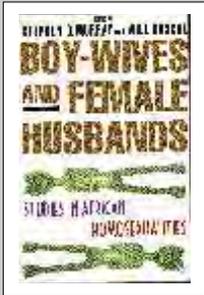
ABSTRACT

Contributors are requested to forward an abstract of not more than 250 words along with their papers to the email address indicated below. A short personal bio with the name, contact address, phone numbers and email addresses of the contributor should be submitted on a separate page.

Length: 5,000 – 8,000 words

All correspondence should be addressed to:
The Editor,
Sexuality in Africa Magazine
Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre.
E-mail: info@arsrc.org

Sexuality Resources



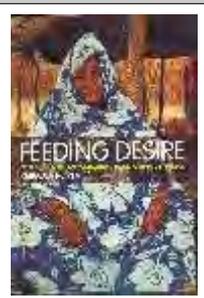
BOY-WIVES AND FEMALE HUSBANDS (Studies in African Homosexualities)
Editors: Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe
Publisher: Palgrave Publishers Ltd 1998

This book is the first serious study of the subject. It is a significant contribution to anthropology, history, and gender studies, offering new, often surprising views of African societies, while posing interesting challenges to recent theories of sexuality. An invaluable resource for everyone interested in the continent's history and culture. The book reveals the denials of African homosexualities for what they are: prejudice and willful ignorance.



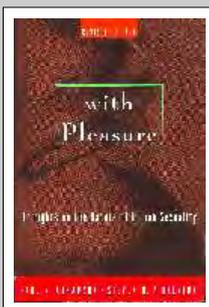
CITIES OF PLEASURE (Sex and the Urban Socialscape)
Edited by Alan Collins

This collection of cutting edge and accessible chapters explores various connections between urban living, sexuality and sexual desire around the world. The key themes featured address a number of topical issues including the controversies and debates raging around the evolution, defining patterns and appropriate regulation of commercial sex zones and markets in the urban landscape. It was previously published as a special issue of the journal Urban Studies.



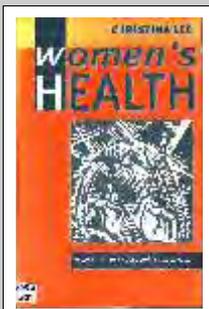
FEEDING DESIRE (Fatness, Beauty, and Sexuality Among a Saharan People)
Author: Rebecca Popenoe
Publisher: Routledge Group

The book analyzes the meanings of women's fatness as constituted by desire, kinship, concepts of health, Islam and the crucial social need to manage sexuality. By demonstrating how a particular beauty ideal can only be understood within wider social structures and cultural logics, the book also implicitly provides a new way of thinking about the ideal of slimness in late Western capitalism. It is both a fascinating exploration of the nature of bodily ideals and a highly readable ethnography of a Saharan people.



WITH PLEASURE (Thoughts on the Nature of Human Sexuality)
Authors: Paul Abramson and Steven Pinkerton
Publisher: Oxford University Press 2002

This is a scholarly, provocative, and brave book that will both evoke discomfort in the sexual puritan and instill hope in the sexual liberal as it increases the tolerance of all to the celebration of sexual pleasure. It is also a thought provoking, insightful examination that takes pleasure out of the closet and challenges us to rethink commonly held assumptions about the nature of sexuality.



WOMEN'S HEALTH (Psychological and Social Perspectives)
Author: Christina Lee
Publisher: SAGE Publications

The book is organized around restrictive social myths about women: women at the mercy of their hormones; the myth of the maternal instinct; the assumption that it is 'natural' for women to carry out the majority of unpaid domestic labour and family care; and women as stereotypes conforming to images of youth, beauty and sexual availability of men. The book is essential reading for students and academic psychologists working in the area of women's health. It will also be of interest to students of sociology, social work and women's studies.