

# Sexuality in Africa

M A G A Z I N E



Vol 4 Issue 3

Beyond Pain:  
Toward Pleasure  
In The Study Of  
Sexuality in Africa

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Towards A  
Sensual Life  
Style

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It Has Always  
Existed: Sexual  
Pleasure And  
Fantasy In  
Africa

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Published by  
Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre,  
Lagos, Nigeria  
[www.arsrc.org](http://www.arsrc.org)

A Project of Action Health Incorporated



A Woman Wearing Beads Around Her Waist And Wrist  
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We acknowledge the contributions of those who reviewed the papers in this edition of the magazine.

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ISSN 0189-7667  
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Sexuality in Africa Magazine is published in Lagos by Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre (ARSRC) and is distributed without charge until otherwise indicated.

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## Beyond Pain, Towards Pleasure In The Study Of Sexuality In Africa

By Rachel Spronk



A Woman Adorned With Beads  
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The global Aids epidemic exposed the deficiency of our knowledge about the complexity and variety of sexual behaviour. As a result, there has been an impressive increase in research activities aimed at responding to this discrepancy. In Africa this has meant that the study of sexuality is mainly conducted in relation to HIV infection. One of the major consequences of this is that sex becomes de-eroticised to an act devoid of meaning and as a result, sex is studied apart from its sensorial power. The challenge of sex research is to understand the ways that societal factors organise sex and sexuality. It is important to note that sex is, above all, about the senses, and many times people engage in sex for pleasure. If we do not pay due attention to the pleasurable and sensorial aspects of sex we will continue producing deficient knowledge about

sexuality. In this article I will shortly reflect on the dominant trend of sexuality research in Africa, after which I will explore how to study sex beyond its painful realities and consequences and how to study its pleasurable capacities as well, based on my research on love and sex in Nairobi, Kenya.

### The State Of Art Regarding Sexuality Research In Africa

There are two major flaws in the health-related approaches to studying sexuality. The first is that the

term 'sexuality' has been used in a self-evident and instrumental manner, rather than being approached with due attention to the full variety and subjectivity of sexual behaviour.

Studying 'the' sexuality of teenagers, for example, can mean studying their discourse on sex, their experience of arousal, their gendered expectations, their sexual identity or their sexual relations. Studies that do not take into account the imprecision of the term 'sexuality' start from a flawed position that sees sex simply as an obvious incident or action [1]. In reality it is far more complex than this. The word 'sex' refers to an act, a category, a practice, a gender. 'Sexuality' refers to the quality of 'being sexual', it is a concept depicting the social arena where power relations and moral discourses are played out, and

it also refers to sexual desire. These different aspects of sexuality highlight the need to define the term 'sexuality' in concepts such as sexual practices, categories, desire, identity, etc., in order to clarify what is being studied.

A second related-flaw is that a mainly ahistorical approach has been responsible for grossly simplifying notions of 'culture'. Much research has been limited by ideas that there is something peculiar about African cultures regarding sexuality [2;3]. Cultural 'traditions' and 'taboos' are the first things researchers tend to look for, to account for sexual behaviour, overlooking the more mundane aspects of life such as the influence of poverty or the emotional weight of sex. One such common assumption is that African men engage in multi-partnered sexual relationships because of 'their culture'.

A historical analysis of sexuality in Kenya offers an alternative explanation which is that, since the colonial period onwards, many married couples could not live together due to laws controlling male labour migration. In such situations of separation women and men would have engaged in other sexual affairs, all likely to be against 'cultural' conventions because adultery was a crime amongst many groups in Kenya [4; 5]. Since sexuality is often presented as embedded in 'age-old traditions', too little attention has been given to such historical and social explanations of particular contemporary sexual practices. This is especially important given the current colonization of the public debate in different African countries representing a glorified 'African' past where sexuality was trouble-free and healthy.

The challenge of sex research is to understand the ways that societal factors organise sex and sexuality, and finding out how these processes shape the experiences of people. How, then, do we study sexuality and at the same time respect the interface between the social

context and personal experience?

### 'Better Sex Makes Happier Couples'

In Nairobi (where I did my research on the love and sex lives of young adults), public debates about sexuality getting out of hand due to the loss of ('African') morals have flared up from late colonialism [6]. Debates about sexuality tend to articulate social discontent about social change, particularly when gender and sexuality are shifting because this occurs to the detriment of existing gerantocratic power structures [4; 5; 7]. The history of public debates about sexuality shows that current changes in gender and sexuality are part of a continual reconfiguration of gender and sexuality, despite common views that sexual morals or 'traditions' have been under pressure in the last decades only. Interestingly, the volatile discussions about sexuality in Nairobi occur side by side a positive discourse on sexuality that has found a niche in the media. A discourse has come into being, praising the vitalising force and bonding intimacy that comes from sex in relationships [8]. *Parent's* magazine is known particularly, among married and unmarried people, for its weekly column called 'Sex' or 'Sexuality'. Sexual practices and principles are dealt with in explicit terms. Sexual positions and the type of gratification that can be expected are described, while the topics of foreplay, fantasy and sexual variation to enhance female pleasure are written about regularly. The rationale of *Parents'* editor is reflected in the statement that 'Better sex makes happier couples,' claiming that sex is 'a couple's primary way to show love' (November 2001). In contrast to the conventional and religiously inspired idea that 'sex is a marital duty,' which is interpreted among many female young adults as enforcing the sexual subordination of women, the 'modern' duty is the fulfilment of a mutual orgasm. I do not mean that people did not have sex for pleasure before, but that the positive language of sex sex as love, intimacy, and pleasure- as it is espoused by magazines such as *Parents* provides a sounding board for couples to develop their sex lives.

The implication of mutual orgasm is that sexuality gains a new interpretation; female sexuality becomes redefined as pleasure and not necessarily as procreation, and male

sexuality becomes partly redefined in relation to female pleasure. This approach is new, exciting and more engaging for both women and men compared to conventional perspectives on sexuality emphasizing the procreative aspects of sex. For many young adults, to have a fulfilling sex life has become a symbol for a truly contemporary person. This does not necessarily imply that it is perceived as a green light to sexual permissiveness. Depending on the person's morals, a sexual life is developed only in marriage, while for others it is possible in premarital relationships as well. Both women and men are advised and encouraged to 'work' on their sex life, as it 'enriches' their personal sexual experiences as well as their partner's. Personal and mutual sexual happiness becomes an asset of individuals, as well as a symbol for a successful relationship:

**Better sex  
makes  
happier  
couples,'**

*'These days, we want our part of pleasure. I mean... We, women, know what to*

*buy in this world and there is no way I could make love with a man and be left unsatisfied. It sometimes happened [that a man did not know how to satisfy a woman properly], men are not yet [as] up to date as women, and then I was so so disappointed. I mean, I don't even consider explaining [to] him what to do with a woman. Imagine! Some don't even realise!' (Dana, aged 29)*

*'OK, as a modern man you have to know how to satisfy a woman, there is no way to ... when you have sex, that only you get satisfied. You have to know what she likes, to postpone her coming, to tease her so that she begs you. Sometimes it's disturbing when you cannot make it, when you cannot satisfy a*

*woman. I once had a girlfriend and she never had an orgasm, it disturbed me to have mine whereas she was left ...*

*nothing.'* (Ruben, aged 28)

In general, young adults are searching for new definitions of sex. They want to give a positive meaning to sex in their premarital sexual relationships. Pamela, aged 22, for example, says: 'How can something be wrong when it makes me feel good?' In popular definitions of sexuality, sex is linked to love instead of to reproduction, ethnic compatibility or marriage as conventional discourse has it. What is most notable is that women, in contrast to conventional discourse, also recognise sex as natural, as an embodied element of growing into adulthood. They thus recognise sexual desire as crucial to their identity as women, instead of understanding sexual desire in relation to married motherhood. For men, sexual desire has always been understood as self-evident in conventional discourse; sex is normatively understood as individual achievement. But, as Ruben explains, there is now more to sex for men like him because his sexual potential is also connected to his partner's sexual pleasure. In the new definition of sexuality, then, sexual intimacy becomes a matter of the self as a sexual subject; intimacy becomes an intersubjective experience. 'Intimacy', therefore, is the name of the game. It has become a fashionable word in all popular self-help columns in Nairobi magazines advising on the art of good relationships. For young women and men, notions of romantic love and emotional intimacy are increasingly important criteria for selecting a lover or spouse. Their desire resonates with an emerging discourse on love that is shared among many factions of society, from religious understandings of marriage to popular understandings of dating.

In my research I worked out a step-by-step approach linking the personal and the contextual, and I was able to study sexuality from its diverse angles [9; 10; 11]. The personal aspect of sex focuses on sexual meanings that are individual and often have an emotional basis and are experienced through the body. Young adult women and men, like others all over the globe, reflected positively about the fact that sex is above all about sensual pleasure or the promise of pleasure and physical thrill. Being sexually active implies being sexually attractive or 'wanted', which contributes positively to women's and men's sense of self-worth. The sex act is

experienced as a moment of bliss, of physical energies that cannot be negated and sex is recognised as a powerful 'natural' force. Having sex makes people feel 'good!', 'happy', 'alive', 'in love', 'sexy', 'loved', 'strong', and much more, or as a woman expressed it: 'Making love connects my body and soul'. Many experienced sex as a vitalizing force, linking its power to its capacity as the source of life, literally and metaphorically. In 2001, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's phrase 'sex makes the world go round' (which circulated in the Kenyan media) was often used to joke about and to answer my never-ending questions<sup>1</sup>. Sex is often perceived as a 'gut feeling' (referring to excitement, sensuality, and release associated with bodily sensations, and with more complex understandings like 'feeling wo/man' augmenting a gendered sense of self).

Whereas these meanings of sex are more centred on the individual, other meanings are relational, seeing sex as connected to love, affection, romance, in which sex is defined corresponding to one's relation to another person. For many people sex was a mutual pleasure that augments an emotional bond between lovers, whether it concerned a casual or committed relationship. Mutual orgasm as proof of success and/or intimacy in sexual relations has become an indicator among certain young adults. Moreover, experiencing orgasm is often explained to me as the primal urge to feel alive, to achieve the ultimate moment of self-awareness while simultaneously getting lost in the pleasure of orgasm. It is a positive experience for the individual as well as for the couple. Second, the intersubjective aspect of sex comes about because the moment of sex is a moment of exchange where the personal and the social merge.

### **Ambiguous Pleasures**

For many women, experiencing femaleness through their bodies was a means to feel empowered and what they labelled as 'feeling sexy' was typically informed by wider shared notions of femininity. In spite of normative understandings that equate female sexuality with reproduction, they also

actively appropriated sexual pleasure as an index of their gendered sense of self. However, when pleasure and mutual orgasm become a standard, then sex becomes a new kind of obligation, generating insecurity. Several women recounted fear of failing as a competent sexual partner, either because of this new standard or because of the fact that they were never encouraged to perceive themselves as desiring sex for pleasure and therefore felt inhibited to do so. Most of the women as they got older became more sexually assertive, and bolder in taking a position against existing double standards. For all the men, having sex was a necessary aspect of being masculine, whereas for them also, the interpretation of sex as an

**'How can something be wrong when it makes me feel good?'**

emotional exchange of trust and companionship could lead to uncertainty because it contradicted the common sense idea that male sex is spontaneous. Some men's desire for sex was close to compulsion and for them sex was a means of feeling alive and virile, hence masculine. A minority of men resisted this hegemonic notion of male sexuality by drawing on the discourse on love, in the same way that a minority of women chose to delay sex till marriage. These experiences show that there is a thin line between pleasure and anxiety in sex; and that they are not unconnected or mutually exclusive emotions and experiences.

I believe that there can never be a purely physical, ecstatic or anxiety free sexual encounter. From the young adults' experiences (and underlined by other accounts described in the literature), it can be concluded that sex

is almost always imbued with some degree of uncertainty, ambiguity or anxiety. Feelings of shame, fear of losing the partner, fear of disappointing, fear about violation of trust, anxiety about failure to enjoy sex or have an orgasm, and fear of arousing suspicion, all these were experienced by both women and men, and only serve to highlight the precarious and complex nature of a sexual encounter. For example, many women endlessly deliberated whether or not to initiate condom use because they feared to arouse the suspicion of their partner about being promiscuous. Other women recounted similar qualms, as well as a fear of violating trust by initiating condom use. Men recounted similar anxieties, though less often.

Besides anxieties such as these that were related to social expectations, sex was also used to deal with a range of feelings, such as rejection, insecurity or anger, or to exert power or increase self-worth. For example, Thomas, aged 26 dealt with his fear of rejection related to his experience with his first committed relationship- by having multiple relationships: once he sheepishly said that sex 'boosts my ego'. Njeri, aged 24, however, would never phrase it in such a way and instead explained how she enjoyed the fact that her boyfriend was 'hooked to her' because of their 'great sex life'. In her sexual life the interface of pleasure and anxiety becomes clear in the way she enjoyed sex with her partner to the

full, which was important to her, despite the fact that the relationship was troubled with fights, mistrust and frustrations, which she claimed did 'not do me well'. It should be pointed out that pleasurable and anxiety evoking aspects of sex are not mutually exclusive and that, therefore, such uneasy aspects of sex should not be over-problematised. It highlights the fact that sex is fraught with ambiguity.

In sum, people's explanations about the importance of sex mostly relate to how sex augments a gendered sense of self. Gender ideologies influence how people understand themselves and how sex plays a role in their gendered identity. If sex is constitutive to people's feelings of being either 'woman' or 'man', then experiencing being feminine and masculine is partly related to normative expectations based on existing gender roles. Butler's notion

<sup>1</sup>Winnie Madikizela-Mandela is the well-known ex-wife of the former president of South Africa Nelson Mandela.

of the 'paradox of subjectivation' [12] is helpful in pointing out how women and men both advocate new interpretations of gender because- young adults unsettle, in different degrees, the patriarchal understanding of sex and gender- as well as reproduce normative understandings of gender.

The hegemonic symbolic construction of women as moral caretakers, guardians of the family, and devoted wives, serves as the norm of femininity even when women deviate from it. It comes to women being encouraged to remain chaste and being severely judged when transgressing normative parameters. Women have therefore been compelled to adopt more secretive strategies when having sexual affairs compared to men. They have to be constantly negotiating between factors that are associated with deviance on the one hand, and aspects that would allow them to be considered respectable on the other. Nevertheless, women appropriated sexual pleasure as part of contemporary personhood, and many enjoyed doing so. In general, the older the women were, the more boldly they pursued sex for pleasure, whether it was via short affairs or by finding out about sex toys or toy condoms.

Men generally had, and have, more leeway to deviate from the norm. Although men are also encouraged to remain chaste, mainly by the Christian discourse, they are also encouraged to be sexually active, which is endorsed by the patriarchal discourse equating male sexuality with virility and social achievement. Public discourse is highly contradictory when it comes to manhood and morality, and this also impacts on men's sexual behaviour and their relationships with women. Whereas they perceive sex as constitutive to their sense of masculinity, men should also exercise self-restraint and therefore there is a (undefined) limit to sex. A man should not appear to be addicted to sex, because this implies being dependent on women and thus not being self-reliant. On the other hand, a man should not fail in having sex and, above all, being a good lover. In patriarchal discourse being a skilful lover is not considered crucial to men's sexuality, while in the new discourse it is. The new discourse, however, implies that sex is not as spontaneous as it is conventionally understood to be; instead, it needs to be 'worked upon' as sexual skills, like other skills, require knowledge and practice.

Many men recounted or hinted at their anxieties about failing to be skilful lovers. The new discourse on sex as central to emotional intimacy challenges conventional constructions of masculinity, and men struggle to balance and incorporate both in their lives as lovers. Nevertheless, the discourse of sex as being natural to men remains hegemonic and most men consider it their right to take pleasure in sex.

Young adult women and men in Nairobi maintain ambiguous attitudes towards each other because men occupy an ambiguous position in women's lives as lovers, friends and future husbands, as well as figures of authority and social control. As a result, both women and men communicate ambiguity towards their partners and potential partners. It turns out that many sexual affairs are not self-evident anxiety-free encounters. Especially in non committed relationships, sex is embedded in ambiguity because of social and cultural expectations, as well as the fear of arousing suspicion and violating trust. Further, Aids poses a realistic threat when having unprotected sex, which continues to happen although condom use is fairly high. The moralising discourses on Aids have further codified sex with a negative meaning in public discourse; 'bad' sex is 'immoral' sex, while 'good' sex has come to mean sex that conforms with normative cultural values. These social definitions of sex affect the very personal experience and sensations of sex.

### **Studying Sex In All Its Meanings, Sensations And Connections**

In order to be able to interconnect the personal and social aspects of sex, I propose to use sexuality as an analytical tool with three foci. First, sex is a vehicle for powerful sensations that are experienced very subjectively. In other words, sex is *personal* and sex is a medium for expressing a variety of feelings, emotions and needs in a person. In all the biographical narratives I collected, the effects of sexual desire and conduct on the person stood out from the power of sexual attraction as an uncontrollable force, to the bodily craving for sexual fulfilment. Women and men reflected differently about these experiences depending on their relationships, their view on sex or intimacy, or their anticipation of gendered expectations. In my research group of 49 people, the differences

between individual people stood out. This is an important observation to make, since large scale studies, because of their methodology, cannot but generalise and therefore easily negate variety. Generalisation itself does not need to be problematic as long as the limitations of this approach are taken into account in the production of knowledge about sexuality.

Second, sex is more often than not an *inter-subjective* exchange between people; sex implies intimacy in the sense that mutually agreed sexual conduct always implies a degree of confidence or trust [13]. Sex carries a sense of emotional interaction that varies in its nature. The young adults' experiences show that sex is a means for the expression of different feelings, emotions and needs that are acted upon in relation with another person. People have sex for fun, to fulfil a desire for intimacy, as a physical thrill, to achieve social status, to confirm a gendered sense of self, to exert power, to express love, to humiliate, to conform to expectations, and much more. The emotions and the nature of intimacy can differ. Despite the popular connotations of the term, 'intimacy' does not always imply feelings of monogamous romantic love 'love-dovey' feelings, to use a man's words whose narrative showed how intimacy can imply friendship or financial care more than romantic love [14;15]. Perceiving sex as an inter-subjective exchange can be used as a direct call for further research studies to move beyond an essentialist analysis of sex as an obvious act.

Third, because sexuality is also a peculiarly sensitive conductor of social influences, cultural perceptions and political divisions, sexuality is also *socially* defined. These social aspects inform all the abovementioned emotions and exchanges. Every one of the biographical narratives I collected testifies to how social meanings frame people's behaviour, their understanding of themselves and their experience. The accounts of, for example, women's 'playing hard to get' to men's burden of needing to be seen as 'man enough', show how people acted in order to preserve their sexual reputation. Sexual ideology and practices are related to notions of gender, age, ethnicity or race, religion, social status, familial responsibility, ideas about intimacy, love and affection. Relations of power are typically translated into the organisation of sexuality (Arnfred

By Naana Otoo-Oyortey



African Gourd Rattles

Naana Otoo-Oyortey; the Technical officer on Gender and Rights at the International Planned Parenthood Federation, shared her views on sexual pleasure and fantasy in Africa with the ARSRC Director..

### How would you explain Sexual Pleasure and fantasy in Africa?

I would really like touch on the fact that in my opinion, discussion and discourses around sexuality in Africa are very limited to the discussion around homosexuality and lesbian issues. With regards to sexual pleasure, I think that the only way you could understand this, is practically through songs. In the sense that there is much taboo on public discussion of such matters.

Even in terms of the literature, I have only recently started working on issues of sexuality and I have done only two training sessions in the past year. In fact, there is very little discussion around it, issues around sexual pleasure are hardly touched upon. It is actually more about sexual taboo, care, refraining women's sexuality including practices such as female genital cutting, which is basically aimed to subdue women's sexual pleasure. I think the whole discourse on women's sexuality if any, has really not come up, there is rather a lot of focus on male sexuality, male pride and male virility and how all these transcends into male pleasure. Despite all these, there is

still very little discussion around them, again because it continues to be a taboo subject.

Working with the family planning section for reproductive health, my experience has been that even among service providers, there is the reluctance to talk about. I think this is because there is certain shyness or sense of embarrassment surrounding issues concerning sexual pleasure. Since the focus has been on disease, HIV/AIDS, maternal

health and of recent, sexual health. The downside has to do with sexual rights, which has not really taken off even with discussion on young people and sexuality, there is always dominance on sexual autonomy, and sexual "don'ts" with very little about the sexual dos. In this sense you find don't *do this* and don't *do that*. Then there's the question of how to ensure that young people do not have sex within a certain time frame. I must say that for me there is very little opportunity to really look at sexuality in such a very pragmatic way.

### Some Proverbs and songs are examples of the public manifestation of sexual fantasies

It is very interesting because in Africa you will find that the very good way of finding out about issues of sexual pleasure and fantasy is actually in proverbs and songs. When you delve into these you will be able to thoroughly understand some of the intricacies around sexual fantasies, because again our culture is very much linked to naming but saying it in a very cautioned and blurry way.

### Example of song or proverb related to sexual fantasy and pleasure

In Ghana what really comes readily is actually more against, it is about the 'don'ts'. I remember a local song which is sung by these women, who play the local

music. I don't remember the name of the music, but one of the songs actually translates like "when my *husband* holds my hand and he leaves my hand and touches my breast, I get pleasure"(local). It is *-mi kon so mi sa jah kon me foun mi, ya na mi do, ya na mi do*. It is an Akan song. It actually talks about some of the pleasures of sex. This is like a group of women, who stay together, sing and play the coral songs.

It is actually sung in public, you may not really get the words. It is like I mentioned earlier, one of the best ways you can find out about matters relating to sexual issues is through songs and proverbs, you just won't find people sitting around and talking about it.

I think the name of the song is either '*mar yom*' or '*mar ago*'. These women sit in groups and play their calabashes as they hit their sides and hands together. It was a very interesting thing, and then again you find some of the issues in which you can find sexual fantasies. Especially in dancing, the *Gan* group of Ghana have a very sexualized dance. These kind of things help you realize that there are really a lot of fantasies around the female body, particularly the female buttocks and breasts. I had a training where I was talking about attractiveness and desire, that is the things men find attractive in women, and one of the things the men said was that a woman should have a big bum, big breasts, it's an indication that these men fantasize about the bigger the better.

### Private manifestation of sexual fantasy or sexual pleasure and male fantasies

It is interesting in term of women's functions and fantasy around sexuality, again you find that in songs particularly in community where women have their own spaces and have the opportunity to come together, you would invariably find that a lot of the talk has to do with issues surrounding sexuality and that, as a matter of fact you would even find out sometimes in some languages if you are doing something painful, they would say '*but this kind of thing?, this is nothing*

compared to what you get from your husband'. I think this time around it is not so much about fantasy but more about voicing women's ability to enjoy sex. In terms of fantasy, I see it very much in the abstract within the African context.

I can't say in the past, because I have not really done a lot in terms of the history of sexuality within Africa, I've just looked in terms of how I view things now. It is more about glorifying the woman's body in terms of sexual fantasy. With regards to how you want to position yourself or how you fantasize about different forms of sexual pleasure that kind of thing is a little bit far fetched for me.

### **Any link between pleasure or sexual fantasy and individual well being?**

I would rather link individual wellbeing to sexual pleasure and satisfaction. It is interesting to note that although some women say they were not taught openly about sex and on the contrary can tell from a woman's happy face if her husband satisfies her or not! Which of course would not be discussed openly. If you look at the absence of pleasure and well being then you know that the absence of pleasure particularly in the context of violence would affect women's general well being. I would like to say that sexual pleasure and satisfaction is actually, good for women. But the interesting thing is that you look at different forms of pleasure as being very much a male thing. You would find that even in some of the rites of passage,

women are taught how to give men pleasure, but hardly would you find occasion where women are taught how to pleasure themselves. So the pleasure is very much toward the male pleasure and satisfaction

### **Are men taught how to give pleasure?**

In the circumcision passage rite some men go through in some communities, I believe some element of it is put in because based on the women's reply when they are asked about pleasuring their men, they usually reply "They (men) taught us how to do it". Issues about ensuring men's pleasure is foremost and the various things you may have to do as a woman to give a man's pleasure. This is from a female perspective, I haven't actually gotten much into the male perspective. There is a lot of taboo surrounding sexual issues in Africa, may be if you open up a dialogue women will talk about it, the problem is whether they would agree to open up about pleasure, whether they even have pleasure is another issue. Sometimes opportunity for training gives you opportunity to talk about it because this gives people the opportunity to voice out their feelings and it is also at forums like this you discover that some adults have no idea what an orgasm is.

### **Public Discussion on sexuality or the sexuality discourse in Africa is more oriented toward sexual preference**

I would say, it is important to broaden the whole discourse around sexuality

because a lot of people to be honest, are very narrow minded in terms of what sexuality is and the issues surrounding it. This narrow mindedness is very clear in the sense that once the issue of sexuality is brought up, the first and major thing that comes to their mind is sexual orientation, sexual diversity and etcetera. This very narrow definition of sexuality makes it very difficult to break that narrow perception of sexuality.

### **What would you say could possibly be the cause or solution ?**

It is not only in Africa but a global thing. It is important to understand the different elements around sexuality, introduce it in schools like integrating it into the university curriculum. In a way that it helps people to understand the different elements of sexuality. Not just Africa around sexual diversity but also issue around relationships, sensuality, and all these elements that have not really been discussed, such as body image, gender identity and all these issues, and putting them together into perspective as well as what we've been discussing today issues around sexual citizenship and broadening citizenship. I think these are some of the ways we could open discussions and dialogue.

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## **Beyond Pain, Towards Pleasure In The Study Of Sexuality In Africa**

2004), such as different perceptions regarding chastity defined by gender. The different biographical narratives elaborate how people's sexuality developed in interaction with these social axes.

In short, epidemiological studies and/or studies from a health perspective on sexuality have tended to ignore the construction of gendered and sexual identities, the cultural meaning of sexual conduct, and the erotic significance of variant sexual practices in distinct social settings. There is no way of avoiding the fact that accounts of sex, intimacy and sexuality eventually come down to studying personal sensations. These sensations are comprised of the complex conjunction between physiological arousal, erotic practices and interpretative processes; they are thus situated at the threshold where body and

discursive knowledge converge and merge.

The challenge of sexuality research in Africa is to bring into focus the experiential aspect of sex while continuing to work from a health perspective (which seems inevitable for as long as research remains dependent on 'development-related' finances, which is not the case for sexuality studies in the West). We should not compromise on a solid research epistemology despite pressures to do so such as the pressure to work towards solutions for so-called risk behaviour which tends to narrow down the research epistemology. This is easier said than done. It is why in this context Obbo calls for a certain degree of humility in the current explosion of Aids-related sexuality studies geared towards formulating answers and solutions [16]. After more than two decades of Aids

research, there is an urgent need to incorporate into the Aids paradigm that 'the hallmark of sexuality is its complexity: its multiple meanings, sensations and connections' [17].

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## It Has Always Existed : Sexual Pleasure And Fantasy In Africa

By Charles Ngwena



A Pregnant Woman With Beads Around Her Waist  
Credit: Waistbeads By Sewra 2008.

Charles Ngwena from the University of the Free State chatted to the ARSRC Director, Dr Richmond Tiemoko about the programme and his views on the precedence of African pleasure and fantasy in Africa.

### *Sexual pleasure and fantasy in Africa*

I think part of the problem is that in Africa this matter has not been discussed publicly, and as a result we find it very difficult to find genealogical or newspaper items that have publicly discussed the matter of sexual pleasure, so it tends to be something regarded as unwritten, unsaid, and yet an important part of human identity. So I would say yes, the topic is very important to all of us as Africans because we are part of humanity and all of us regard sexual pleasure as an important and essential aspect of our being human and our identity.

Yet it is not a topic that we have publicly discussed. It is only now that we think it is important to discuss it, because if it is not discussed we'll end up for example in the situation we are in with HIV/AIDS. So you do need to make it a public matter. Also since sexual diversity exists and is not acknowledged. It means in a sense, we are contributing to the oppression of our sexual minority. So my response will be no, it is not a topic that is been discussed traditionally or historically in Africa except through the media.

**Does the fact that there has really been no public discussion on it mean that there was no issue of sexual pleasure or sexual fantasy in Africa in the past?**

No, it has always been there, I just think that Africa is not an exceptional case with regards to other societies.

There has always been sexual pleasure and fantasies even though we may not have documented the experiences. We've not had researchers in Africa actually going into the field (Africa) to research on sexual experiences, pleasure and fantasies but I think we may have had anthropologists from other parts of the world coming. I personally don't know yet about it, and I am very keen to know about it, because it makes my teaching very difficult when we teach about sexual orientations. I am able to cite taboos that have been documented along with sexual experiences of a different kind.

**Since there is no real evidence of documentation, do you believe that in Africa poetry helps in any way?**

You can say so because basically in Africa, the little that has been passed on was done verbally to some extent whereas our counterparts in other parts of the world have been able to share it on films, in theatres and etcetera.

Books written by Africans actually restrain themselves, when it comes to discussing sex and sexual fantasy. Films have also done the same, although we are now beginning to see a bit of it on television. Otherwise you would still have narratives that are very private and within closed places. I'm not trying to say it hasn't always been there, it's just that it's always been within a very private sphere.

From personal experience it could have been something shared between my peers and me, so there was no institutional structure at home or in church or wherever, where that could be shared. It was just between my school mates and I and then friends too. I think that was a very limited environment for sharing. You probably would want it to go beyond that but I don't think it did.

The teacher for example wouldn't communicate anything to allow you to think it is a subject that you can entertain and listen to. So it was very much of a private conversation between me and my peers. It was only after living home and experiencing other countries I discovered that it is something that is supposed to be shared in public

#### **Socialization and Sexual Fantasy**

I think like any young person you are curious about your first sexual experience and this I believe happened to all of us and these are the sort of things we would share with our peers. Like if somebody had a sexual experience he would want to share it with his closest friends because we were just curious about sex and what the experience was like. I'm not sure about fantasies. I suppose by fantasies one might imagine they might want more than one partner, I can't remember any of us either experiencing or longing for this sort of fetish. It was actually after reading and knowing about other peoples experiences that I discovered that, that could be a pleasure if one was inclined towards that. In my opinion, based on my experience I would still say that the African experience tends to be a private one between very close friends and it's barely even shared with my brother.

#### **Link Between sexual pleasure and individual well being?**

Well, as the sexual beings that we are, we become socialized at an early age into roles, there is an expectation that

one day you meet your partner it would not just be simply a platonic relationship but a relationship that among other things involve sexual communion between you and the other party. I was cultured into a prosexual culture and I

**Books written  
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fantasy**

accepted that as the norm. It was only much later in life that I discovered it could be different. Sex is not just to make children but it is also an important part of how we recreate.

#### **Bringing sexual fantasy into public discourse in Africa**

I think when it was private, it wasn't problematic. To the best of my knowledge I never saw the need but now that I know about sexual diversity and the oppression of the sexual minority, I think it is important to bring it out in the public in order to have recognition of

these other forms of sexuality. HIV/AIDS is another important reason why we must talk about it because only then would there be some sort control of unwanted or adolescent pregnancy. As a matter of fact, there are many reasons why we should promote a public discussion on sexuality and sexual pleasure because we are bound to suffer from lack of knowledge and by remaining silent and calling it a private matter. The same could be said about commercial sex work, that it is some thing that we ought to discuss publicly, and provide an environment where commercial sex work could be discussed without the provider of the service becoming victims or at least minimizing the cost on the people who provide this service.

#### **Could you please tell us briefly about your masters programme?**

The masters in law programme on reproductive and sexual right was launched in 2005 with the support of the Ford foundation. We train graduates from different African countries who already have law degrees. They come here to do their masters in law programme, with a special focus on reproductive and sexual right. The programme is in its 3rd year here and it is actually the first programme on the Africa continent to opt for an academic curriculum, which focuses on reproductive and sexual health and rights.

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Prof Charles Ngwena is the director of the Masters programme on Reproductive and Sexual Rights at the University of the Free State, South Africa a Ford Foundation supported programme in the Faculty of Law.

By Marlene Wasserman



### Introduction

Fourteen years ago I came out as a couple and sex therapist. Like my country, South Africa, coming out from years of sexual repression, darkness and criminalization into the light of a sexually democratic nation, I acknowledged my curiosity and great desire to make a difference to people's sexuality and relationships.

I began my academic and clinical career as a Clinical Social Worker with a special interest in psychopathology. I then did a Masters degree and became a Family Therapist. In my work with families I understood that children's pathologies were merely symbolic of their parent's difficult relationships. I removed the children from the therapy room and began couple work. Only to find that couples wanted to speak about sexuality.

As is well documented, the study of sexuality has to be done within an integrative bio-psycho-social model. In addition, analysis and understanding of sexuality have to consider the political, socio economic and cultural climate of a

person within a society. Applying this model to my experience, South African sexuality was seen primarily within a medical context which determined which behaviours were "normal" and which were "pathological". For example homosexuality and masturbation were abnormal illnesses. Much sexual behaviour, for example loving and being sexual with the person you chose irrespective of race and culture, were illegal and punishable by law. The Apartheid government ensured censorship of press and freedom of speech which removed people's rights to learn about sexuality via schools, homes, pornographic material, sex toys or religious institutions. And religion continued to exert control and regulate people's sexuality.

Any sexual pleasure and fantasy in South Africa was deeply repressed and suppressed. People knew the expression thereof led to imprisonment, shame and pain. Against this backdrop couples turned to me for sexual counselling.

Being raised in a family of politically aware activists, human rights were

deeply entrenched into me. I merely discovered a new outlet for my commitment to human rights: sexual and reproductive health rights for all people. This included and embraced the concept of the right for all people to have sexual pleasure and fantasy as is stated in the World Health Organization's Bill of Sexual Rights (2002)

In my passion for skills and knowledge I was left with little choice but to travel to United States of America for training and accreditation and finally a Doctorate from the Institute of Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, San Francisco, CA, USA.

Fifteen years later, I am the voice of sexual and reproductive health rights in my country. My organization, branded as DR. EVE, represents the principles of all human rights organizations. I stand for advocacy, lobbying, treating, educating and informing all people of my country. In turn I am deeply committed to carrying the voice of South African sexuality and relationships to the rest of the world.

### Mission

My mission is to advocate, lobby and educate people about their sexual, relational and reproductive health rights. My mission is to teach people about their sexual and relationship rights, responsibilities and rewards, including pleasure and fantasy. Included in my mission is my commitment to clinically treat people who struggle with gaining pleasure within themselves and their intimate

*Cont'd on page 15*

relationships. On an equal level of commitment my mission is to bring Africa, specifically South Africa, into the international arena of awareness, an arena which can benefit from learning about our unique sexual expressions of pleasure and fantasy and of course , contributing their experience to our country.

A passion for pleasure and fantasy for a better, healthier sexuality of all people in my country motivates me to continue this work. There are many obstacles to working in this area both from a human rights angle as well as a personal level. People continue to be steeped in fear and ignorance which inhibits their pleasure and limits their fantasies.

### **The importance Of Pleasure And Fantasy**

The words “pleasure” and “fantasy” have many different meanings and interpretations. Within a macrocosmic context pleasure is essential as a motivational factor in all people's lives. The expectation of pleasure drives people into positive ongoing rewarding behaviours. During the Apartheid regime there was no expectation of pleasure due to the controls exerted as described above. Thus people lived fearful and unhappy lives which extended into unhappy interpersonal relationships. Within a microcosmic context one of the ways people seek pleasure is through sexual relation. If pleasure is expected within interpersonal relating then people keep seeking this relationship. Research indicates that sexual expression has many health benefits (Whipple, WAS,

2007). Sexual health clinicians encourage people to have sexual pleasure as it is healthy and contributes

**The expectation of pleasure drives people into positive ongoing rewarding behaviours.**

to overall quality of life.

However for South Africans today, sexual and loving pleasure includes abuse, violence and HIV/STI's. It is thus imperative that people are educated about how to have and enjoy responsible sexual and relationship pleasure. This forms an integral focus of my work.

Fantasy is imagination. Stress, lifestyle realities such as crime, violence and living in a country with the highest HIV incidence, plus the highest femicide and abuse statistic requires people to fantasize a lot on a macro level. We need to fantasize about feeling safe, about being able to negotiate condoms and having responsible sexual experiences.

On a micro level people are enveloped in performance anxiety and response

pressure. They need fantasies to overcome sexual dysfunctions and regain confidence as lovers. The Internet and mobile technology provides an overdose of fantasies creating a whole new set of sexual & relationship challenges for people and clinicians to manage.

Education, responsible decision making and knowing your right to pleasure and fantasy are part of the work I do in my organization.

### **Lessons**

My lessons include remembering this and working more compassionately as well as more doggedly in this area. I have learned that sexual and reproductive health rights, including the right to pleasure and fantasy, need to be taught, within a context of human rights thus one cannot compromise on these rights.

I have learned that education, access to information and resources and services are essential to pleasure and well being of all people, ranging from young people to ageing people. I have learned that ignorance, fear and myths about sexual pleasure and fantasies ultimately cause violence and death.

I have learned that as educators, parents, clinicians we are responsible for the loss of pleasure and worse. Thus it is incumbent upon all of us to carry out our responsibilities: let's talk about sexuality!

<http://www.dreve.co.za/talk/index.html>

Dr Marlene Wasserman is a clinician, educator and sexual activist. She is fascinated with the mysteries of relationships, love and sexuality and committed to promoting sexual health and reproductive rights. Dr Wasserman is also the author of *Dr. Eve's Teen Sex Book*.

## Expression Through Lack Of Expression : Lingerie And Sexual Fantasy In Cairo

By Amany Abouzeid



In this article , Amany Abouzeid the Director of Programmes for Rainbow, shared her views on sexual fantasy and sexualized relations in North Africa

### **What is your view on sexual fantasy and sexual expression in Africa? Have there any changes over time?**

That is a very wild and difficult subject, ironically fantasy comes to mind. Although a North African Muslim Country, Egypt is metamorphosing at a very fast rate and increasingly becoming more competitive, especially with regards to the thought that a lot of sexual expressions are actually mediated through lack of expression or consecrated by its absence thus resulting in its mediation through fantasy. Especially since the predominant and only open norm of sexual interaction is still heterosexual.

### **Could you elaborate on what you mean by sexual expression being mediated through lack of expression?**

What I mean to say is that I think we are into acting, especially based on the predominant form of sexual expression, which is the heterosexual principle that is between men and women. This is not

these boutiques are filled with heavily veiled women. Some of them are even accompanied by their male companions who might be their husbands, fiancés or boyfriends holding hands and admiring these products and no one seems to flinch at the sight of such intimate pieces of clothing.

Since no one seems to flinch, I believe this is basically playing on individual fantasy. By this I mean, these individuals to a great extent have to rely on fantasy because the actual places for manifesting any sort of sexual interaction are getting narrower, and narrower.

Another thing that I can relate to fantasy which I discovered during my research in Cairo is the very Mediterranean phenomenon of sudden sexual harassment. This usually involves men commenting on the appearance of women, by making sexual remarks like “*Ahh she is beautiful*”, “*Ahh she does the moon walk*” and etcetera. This kind of engendered form of interaction. I actually carried out a participatory research where I dressed

to say there are no other forms of s e x u a l interactions, the fact is that the only open norm is heterosexual.

One of the growing trends especially in Cairo is that the city is littered with lingerie boutiques and not just any lingerie but the types sold in European sex shops. Ironically

up in three different attires for three different looks and interviewed some of the men who had made these comments at me. I carefully studied their three different expressions and responses to me based not only on my questions but also on the way I was dressed.

I would say my “normal” standard Cairo look, is a veil, which is a very conservative look and a rather real cape. I think in the three cases these men saw their fantasy. By this I mean, they saw what they wanted to see and not what I was actually wearing.

I went out with a headscarf and a veil, but a sleeveless top the first time and he interacted with me quite well because he saw the *scarf*, so I assumed the symbol of the scarf is the same as that of the veil, he did not realize that I was wearing a sleeveless top, he was in fantasy of the veil and I think I am using fantasy here to mean a constructive stereo type, that the people are responding to irrespective of what is actually going on. What they are actually seeing is either the condoned image of the veiled woman with the cape in front of the box, or the uncondoned image of the unveiled woman with a cross in front of the box. What suddenly and interestingly came to my mind was the fact that a lot of gender interactions with a huge amount of underlying sexual contents are taking place so fast on the streets of Cairo.

I remember when a colleague commented on one of my earring “It's so exotic you know!”, I had looked at her amazed at how she had projected an exotic identity on me. So I had to be an exotic person to be wearing exotic things. What I am saying is that we most of the time interact along the lines of what I choose to call fantasy

### **Lingerie And Sexual Fantasy**

It is interesting to know that there's a shop chain called "*the tashid owhonual*". It is an Islamic terminology which means "the unity and the light", owned by a prominent *Muslim figure* who openly supports it financially and otherwise. Ironically he is a religious conservative who does not employ women in any of his establishments!

The contrast in the lingerie business in Cairo is interesting. By this I mean, it is an Islamic country and the traders of this intimate articles of clothing are *long bearded men* dressed in three quarters *Jalabia* discussing with their customers who are *fully veiled women*. You actually hear these women discussing bra sizes and making statements like, "*Oh no I would like a 40DD, you know I have big boobs*".

Its amazing, I just could not understand this. Of course these shops are very competitive price wise and everybody always goes there including Christian women and others but they hire men who measure women. Personally, I have my reservations with regards to this, if I want to go to a lingerie shop, I'll rather have a woman attend to me rather than a heavily

bearded man. Any way that's my personal opinion to it doesn't really count but things are really happening.

### Is there any change in the expression sexual fantasy?

I think it has always been there but what is increasing is the sexualization of this fantasy. I mean to say, there have been fantasies or what you can call the clichés of class. Class was more salient in the Egyptian context but the almost aggressive under current sexualization and objectifications, is of course that which came in parallel to the fundamentalism. The increasingly conservative gender relation is not internal fundamentalism because all of them fight conservatism. It is a very hierarchical society but under current sexualisation, it is very much at the stage where it has risen especially in religious conservatism beyond the doubt. Consequently with so much local constrains along site globalization, I would say that sexual fantasy has become more apparent and visible.

### These Developments Not limited to Egypt

While in Nairobi recently, attending a training workshop, I bought several products, all of which claim to be

virginity products,. you know like soaps and gels which the manufacturers claim tighten the Vagina and make you as good as new. It is in all the shops, I didn't go into any specialized shop. What actually caught my attention was the label written 'virginity soap' and more interesting was the fact that it was written in Arabic. Feigning ignorance, I tried to inquire about its meaning and walked up to a trader and asked, 'What does this mean?', you wouldn't believe the look he gave me. It was this kind of where on the planet have you been not to know what this is!"

I also remember when a colleague in London commented on one of my earring "*It's so exotic you know!*", I had looked at her amazed at how she had projected an exotic identity on me. So I had to be an exotic person to be wearing exotic things. What I am saying is that we most of the time interact along the lines of what I choose to call fantasy.

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Amany Abouzeid is the Director of Programmes for Rainbow, working on the health and rights for African women based in the United Kingdom

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Rachel Spronk is a lecturer in the Sociology/Anthropology Department at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

# NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS

## GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

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The editors welcome submissions related to future issues of the Magazine and also other areas of sexuality, sexual health and rights in Africa. These articles or poems should be objective, analytical and reflect current issues and debates i.e. taking a broader approach to sexuality and taking the sexuality discourse beyond health to integrate the expression of sexuality without guilt or fear.

Priority would be given to previously unpublished articles while already published material might be considered based on the relevance of the subject area to ARSRC's work, accompanied by details of where to seek permission for its reprint. Presently we are seeking articles on:

### 'Unusual Marriage' And Sexual Health And Rights In Africa ( Volume 5 Issue 1)

Undoubtedly, marriage remains an important and valued social institution as well as the main location of 'approved' sexuality. For many stakeholders, marriage appears as a control mechanism of 'socially acceptable' sexuality. Interestingly, the values attached to and the centrality of marriage have recently revitalized the politics of the institution. What is marriage? Who should be married? To whom? When? And where? Have therefore become major contentious issues in the politics of the marriage institution. What is however clear, is that marriage is evolving especially among the youths.

*Urft* (or Secret Marriage) in Egypt, *Vat-en sit* in South Africa, *Come we stay* (Kenya), *informal marriage* (West Africa) and same-sex relationship are just some of the emerging forms of long-term relationships that will be the focus of the magazine. Contributions will address, amongst others, the following questions: the prevalence, meaning and sexual health implications of these hitherto unusual marriages/unions.

### Technology, Sexuality And Reproductive Rights In Africa: ( Volume 5 Issue 2)

Technology is fast affecting ways of life in Africa even though the level of technology penetration in the continent is quite limited when compared with the level in other parts of the world. Yet access to Global services for mobile communication (GSM) and the Internet is growing at one of the fastest rates in the world. Another technological development likely to affect sexual life and relationships in Africa is the availability of sex toys/aids and drugs for sexual dysfunction.

Contributions to this edition of the magazine will explore and analyze the effects of these technological developments on sexuality in Africa. One of the questions an attempt would be made to resolve is how and the extent to which technology could foster sexual pleasure and health within the social, legal and religious framework of the society.

### Transactional And Commercial Sex: Facts, Issues And Policy Implications ( Volume 5 Issue 3)

This edition of the magazine will explore and analyze facts and controversies on transactional and commercial sex. Some of the key questions for consideration are: What are the levels, forms and factors of these practices? What policies and programmes are needed to address the issues of sexual health and well-being related to the practice of transactional sex, commercial sex and sex tourism?

### Food, Body And Sexual Well-being ( Volume 5 Issue 4)

This issue of the magazine will explore the relationship between food, the body and sexual well-being. Contributions will look at the sexualization of the body and food, and the extent to which this process contributes to individual sexual well-being in contemporary Africa. Issues around femininity, masculinity and nutrition will also be explored.

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

**Programme Feature:** Best practices

from programme implementers.

**Research Notes:** Focus on research and methodologies

**Viewpoint::** Reactions to previous magazine issues or subject areas that a reader wishes to express very strong opinions about.

### Length:

Feature article : 1,000 - 1,500 words

Research issues: 800 - 1,000 words

Opinion articles: 400 - 500 words

### Pictures:

Pictures are welcome with or without articles and appropriate credit would be given if the picture is used.

### Presentation:

An abstract with your name, contact address, phone number, email address and short personal bio as you would like it to appear on the list of contributors should also be submitted.

### References:

\*\*\* It is important to note that references should be from the last five years.

\*\*\* All contributors would be sent a copy of the issue with their published articles.

All correspondence should be addressed to:

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Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre,

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PO Box 803, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.

E-mail [L.IBHAZE@ARSRC.ORG](mailto:L.IBHAZE@ARSRC.ORG)

Please visit our website - [www.arsrc.org](http://www.arsrc.org) - for more information

and to access online editions of the magazine. Hard copies of the magazine will be made available on request and subscribers will however be required to pay the cost of postage.

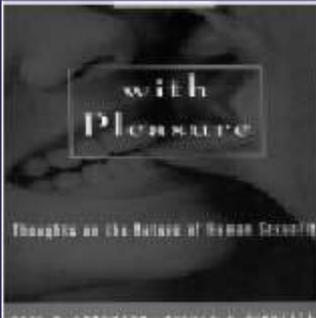
# Sexuality Resources

Ambiguous Pleasures: Sexuality And New Self- Definitions In Nairobi

**Author:** Rachel Spronk

**Publisher:** University Of Amsterdam, 2006

In this book, Rachel Spronk merges sexuality research and the debates in African studies about postcolonial societies. She carefully analyses sexuality as a prism to study societal transformations by exploring how sexuality is constituted socially and experienced personally and how the social group of young professionals can be seen as being in the vanguard concerning reconfigurations of gender, sexuality and culture. In other words she explores how sexuality has gained a new meaning in modern lifestyles and how sex has become central to self expression among young professionals in Nairobi.



With Pleasure; Thoughts On The Nature Of Human Sexuality

**Author:** Paul R. Abramson & Steven D. Pinkerton

**Publisher:** Oxford University Press, 2002

**ISBN:** 0195146093 (Paperback)

This book explains why sex feels good and examines the far reaching implications of the pleasurable of sex in all its guises. The book argues that pleasure is the premiere evolutionary motivator and, therefore the pursuit of sexual pleasure is as natural as a bear seeking honey. But sex is risky, for individuals who might contract STDs and society alike, hence the repressive effect of the current AIDS epidemic.

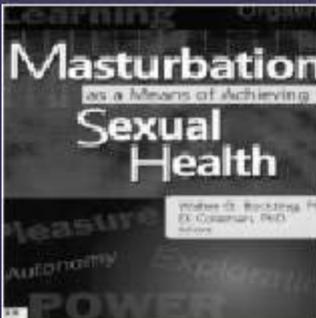
Forbidden Flowers: women's Secret Sexual Fantasies

**Author:** Nancy Friday

**Publisher :** Arrow Books, 2003

**ISBN :** 0099462427 (Paperback)

Forbidden Flowers is a celebration of new freedom, where today's women joyfully accept and rejoice in the awareness of their own inner sexual lives .Nancy Friday's Ground breaking work adds an exhilarating new freedom to the ever changing relationship between the sexes.



Masturbation As a Means Of Achieving Sexual Health

**Author:** Walter O. Bockting, PhD and Eli Coleman, PhD (Eds)

**Publisher:** The Haworth Press, Inc

**ISBN:** 0789029467(Paperback)

This book looks beyond the taboos and cultural misconceptions to see how masturbation can promote sexual health. Here masturbation is seen as a critical component in the development of sexual health and explores both positive and negative powers of the act, carefully outlining viable ideas for future research. It also presents a concise historical overview of societal attitudes toward masturbation and reports on changes in masturbatory behaviour in the twentieth century, including the trend towards 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

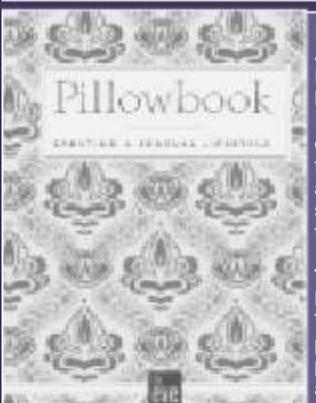
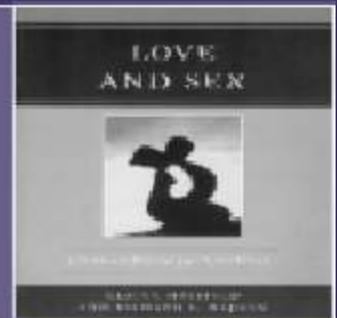
Love And Sex

**Author:** Elaine Hatfield and Richard L. Rapson

**Publisher:** University Press Of America, 2005

**ISBN:** 0761832327

In this book Elaine Hatfield and Richard Rapson focus on the cross- cultural research concerning the passionate beginnings of relationships ; how people meet, fall in love , make love and fall out of love , usually only to risk it all over again. Through in depth analysis and astute assessment, they compare the way cultures try to set rules for these incendiary matters. The two main questions addressed here are; "What seems to be biological and universal?" and "What seems to be socially constructed and transient?"



Pillowtalk

**Author:** Dr Marlene Wasserman

**Publisher:** Oshun Books, 2007

**ISBN:** 9781770200098

In the early 14th century Japanese tradition allowed for a young woman to receive a *Pillowbook* from her mother on the eve of her wedding. Placed under the bride's pillow this book was filled with sexual permission, advice, tips and techniques for the young lovers. Renowned sexologist Dr Marlene Wasserman also known as "Dr Eve", has used this traditional concept as the basis of her guide to women's sexuality and relationships. She describes *Pillowbook* as her gift to women of all ages, stages and cultures who want more out of their relationships and also for women who wish they could recapture the passion that used to make sexual experiences so exciting and those who have never experienced real passion.

**The Pleasure Project**

<http://www.thepleasureproject.org/>

The Pleasure Project is an educational organization that promotes safer sex that feels good. While safer sex and HIV prevention programmes are negative and disease-focused, The Pleasure Project is different, in the sense that it takes a positive, liberating and sexy approach to safer sex with the view of sex as education. The project aims to make sex safer by addressing one of the major reasons people have sex, which is the pursuit of pleasure.