

## CHAPTER ONE

# *Sexuality and Sexuality Education: Implications For the Nature of Society*

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"...debates about sexuality are debates about the nature of society; as sex goes, so goes society."

(Weeks, 1986)

"Learning a culturally prescribed way of life includes learning sexuality, having the expression of one's sex drive culturally shaped."

(Henslin, 1978)

"Sex education is potentially a vehicle for social engineering par excellence, be it progressive or traditional."

(Thompson, 1994)

### *Introduction*

My objective in this first chapter is to shed some light on why sexuality education in the schools has become so controversial. I propose that the nature of sexuality education is so passionately fought over because, as an instrument in the sexual socialization of youth, sexuality education is seen to play a role in the shaping of sexual values and behavioural norms of our culture which in turn are widely perceived to impact significantly on the character of society as a whole. Sexuality education in the schools is a key battle ground in a wider social conflict about sexuality in particular and the nature of society in general. In other words, the battle over sexuality education is not simply a dispute over the most effective means to promote the sexual and reproductive health of youth, but rather it is, first and foremost, a clash over the shape and direction of society itself. Thus, we can only make sense out of different perspectives on sexuality education in the schools when we consider them in the context of divergent perceptions of the role sexuality should play in promoting a stable and just society.

### *Sexuality and the Nature Of Society*

There is a long held belief that attitudes and values “pertaining to sexual behavior are of the highest importance for both the survival and effectiveness of society” (Kardiner, 1955, p. 23). Indeed, since its very beginning, Western civilization has tended to define itself, in large measure, by its moral, social, and economic organization of human sexuality. As Jeffrey Weeks (1986) puts it, “Concern with sexuality has been at the heart of Western preoccupations since before the triumph of Christianity” (p. 89). The ascension of Christianity as the dominant meaning system of Western society is a key event in the modern history of sexuality, and the importance placed upon sex by the foundational Christian scholars remains with us to this day. Elaine Pagels (1988), in tracing the roots of Christian beliefs about sexuality, suggests that the theologian Augustine (353-430) was the pivotal figure in laying the foundation of the Western approach to sexuality. “From the fifth century on, Augustine’s pessimistic views of sexuality, politics, and human nature would become the dominant influence of Western Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, and color all Western culture, Christian or not, ever since” (p. 150). Or as D.P. Verene (1972) aptly puts it, many of Augustine’s views on sexuality “seem surprisingly familiar to the attitudes we have absorbed since childhood simply by growing up in Western culture” (p. 86).

Augustine associated sexuality with the idea of original sin and the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden. He proclaimed that sexual desire was the proof of—and penalty for—Adam’s failure to resist temptation. Although men and women, according to the Christian tradition, are made in the image of God, their sexual urges show them to be a flawed and degenerate version of the deity. As Pagels (1988) suggests, “the Augustinian theory of original sin claims that our moral capacity has been so fatally infected that human nature as we know it cannot be trusted” (p. 149). From this perspective, sexuality is important for the survival of civilized society because it represents the moral weakness of humanity. Accordingly, it follows that as civilized societies attempt to control the “dark side” of human nature, they must place considerable emphasis on the regulation of sexuality. Western society has had a strong propensity to attempt to control sexual behaviour through both law and social norm. This tendency reflects the pervasive belief in the power and significance of sexuality in human affairs. “Every society, whether sexually permissive or restrictive, finds it

useful and even necessary to regulate and structure its social relationships, especially sexual relations, in some way for the common good" (Shapiro & Francoeur, 1987, p. 88).

An important example of how Western society has structured social relationships by means of sexual regulation is the institution of the family. Since the Middle Ages, the nuclear family has been the dominant kinship grouping in Western society. The nuclear family is based, first and foremost, on the heterosexual union of a man and a woman bound together by a sexually monogamous relationship, providing Western society with a normative framework for producing children. The family unit has been designated as a central biological, social, political, and economic constituent of society. From their examination of the history of sexuality in the United States, D'Emilio and Freedman (1988) concluded that "In early America, a unitary system of sexual regulation that involved family, church, and state rested upon a consensus about the primacy of familial, reproductive sexuality" (p. xvii). While there can be no doubt that during the 20th century the links between sexuality, reproduction, and the family have loosened, they have not dissolved and many of the laws and social norms regulating sexuality in support of the nuclear family unit remain in force. One of the primary reasons they have persevered is because these sexual laws and norms preserve, for better or for worse, the existing social structure.

Many of the objections to an increasing trend toward the liberalization of sexual laws and norms are premised on the belief that a breakdown in traditional patterns of sexual regulation constitutes an assault on a way of life based on the sanctity of the nuclear family unit. The desire to regulate sexual behaviour in support of the family unit can be readily seen in the many laws that have been instituted in Western societies regarding such things as marriage, divorce, homosexuality, and prostitution, and in often strict social norms upholding practices such as premarital chastity, monogamy within marriage, and heterosexuality. Because family-oriented sexual ethics, based on Christian doctrine, have shaped the legal regulation of sexuality, it is not surprising that, for example, many American states continue to have laws proscribing sodomy between consenting adults, adultery, and fornication (Posner, 1992, pp. 77-78). As Gayle Rubin (cited in McCormick, 1994) notes "The only adult sexual behavior that is legal in every state of the union is the placement of the penis in the vagina in wedlock" (p. 7). For much of our history, including the present time, sexual laws and customs have supported the social ideal of the nuclear family.

Since the nuclear family has been basic to the organization of Western society, we can see how the regulation of sexuality plays a central role in maintaining the social order.

Social scientists from a diversity of disciplines have emphasized the importance of sexuality to Western society. While early Christian theologians connected sexuality with the sinful tendencies of humanity, 20th century psychology has attached a different but equally significant meaning to sexuality. One of this century's most influential figures, Sigmund Freud (1977), theorized about the centrality of sexuality in personality development and in so doing stressed "the importance of sexuality in all human achievements" (p. 43). Indeed, the psychological health of individuals and couples is now seen to be greatly dependant on sexual adjustment and fulfilment. James Nelson (1988) reflects this view of the importance of sexuality when he writes:

Our sexuality is far more than genital activity. It is our way of being in the world as gendered persons, having male or female biological structures and socially internalized self-understandings of those meanings to us. Sexuality means having the capacity for sensuousness. Above all, sexuality is the desire for intimacy and communion, both emotionally and physically. It is the physiological and psychological grounding of our capacity to love. At its undistorted best, our sexuality is that basic eros of our humanness—urging, pulling, luring, driving us out of loneliness into communion, out of stagnation, into creativity. (p. 26)

This emphasis on the importance of sexual fulfilment and happiness has not detracted from the social or political significance of sexuality. In this view, sexual happiness is linked to the well-being of society. As George Frankl (1974) writes, "the root of human happiness is love, and sexual happiness is the foundation of social happiness, for he who cannot find sexual happiness cannot find love, and he who cannot find love cannot build a good society" (p. 13). The expansion of the meaning of sexuality beyond genital activity for the purposes of procreation is part of a shift in emphasis toward what sociologists call "affective individualism", the quest for personal fulfilment (Giddens, 1987). It has been argued that such a shift also has implications for the economic structure of society.

The rise of "affective individualism" has been closely involved with the association of sexuality with personal fulfilment, inside and outside the

formal ties of marriage. Some radical writers have argued that the origins and continuation of capitalism are closely bound up psychologically with the repression of sexuality. The strict discipline demanded by industrial labour, in their view, is secured through the generalised curtailment of personal desires, epitomised by Victorian mores in the heyday of nineteenth-century capitalism. (Giddens, 1987, p. 130)

Herbert Marcuse (1966) is perhaps the most well-known theorist to propose a link between the social control of sexuality and the workings of capitalism, and other writers such as Wilhelm Reich (1962) have attempted to show that political liberation cannot occur without a complementary freedom from sexual repression. As Richard Posner (1992) suggests in an analysis of the legal regulation of sex in the United States,

We have seen that a number of sexual laws, and sexual customs having the force of law, including a variety of apparently senseless, seemingly vestigial sexual laws in this and other Anglo-Saxon societies (culturally although not ethnically, ours is still an Anglo-Saxon society), make sense—social-functional sense—when analyzed in economic terms. (p. 213)

One of the most provocative perspectives on the place of sexuality in the structuring of social life comes from philosopher Michel Foucault, who theorized that the organization of sexuality acts as a mechanism of power, operating as a means of control over bodies and identities. Foucault saw the history of sexuality as a history of discourses. By employing the term “discourses” Foucault was referring to organized bodies of knowledge which, when joined with the practice of theology, medicine, psychology, psychiatry, and the other human sciences, produce and transmit power. According to Foucault (1978), we have been engaged in a perpetual “will to knowledge” (p. 12), “speaking of it ad infinitum” (p. 35). The resulting discourses become mechanisms of power, ordering, classifying, and organizing the body’s capacity for sensual pleasure into “polymorphous sexualities.” Sexual identities, orientations, and perversions are formulated and come to define the individual and his/her behaviour. In sum, the discourses of knowledge-power become the reference points through which personal identities are constructed and social life is organized. For Foucault (1978), sexuality is “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and

students, priests and laity, an administration and a population" (p. 103). Sullivan (1995) succinctly states Foucault's position when he writes, "The history of sexuality in the West is not a history from repression to liberation, but the exchange of one kind of power relations for another" (p. 64).

Not only does the organization of sexuality continue to determine the nature of many of our key social institutions such as the family, but as Foucault suggested, sexuality has also increasingly come to define individual identity. This too has important ramifications for the nature of society. Biological sex and gender identity are arguably the most fundamental defining characteristics of the individual. The existence of the category of homosexuality "made the sexual significant by making it a signifying aspect of character" (Simon, 1994, p. 7). In the social world of our present culture, a person's sexual orientation is among the most salient features of how an individual is perceived by the self and others. It is at least as important as race, ethnicity and perhaps gender. More than any other event, the onset of puberty—the attainment of sexual and reproductive capacity—and subsequent experiences of sexual interaction, is seen as the clearest indication of the transition between childhood and adulthood. For many women, menopause, the cessation of reproductive capacity, is seen as a key marker in the shift from adulthood to old age.

Feminism, perhaps the most influential social movement of recent decades, also emphasizes the relationship between sexuality and the power to organize social life. This linkage between sexuality, gender equality, and social organization has, as Janice Irvine (1990) explains, been a central focus of the feminist movement.

Although the feminism of the 1960s envisioned new strategies for organizing around sexual issues, this analysis reaffirmed that of feminists of the early 1900s: achieving sexual liberation for women was indistinguishable from changing wider sociopolitical power structures. (p. 137)

Feminism is grounded, in part, on the theory that the inequality of women is expressed through the gender specific codes of sexual behaviour inherent in the patriarchal social system (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Steedman, 1987; Vance, 1984). Feminists such as Catherine Mackinnon (1982) identify sexuality as "the primary social sphere of male power" (p. 529). In sum, "Sexuality is important, feminists argue, because *norms* regarding

'proper' and 'normal' sexual behavior function everywhere to socialize and control women's behavior" (Tiefer, 1995, p. 114).

This brief survey of different perspectives toward the importance attached to sexuality leads to two basic conclusions. First, from early Judeo-Christian theological scholars to contemporary feminists, virtually every social scientist who has seriously examined the cultural implications of human sexuality, in one or all of its multiplicity of dimensions, arrives at the conclusion that, in one way or another, the sexual norms of a particular culture provide a central pivot upon which much of the social, political, and even economic character of that culture is derived. In other words, sexuality is important in that its organization significantly shapes the nature of society. In Eve Sedgwick's words (cited in Stanton, 1992), sexuality is "the most meaning intensive of human activities" (p. 2), or as Stephan Jay Gould (cited in Stanton, 1992) puts it, sexuality is "a sign, a symbol, or reflection of nearly everything in our culture" (p. 2).

Second, the history of sexuality is a history of change. For example, as we have seen, whereas Augustine saw sexuality as the expression of human weakness and immorality, contemporary psychology sees sexuality as vital to human happiness. The enormity of this difference in perspective is summed up well by Thomas Szasz (1980) when he suggests that "To the great doctor of Christianity in the fourth century, sexual desire was a disease; to the great doctors of coitus today, lack of sexual desire is a disease" (p. xi). Put another way, "...the dominant meaning of sexuality has changed during our history from a primary association with reproduction within families to a primary association with emotional intimacy and physical pleasure for individuals" (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988, p. xv).

As a result, increasingly large segments of Western society have come to accept the legitimacy of sexual acts that occur outside the context of reproduction within marriage. Simply put, the meaning attached to sexuality has been undergoing a profound transformation characterized by the emergence of a mixture of diverse sexual norms and values that has replaced the uniformity of the past. Although it is more than likely that the sexual uniformity that we commonly associate with pre-1960s Western culture is somewhat overstated, there can be no doubt that the growing acceptance of sexuality beyond its traditional familial reproductive function has led to an ever increasing variability in the meaning and perceived role of sexuality in our lives. Today, more than ever, sex means different things to different people, and the moral, social, and psychological ramifications of engaging

in any given sexual act can be very different depending on who you are and what you believe.

However, these transformations in the meaning of sexuality have been neither smooth nor complete. Indeed, the existence of these divergent meaning systems related to sexuality has been a major focus of what is often referred to as the "culture wars." Because sexuality and the societal norms related to it carry such significance for the shape of society itself, sexuality has become the site of considerable social and moral conflict. While large segments of Western society remain strongly attached to what might be described as a traditional view of sexuality based on reproduction within the family unit, a significant proportion of society believes that a dismantling of traditional sexual values, replacing them with a set of values that emphasize sexual and reproductive freedom, will lead to a more just society. The schism in the views of sexual morality in contemporary America has been made abundantly clear in surveys on what sexual activities people believe are morally acceptable. For example, according to a recent, nationally representative survey, 19.7% of Americans believe that premarital sex is always wrong. In addition, 60.8% believe that teenage participation in premarital sex is always wrong and 64.8% believe that homosexual sex is always wrong (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994, p. 514; Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, & Kolata, 1994, p. 234). In other words, while about 60% of people resolutely reject the moral acceptability of homosexuality and premarital sex among teenagers, close to 40% do not, indicating that large segments of society disagree with each other on this issue. The authors of this survey concluded from their findings that "aspects or consequences of sexual behavior such as sex before marriage, abortion, and homosexuality are among the social issues about which we as a nation seem to have no clear consensus at this time" (Laumann, et al., 1994, p. 547). A Kinsey Institute survey of Americans' beliefs about sexual morality, conducted in the 1970s, provides further evidence of clear divisions on these issues. In the Kinsey Institute survey, while 56.4% of respondents believed that "premarital sex by a teenage boy with a girl he loves" is always or almost always wrong, 42.8% felt that it was wrong only sometimes or not wrong at all. While 70% disapproved of homosexual activity even when the participants were in love, close to 30% believed there were circumstances when homosexual sex had the potential for moral acceptability (Klassen, Williams & Levitt, 1989, p. 18). In addition, 59.1% believed that homosexuality



should be against the law while 37.8% stated their opposition to the legal proscription of homosexual acts (Klassen, Williams & Levitt, 1989, p. 173). What is apparent from these findings is that while a little over half of Americans seem to believe that certain sexual acts are intrinsically or always wrong, a sizable proportion of Americans look to the context or circumstances in which a sexual act takes place before proceeding to make a moral judgement about it.

Although there have been no systematic, large scale national studies on the sexual attitudes and beliefs of Canadians, available data support the conclusion that while many Canadians continue to hold conservative views of sexual conduct, "more Canadians in the 1990's than in prior years accept, or are at least tolerant of, a wider diversity of forms of sexual conduct, expression and communication" (Barrett, King, Levy, Maticka-Tyndale, & McKay, 1997, p. 236):

Overall, these numbers indicate a clear lack of consensus within the North American public on issues of sexual morality. In addition, they also suggest that although Western society has passed through numerous scientific, political, philosophical, and demographic transformations, including at least one "sexual revolution" since the ascension of the Augustinian view of sexuality, many, if not most, Americans continue to adhere to the traditional Christian moral perspective on sexuality. This perseverance of traditional views of sexual morality exists simultaneously with a growing trend of revolt against traditional values on the part of many groups, including feminists, gay and lesbian rights activists, and those who might generally be described as embracing secular humanist values and/or liberal theological interpretations of sexual morality. Although most Americans apparently continue to adhere to a traditional sexual morality, since the 1960s, in particular, "Many more Americans than before liberalized their views on masturbation, premarital relations, extramarital affairs, homosexuality, and began to forgive themselves and others for engaging in previously tabooed acts" (Ellis, 1990, p. 6).

These divergent meaning systems do not peacefully co-exist in an open market place of ideas and lifestyles. The mere existence of one meaning system in the public sphere is perceived as a threat to the way of life based on another meaning system. The clash between the traditional Christian and contemporary secular moral perspectives on sexuality as they pertain to sex and gender roles and homosexuality illustrates why these seemingly mutually exclusive meaning systems have been unable to peacefully

co-exist. From the traditional Christian point of view both feminism and the homosexual rights movements seek to destroy the family as we know it. According to the feminist and homosexual rights movements, the traditional Western organization of social life is oppressive for women and gays and lesbians.

The degree to which feminist perspectives on sexuality have been the subject of intense social science and media discussion and debate is an example of the power of sexuality related issues to provoke disagreements. While nearly everyone would agree that the implications of sexual changes related to sex and gender are immense, the direction that society ought to take in the organization of sex and gender is hotly contested. For example, the changing nature of sex roles, partially embodied by male and female scripts for sexual behaviour, are seen as an important issue because, as Robert Francoeur (1987) suggests, "Sex roles and conformity to those roles are essential if an individual is to relate to and be accepted as a part of the whole society. Sex roles allow us to maintain a stable society" (p. 29). In addition, sex role arrangements, even in societies that are stable, need to be viewed in terms of their ability to protect individual rights, ensure equality between groups, and to benefit society as a whole. Those with a traditional view believe that

The differences between the sexes are the single most important fact of human society. The drive to deny them—in the name of women's liberation, marital openness, sexual equality, erotic consumption, homosexual romanticism—must be one of the most quixotic crusades in the history of the species. Yet in a way it is typical of crusades. For it is a crusade against a particular incarnate humanity—men and women and children—on behalf of a metaphysical "humanism." (Gilder, 1987, p. 37)

According to this perspective, allowing women to explore avenues of sexual freedom which for many may lie outside the confines of marriage, and to have easy access to contraceptives and abortion, tempts women away from participation in the nuclear family structure, a trend which is seen to be detrimental to society.

According to many feminists, the patriarchal family and the sexual norms that support it are at the root of gender oppression. Feminists, therefore, have encouraged women to explore alternatives to traditional family life and the roles that men and women play within it. Many feminist

social scientists believe that gender differences, and their complementary sex roles, do not reflect incarnate humanity but are “best explained as a social construction rooted in hierarchy” (Fuchs Epstien, 1988, p. 15), created by patriarchal society in order to institutionalize male privilege. As noted above, many feminists contend that this gender hierarchy is embedded in the sexual world, requiring a dismantling of traditional sexual scripts that emphasize male assertiveness and female passivity and a double standard toward sexual freedom. Reshaping the sexual aspects of gender arrangements is a key aspect of feminism’s goal to create a gender equal society. These two competing conceptions of sex roles are seen to be mutually exclusive in that one can only gain in influence at the expense of the other.

Those who follow the traditional Christian view of sexuality have been unable to affirm the moral validity of homosexuality because they see it as not only against the laws of God and nature but also because they see homosexuality as a dangerous threat to a way of life based on the family. Naturally, those who favour equal rights for homosexuals are unable to accept this version of Christian doctrine because they see it as discriminatory against gay and lesbian people. In effect the feminist and homosexual rights movements have undermined

the “naturalness” and inevitability of traditional gender stereotypes and the monolithic nuclear family. And whereas feminism had affirmed nonreproductive sexuality, gay sexuality involved an explicit separation of sex and reproduction, which foregrounded the option of sex solely for pleasure. By their very existence, gay people challenge the “principle of consistency,” which links sex, gender, and sexual preference in a socially normative ideal. (Irvine, 1990, p. 139)

As Schur (1988) notes we can see here the logic behind the belief held by many traditionalists that “If homosexuality is ‘allowed,’ that will be the end of the family as we know it” (p. 19). It reflects an assumption that if membership in the nuclear family, and acceptance of the moral codes governing the sexuality of the family unit, become optional rather than compulsory, the nuclear family will disappear as a social institution.

Homosexuality and sex/gender roles are but two of a number of sexually related issues that are a source of intense social conflict. The pressures for, and resistance to, sexual change can be seen in the deep divisions within Western society on issues such as premarital sex, pornography, contraception, strategies for AIDS prevention, prostitution, and sexuality education

in the schools. Because sexuality is considered so important, changes in sexual norms and values are often resisted by large segments of society. This is not surprising since as sexual norms and values change, society itself is changed in fundamental ways. Since sexuality is not a simple or unified phenomenon, but rather an extraordinarily complex and varied one with a multitude of profound implications for the ordering of social life, sexuality has become a major battleground in a cultural war between competing value systems. As D'Emilio and Freedman (1988) note, by the 1980s, this clash of value systems had reached a new high point of intensity.

The debates about sex, rather than remaining the province of feminist and gay liberationists, were polarizing the nation's politics. The contentious quality of the debates stemmed not only from the demands of radicals, but also from conservatives distressed by the reorientation of sexual values that had occurred since the 1960s. The sexual politics of the New Right, as well as more recent controversies generated by the AIDS epidemic, attest to how deeply sexuality had infiltrated national politics by the 1980s. (p. 345)

By the mid 1990s, Western culture's continued inability to cope with and agree upon solutions to a growing plethora of sexually related social problems, including epidemics of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, gender conflict and inequality, sexual violence and abuse, oppression of sexual minorities, and high rates of unwanted adolescent pregnancy, reflect and exacerbate increasingly volatile social conflict surrounding sexuality. As Weeks (1986) puts it,

There is a struggle for the future of sexuality. But the ways we respond to this have been coloured by the force of the accumulated historical heritage and sexual traditions out of which we have come: The Christian organization of belief in sex as subversive, the liberal belief in sex as source of identity and personal resource, all rooted in a melange of religious, scientific and sexological arguments about what sex is, what it can do, and what we must and must not do. (p. 5)

The very nature of society is believed to be at stake in this battle between competing views of the nature, function, and moral aspects of human sexuality.

## *Sexuality Education*

There are many factors which can contribute to socio-sexual changes in our society. According to Gagnon and Simon (1973), "Changes in the sexual component of the human condition can result from changes in the biological, technological, and psychosocial domains of life" (p. 287). Shifts in the demographic structure of society (i.e., expanding urbanization, ethno-cultural mixing, changing age ratios, etc.), rapid advances in communication technologies resulting in easier access to sexual information, growth in our scientific understanding of human sexuality, technological advances related to sexuality such as better and more effective birth control and countless other factors can affect the way we think and behave sexually. The advent of birth control, in particular, has been cited as a major agent of social change. As Money and Tucker (1975) argue, "The ability to separate the bait of sexual pleasure from the hook of reproduction sparked a revolution more momentous for the human race than any in history" (p. 186). Although, as we have seen, many people continue to share the sexual views of Augustine, Hatfield and Rapson (1993) note that by the late 18th century, changes in the material, economic, political, philosophical, and psychological spheres of Western society had begun to fundamentally alter the fabric of the Western world and many of these changes have unavoidably resulted in "a metamorphosis in Euro-American approaches to love and sex" (p. 87). In sum, many shifts in sexual beliefs, customs, laws, and behaviours can be viewed as more or less rational adaptations to changing socio-historical contingencies.

However, given that sexuality has been imbued with monumental social significance, it is not surprising that conscious attempts to socialize youth in sexual matters have become such a decisive and controversial issue. If we define socialization as the process by which social authorities and institutions transmit to children the beliefs, values, and behaviours deemed appropriate to a particular culture, a bitter debate about the sexual socialization of youth is a highly significant and natural outgrowth of the sexual conflicts that now permeate Western culture.

In order to harmoniously participate in society, an individual must internalize and adhere to the ground rules of the social reality of that society. "The ontogenetic process by which this is brought about is socialization, which may thus be defined as the comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or sector of it" (Berger

& Luckmann, 1967, p. 130). And, as Berger and Luckmann (1967) note, even human activities which are "grounded in biological drives," such as sexual behaviour, are subject, through the socialization process, to "the social channelling of activity" (p. 181). Indeed, it has been argued that "nothing is more essentially transmitted by a social process of learning than sexual behavior" (Douglas cited in Stanton, 1992, p. 4). In their analysis of adolescent sexuality, Zabin and Hayward (1993) note that "Young men and women adopt sexual behaviors at a time that is influenced by hormonal development, but they follow a script that is largely determined by social expectations" (p. 41).

Thus, there is reason to believe that, while historical forces inevitably influence sexual norms, conscious effort to shape the sexual socialization of youth, either in accordance with or against historical trends, will significantly affect the beliefs and behaviour of emerging generations. But as cultural diversity in sexual norms and values becomes more and more of a reality in Western culture, a clearly articulated and widely agreed upon set of reference points from which the sexual socialization of youth can proceed becomes exceedingly difficult to identify.

The sources of sexual socialization are numerous. For example, research has shown that a number of "important variables affect sexual knowledge, attitudes, and behavior including peer attitudes and behavior, family of origin values, self-efficacy, locus of control, choice of partner, relationship with partner, and media exposure" (Dine Jacobs & Wolf, 1995, p. 91). However, it is with sexuality education in the schools that our society makes its most concerted attempt to employ a public institution to socialize youth in regard to the sexual norms and mores of our culture. There is considerable evidence that some school-based sexuality education programs have influenced students' sexual knowledge, attitudes, and some aspects of their behaviour (Kirby, 1993; Kirby, et al., 1994; Mellanby, Phelps, Crichton, & Tripp, 1995; Frost & Forrest, 1995; Mauldon & Luker, 1996). Thus, it is not surprising that with the diverse plurality of moral perspectives on the meaning of sexuality, the picture of human sexuality to be presented in the public school classroom is fertile ground for what has become a polarized debate. After all, "Visions of what is considered 'good education' are intimately rooted in the conscious and/or unconscious visions of what is considered a 'good society'" (Goodman, 1992, p. xix).

Thomas Szasz (1980) shows how sexuality education has come to be seen as a battle between seemingly irreconcilable moral perspectives on the sexual socialization of youth when he writes:

Since human behavior denotes the actions of moral agents, all behavior is, in part at least, a matter of ethics. Sexual behavior is very much a matter of ethics. Hence, since time immemorial, persons who proposed to teach people about sex had but two choices: to embrace and endorse the accepted, traditional sexual ways of the group, or to explore and enjoin sexual principles and practices at odds with those ways. There is no such thing as value free sex education, nor can there be. (pp. 99-100)

Sharon Thompson (1994) writes that "Sex education is potentially a vehicle for social engineering par excellence, be it progressive or traditional" (p. 40). As Philip Meredith (1989) suggests, in one view, sexuality education should "recommend self-control over the force within in order to ensure the survival of the marriage bond, the family, and by extension society itself, from collapse" (p. 45). Yet from another perspective, sexuality education may be able to impart "the capacity and courage to look critically at social arrangements, to chart out rigorous spaces analysis of power, to seek out intellectual and political surprises" (Philips and Fine, 1992, p. 249). Given its potential role in shaping the sexual-moral landscape, it is not surprising that sexuality education has become arguably the most crucial battle in the cultural war over sexuality.

Until relatively recently, the validity of providing sexuality education in the schools was suspect for a number of reasons. Primary among them was the widely held assumption that it was inappropriate to discuss sexuality with children. Such discussion, it was believed, would corrupt youthful innocence and predispose children to immoral behaviour. In addition, teaching about sexuality in an open forum such as the public school classroom violated a cultural taboo on any form of public discussion of sexuality. Most importantly, since the formal sexuality education of youth, when it existed in any direct or tangible sense, was considered to be the exclusive domain of the family and church, school-based sexuality education has, as we have seen, raised difficult and controversial questions about which set of norms and values will be taught in the classroom.

In most respects, all but the last of these concerns has dissipated with the growing

recognition in principle that we must equip young people with the means to understand and protect their own reproductive health and potential: and that rapid changes taking place in society demand that parents and churches be assisted in this through the formal educational process. (Meredith, 1989, p. 1)

The question of whether sexuality should be hidden from youth is now more or less moot as various forms of media continually expose youth to sexually-oriented imagery. Thus, many of those formerly opposed to school-based sexuality education now contend that it is necessary in order to counter what are seen as the overly permissive messages and mores propagated by the popular media.

Since the advent of the AIDS crisis, the need for sexuality education in the schools has become almost universally accepted. Surveys in both the United States (Gallup Poll, 1985, 1991; Janus & Janus, 1993; Louis Harris Associates, 1988; Welshimer & Harris, 1994) and Canada (Lawlor & Purcell, 1988; Marsmen & Herold, 1986; McKay, 1996; Ornstein, 1989; Verby & Herold, 1992) indicate that the vast majority of adults, including parents of school age children, approve of sexuality and/or AIDS education in the schools. For example, a 1991 survey of a national sample of American adults indicated that 87% approved of sexuality education in the schools (Gallup, 1991). In a national sample of American adults, Janus and Janus (1993) found that only 1% of respondents were adamantly opposed to sexuality education in the schools while 90% were "definitely" in favour (p. 97). Perhaps most notable was the finding that 89% of those respondents who were categorized as "ultraconservative" were "definitely" in favour of sexuality education in the schools (p. 280).

Access to sexuality education, particularly as it relates to the prevention of disease and exploitation, is increasingly seen as a necessary and basic right of the individual. The World Health Organization (WHO) proclaims that "sexuality influences thoughts, feelings, actions, and interactions and thereby our mental and physical health. Since health is a fundamental human right, so must sexual health also be a basic human right" (WHO, cited in Health Canada, 1994, p. 7). If sexual health, as a key component of overall health, can legitimately be considered a fundamental human right, it may also be reasonably argued that the denial of the opportunity to learn the information and skills necessary to protect and enhance one's sexual health is tantamount to a violation of this human right.



However, as Meredith (1989) suggests, "The problems which follow from a 'formalisation' of what has traditionally been a hidden, furtive, taboo-ridden, even unconscious area of learning for many are many and complex" (p. 1). So, as Bruess and Greenberg (1994) note, "in recent years the sexuality education controversy has centred more on the content and methodology of programs rather than on whether or not there should be a program" (p. 57). Much of this controversy centres around different perspectives on the value positions reflected in contemporary sexuality education, and on what those positions should be. For example, Barrett (1994) summarizes this tension in Canadian sexuality education as follows:

Canadians appear to be strongly supportive of the schools involvement in sexuality education. Nevertheless, a sizable minority views contemporary sex education as skewed toward liberal, secular attitudes, particularly in the areas of abortion, homosexuality, teen sexuality, and access to contraceptive information and services, and actively promulgates a more restrictive agenda in all of these areas. Although historically this view has been expressed as an opposition to sexuality education in the schools, at present it is more likely to focus on either the specific value positions that schools should adopt, the appropriateness of particular topics (e.g. homosexuality, contraception, abortion), or the ways in which student behaviour should be influenced (e.g. abstinence-only programs). (pp. 200-201)

There have been many different objectives proposed for sexuality education in the schools. Among the more common, and sometimes contested, objectives are instilling a basic knowledge of human reproductive physiology, clarifying values, increasing social skills, learning methods of expressing affection, increasing comfort with communication about sexuality, enhancing self-esteem, and reducing exploitation (Kirby, 1992). It has also been proposed in some quarters that sexuality education should encourage a critique of prevailing gender roles as they pertain to sexuality so that students may have a greater opportunity to build more egalitarian relationships than those prescribed by patriarchy (e.g., Fine, 1988; Szirom, 1988). A small number of sex educators have increasingly focussed on reducing homophobia and have begun to recognize the sex education needs of gay and lesbian students (e.g., Sears, 1992). These latter two objectives have been, as we might expect, highly controversial. In any case,

...educators in the field of sexuality inevitably do their work under some assumptions about its purpose and value—assumptions that

include a particular vision of the place of sexuality in social behavior in general and the needs of teenagers in particular. (Zabin & Hayward, 1993, p. 113)

Despite the controversy over the objectives of sexuality education in the schools, nearly all programs do intend, in some way, to provide information that will help students reduce or eliminate their risk of unintended pregnancy, or STD infection with a particular emphasis being placed on HIV/AIDS. Indeed, any account of contemporary sexuality education in the schools cannot be divorced from the fact that a major priority is to help young people avoid sexual problems such as unintended pregnancy and infection with sexually transmitted diseases. The emergence of HIV/AIDS has added an unprecedented urgency to what can be described as sexuality education's public health mandate. With a focus on the pragmatic aspects of pregnancy and disease prevention, one might expect that the public controversy around sexuality education in the schools would be diminished.

However, proposals for how problems, such as pregnancy and STD prevention among youth, should be addressed both pedagogically in the classroom and in the larger society are closely interwoven with one's views on sexual morality. So, for example, if I have qualms about the moral acceptability of premarital sex, I might favour sexual education for adolescents that emphasizes sexual abstinence outside of marriage. If I think that sex outside of marriage can be morally acceptable, I may be more likely to sympathize with educational programs that encourage sexually active youth to use contraception and practise safer sex. In sum, whether one bemoans the lack of emphasis on a "Just Say No" to sex approach in contemporary sexuality education or complains that sexuality education fails to sufficiently acknowledge the positive aspects of safer sex practices will largely depend on where one lines up in the cultural battle over the future of sexuality in our society. In other words, if it is true that sexuality education cannot be value free, it would also appear that even seeking to achieve commonly shared objectives like preventing unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases is a morally laden and divisive enterprise.

### *Conclusion*

When communities battle over sexuality education in the schools, it is not simply a minor quibble over the effectiveness of particular educational methodologies. Although the question of what works in terms of pregnancy

and STD prevention is a hotly debated topic (McKay, 1992), when battles over sexuality education occur, they reflect a clash of fundamental values, of different ways of seeing the world. In short, it is a struggle between ideologies in general and a clash of sexual ideologies in particular. The essence and true character of the sexuality education question becomes more visible when it is understood in the context of ideology.