SEX-RATED

COMMENTS
Sex has become one of modern society's most discussed and most controversial topics. In literature, in scientific research, in entertainment, and in conversation, sex is a predominant subject.

But is this abundance an indication of broad-based understanding or rampant ignorance? Most adults feel they have the necessary knowledge about sex.

Yet the controversy over pornography, sex education, and the sexual revolution, coupled with the spiraling divorce rate, the increase in child abuse, the rise of emotional problems, epidemic venereal disease, and teenage pregnancy would seem to indicate that people do not really understand the complexity of emotions and behavior associated with this little word.

What do sex, sexuality, and mental health have in common? A great deal, according to mental health professionals. Sexuality, or a person's concept of self and his relationship with other human beings, reaches far beyond the physical act of sex. The person with good mental health feels comfortable about emotions and accepts himself without undue guilt.

... More than sex, sexuality encompasses all the feeling tones of interpersonal relationships — love, caring, intimacy, empathy and many more.
One of the best things parents can do is to acknowledge their awkwardness and uncomfortable feelings when assuming the role of sex educator.

or other negative feelings. He can be comfortable with his own sexuality and that of others.

Dr. Sol Gordon, Director of the Institute for Family Research and Education at Syracuse University and Professor of Child and Family Studies, has for many years concerned himself with sexuality for all ages in talks and in writing. His communication has ranged from scientific articles to comic books about sex (with a readership of far more than one million). Strengthening family life through knowledge and awareness is a goal which Dr. Gordon has long sought.

This publication grew out of a radio broadcast. Dr. Gordon appeared as one of many distinguished authorities who have been interviewed on "The Human Condition." The radio series is heard on some 100 American stations and the Voice of America. It is produced by the Longhorn Radio Network, an agency of the Communication Center of The University of Texas, and the Hogg Foundation. The material was adapted for publication by Barry M. Cohen.

Bert Kruger Smith
The Avoidance of Intimacy

Sex, generally regarded as the ultimate closeness, may instead be used as an avoidance of intimacy. The act itself may replace emotional relationships. Our technological society has contributed unwittingly to a false perspective of sex and sexuality. Scientific material about sex, important though it is, has sometimes led the average reader to regard the "science" without perceiving the need for understanding about interpersonal relations.

Research data, through popularization, are often oversimplified and misunderstood. With today's sexual activity, there seems to be a preoccupation with mechanical technology. Many people have abandoned their feelings and are no longer comfortable with their sexuality, i.e. with the broad concept of maleness/femaleness permeating all human relations.

What is happening is that popular writings about sexual behavior have created, in essence, mythical goals toward some measurable sexual standard, often to the detriment of human feelings. Sexuality is and should be a personal matter, without the pressure of externally-imposed criteria such as the duration of the sex act, the age at which people reach their sexual prime, and how often sexual relations should take place.

In other words, there is much more to sexuality than sex. It encompasses all the feeling tones of interpersonal relationships — love, caring, intimacy, and many more.

Ignorance Is a Problem

Objections have been raised over sex books that some people feel are "stimulating" and "dangerous." Only ignorance is stimulating because ignorance produces wild fantasies and antisocial behavior. Basic knowledge about sexuality is enhancing and energizing.

A lack of knowledge may, in one's attitudes, separate sex from love. The sexual revolution is occurring at a time when people, especially young people, know less about sex, mainly
because they are supposed to know more. There is a great deal of pressure on them. And the earlier young people are having sexual experiences, it seems the less they know.

**Teenagers Want Knowledge**

Birth control is often condemned on the grounds that the pill leads to promiscuity. But several studies indicate that fewer than 10 percent of sexually-active teenagers use any form of contraception. Teenagers hunger for information about themselves and their sexuality — the right kind of knowledge, a blend of facts and feelings.

Sexuality is not a puberty rite. It starts at birth. Every human being is sexual. The little child, in order to live, needs to be held and cuddled and touched. Sexuality is part of every developmental stage. It is an integral part of each of life's facets. We need love for survival, but it doesn't come easily.

In order to develop one has to start with caring for himself/herself. One learns this by being cared for. If one is loved and cared for and touched, then one can care for oneself. And if one can care for himself, he can care for others. Sexuality is something one has to work at to achieve and work at to sustain.

Sex and sexuality are areas of great significance and great mystery. If we don't have honest knowledge, our fantasies take over, mythology takes over, the street takes over.
Parental Responsibility

Parents should not abdicate the role of sex educator but should assume primary responsibility for teaching young people about sex and sexuality. Most of what a child needs to know is needed by age five, before the child is ready for school.

Our present sex education tends to overcomplicate physiological facts which are relatively simple. Only simple basic information is necessary, and relating it should be an easy task for parents.

What is more difficult, and quite often missing, is the modeling of sexuality — love, intimacy, caring, communication — that children glean from their parents who are their earliest models. The young need education which begins at birth and never stops.

A balance needs to be maintained. While education for sexuality is essential for a child’s development, the biological aspects cannot be neglected. The main idea is that parents need to be open to questions. If a parent is approach-
able, the child will begin to ask questions as early as age two or three. Parents should answer questions honestly, and they should not assume that harm can be done by telling a child too much. If excess information is given, the child will simply be bored and disinterested. However, parents usually tell their children too little.

Parents often ask how they can overcome their own modesty and restraint and learn to respond to their children without self-consciousness. There is nothing wrong with being awkward or self-conscious. One of the best things parents can do is to acknowledge their awkwardness and uncomfortable feelings about the subject. It is surprising how, when they share these feelings, the child will relax and help the parent to relax and be more comfortable.

Why do the parents need to be our sex educators? Because we need not only sex education but also sexuality education, which must come from the example of loving relationships. We need facts and feelings.

For additional information on this topic write to:

Dr. Sol Gordon, Director
Institute for Family Research and Education
760 Ostrom Avenue
Syracuse, New York 13210

For information about obtaining a cassette recording of Dr. Gordon’s interview on a two-week loan basis:

Mrs. Dorothe Bozza
Hogg Foundation Library
P. O. Box 7998, University of Texas Station
Austin, Texas 78712