

state. They practiced 'complex marriage'-- all the men were married to all the women. The most important thing in sexual relations was that the woman be properly satisfied. The spiritual progress that was the main purpose of sex was dependent on this. Men were taught to practice 'coitus reservatus' to enable them to engage in intercourse for extended periods (well over an hour) without ejaculating. Thus women could have a satisfying sexual life without the risk of pregnancy.

Among one Central American group it is usual for married couples to have sex several times a day. A couple that has not had sex for 11 days is considered divorced. They use a position that requires the minimum of bodily contact and may complete sex in 1 minute or less.

Family is very important to the Chinese who traditionally placed many restrictions on when sex between husband and wife was appropriate. It became completely inappropriate after the birth of the first grandchild or after the age of forty.

Family is very important in southern and eastern Africa. There a number of peoples have institutionalized quasi-marriages between persons of the same sex who may also have marital relationships with persons of the opposite sex.

Family was very important in mediaeval Europe. It was believed by physicians that conception required orgasm by both partners. The Catholic Church permitted women to masturbate to orgasm if their husbands ejaculated before satisfying them, as long as this was done with the desire to become pregnant.

In late 19th century America women were not believed by most physicians to have any sexual drive. Orgasm in a woman was a sign of pathology that required rigorous, even surgical, treatment. Women needed to be protected from the sexual demands of men. Sexual activity by men could be risky to their health, however, and lead to dire results if not 'moderate.' Many physicians believed that if this moderate regime included using prostitutes it was healthier to use male prostitutes as men could only contract venereal disease from female prostitutes.

Family is very important in the Middle East. Women have been traditionally believed to have a sexual drive up to nine times as strong as that of a man. A woman is in a constant state of sexual readiness and the mere presence of any unrelated man is likely to cause her to want to seduce him. Men have to be protected from the sexual temptations of women. And women's families have to be protected from the risk to their honor of women's unfettered lust. Such ideas

are an aspect of what is known as the Mediterranean culture complex (although the area it applies to extends well beyond the Mediterranean) and are not derivative of Islam. They predate Islam and are found among all religions in the region. Indeed the most extreme aspects, such as infibulation, can be even more prevalent among other groups (e.g. Coptic Christians). In societies exhibiting

this culture complex, erotic activity between men is relatively common irrespective of whether they are also married to women.

The term 'homosexual' was created in the 19th century west to describe individuals who were believed to be a 'female soul trapped in a male body.' As these individuals were held to be essentially female, although apparently male, in conformity with the current view of female sexuality they were assumed to have a passive sexual nature that expressed itself in a desire for erotic activity with men. Homosexuals did not want to have sex with homosexuals by definition. 'Normal' men took an 'active' role in sexual encounters whether these were with women or homosexuals. Some decades later, the term 'heterosexual' was created to denote those who -only- desired erotic activity with those of the 'opposite' sex. The creation of the term 'heterosexual' was part of a process of value ranking types of sexual behavior and attempting to link them with judgments on the social utility of individuals based on gender and sexuality. Later yet, the referent of the term 'homosexual' was redrawn to oppose it to 'heterosexual.' Attempting to relate these two opposed terms to actual behavior then required the invention of the term 'bisexual' to denote those who could not be covered by a simple dichotomy.

The issue is complicated by the use of these terms to describe both specific instances of behavior and specific individuals. Thus they are used both as neutral adjectives and as reified labels which may be value loaded. In many cultures historically and contemporarily these terms cannot be usefully applied other than as neutral adjectives. The reified label concepts are culture specific and not generalizable.

The term 'sodomy' is long established in western law and is not specifically linked to homosexuality. Basically, it refers to erotic activity between sentient beings that has no possibility of resulting in reproduction. Thus it can be between any combination of men, women, or animals. (Chickens have had a prominent place in the legal history of sodomy.) I have even seen 'sodomites' used to refer to men who had sex with women of another 'race' by an 18th century author. Although the word is popularly used to refer to anal intercourse this is only one aspect of its legal meaning and also not one to restrict it to homosexual contexts.

There is nothing 'natural' about human sexual activity, let alone the ideas people have about sex. There is nothing 'natural' about human family or marriage systems. Reproduction of the species requires that male and female gametes be brought together. How they are brought together is biologically irrelevant. That the vast majority of human erotic activity does not bring gametes together is

also irrelevant. Human erotic activity is situated in specific socio-cultural contexts. Family and marriage systems are situated in specific socio-cultural contexts. There is no such thing as 'natural' erotic activity, a 'natural' family, or 'natural' family values.

Part of the operation of any culture is producing a feeling of 'naturalness' (inevitability, humanness) in its members about what they do. The challenge for global thinking is to be able to stand aside from this spurious feeling of 'naturalness' about one's own cultural arrangements; to stand aside not only from what actually occurs but also from what is -supposed- to occur. It is unlikely that concepts linked to and privileging highly specific attitudes and behaviors are useful in terms of articulating a globally applicable morality. It is more likely that core concepts that can be applied in many specific socio-cultural contexts will be useful.

19th and 20th century Christian missionizing was accompanied by muumuus and the missionary position as a set of religious concepts was tied to a set of socio-culturally specific erotic attitudes and practices. The results of such an intertwining were cultural dislocation and hypocrisy.

To this day, there is no open discourse on sexuality between westerners and the rest of the world. The west (or a segment of the west) has so successfully missionized its own views on 'normal' sex that much of the world's peoples are aware that their own beliefs and practices are deviant by those standards and they tend to allow westerners to simply assume that everybody else does 'it' the same way. In fact, most of the world sees the west as rather odd and blithely goes on doing 'it' their own way without discussing the issue. Almost everything about 19th century middle eastern family and marriage systems and sexual practices was aberrant by then western standards. Much of it still is.

Religious ideas cannot be worked out in socio-culturally meaningful ways if they are only available packaged with the specifics of a particular time and place. It is part of understanding them to be able to unpack these ideas from their original context and repackage them in -any- context while remaining true to their core. This is the case when using them in any new culture whether that culture is geographically or temporally distant from the original socio-cultural context in which the ideas were expressed.

It is necessary for members of -all- cultures to realize that however 'natural' and fixed their culture seems, change always occurs. The important thing is the coherence of that change with core values not the outward specifics, and our responsibility to consciously adopt and maintain those values rather than simply follow exterior forms be those attitudinal or behavioral.

There is a distinction between a view of religion that is legalistic -- you do this and this and not that and that -- and a view of religion that is ethical

--

these are the principles you should adhere to when deciding what to do. One tells you how to act; the other teaches you how to choose. Islam, Christianity, and Judaism have deep rooted tendencies toward legalism, despite their being known as 'ethical monotheisms,' and this tendency has thus entered both middle eastern and western cultures. 'Things' are right or wrong. Morality is a matter of the objectively observable. In many ways this is a view of religion that is concerned largely with concepts of taboo and pollution rather than values.

The essential locus of the 'thingness' of morality for this aspect of Semitic religion (or more accurately for many adherents of the Semitic religions) has been sexuality. It is the red flag that sets all the bulls charging. However, the concentrated projection of moral fitness on the area of sexuality has often served as a screen to permit considerable flexibility of morality in other areas of life. Sexuality has been pressed into service as a moral synecdoche for an individual's whole life and if one remained conforming in that area it provided a sin-covering function for all other areas.

The corollary of this is that it is not deemed appropriate to discuss issues of sexuality in respect of those who have already been determined on other grounds to have led a moral life. To find a 'flaw' in their sexual conformity would be taken to bring into question their whole life, so their sexuality should remain unexamined just in case.

Thus, biography of early Bahá'ís has eschewed the issue of their sexuality and removed it from the context in which statements about sexuality in the writings are seen. That Bahá'ís had adulterous affairs, were blissfully monogamous, had homosexual relationships, hardly ever spoke to their spouses, used birth control, etc., is as relevant to understanding their lives as Bahá'ís as anything else about them. It is especially relevant to understanding their relationships and correspondence with the successive Heads of the faith. Correspondence includes the unwritten mutual knowledge that the parties have of each other and as much of that knowledge as can be recovered must be taken into account to understand the correspondence.

The phrase 'companionate marriage' is used in a Guardian's letter which is often cited as if this referred to people simply living together. Companionate marriage was a specific reform of marriage law and practice that was proposed in the west in the 1920s. the term refers to a legal contractual marriage that could be terminated simply by mutual consent. It was also proposed that the contract could include an agreement not to have children. Indeed, there could even be an agreement not to have sex. Companionate marriage was being presented by some American Bahá'ís, Lorol Schopflocher for one, as the ideal

form of marriage and was being recommended to attendees at Bahá'í summer schools and other events. I was told by one woman who attended Green Acre in her youth that Schopflocher expounded to all the girls on how they should insist on separate bedrooms when they got married and that she had never shared a bedroom with her husband and never would.

A remark that it is shameful to keep a catamite presumably means first and foremost that it is shameful to keep a catamite. But from specific comments we may also develop generalizations. We are likely to be aided in generalizing by an understanding of the context in which the statement was made and received. However, apart from this there are two basic directions in which we may take our generalizing. The statement may be generalized to a condemnation of a broader range of homosexual acts; or it may be generalized to a condemnation of those in a position of power exploiting their dependents for their own ends. One type of generalization operates on the basis of presumed analogies among specific outward acts and the one in the statement; the other operates on the basis of a concern for the principles that may be inferred from the statement and how these may be related to motives, responsibilities, and relationships.

The important question is which type of generalization is more likely to produce results that may support a global value system that can flourish and develop in all cultures. Is God more interested in people's actions than their hearts? Is the road to salvation a mechanically instrumental one? Of course actions matter, but what underlies the actions must matter at least as much if we are not to espouse a materialist view of existence. And not only individual actions matter but also the broader patterns of social interaction in which these actions are situated.

The early anti-slavery movement in the U.S. was deeply interconnected with the development of feminism. These movements shared a common position that it was not acceptable for one individual to have rights in another's person or labor to an extent that violated the second individual's rights in their own person. It was considered to be equally evident that both slaves and 'free' women suffered under such a disability and that the development of a moral and just society required that their rights be restored and respected.

Unfortunately, the anti-slavery campaign degenerated into the cataloging of stories of abuse and an attack based on arguing slavery's inhumane practices rather than its fundamental illegitimacy. This allowed for the eventual abolition of slavery without acknowledging the humanity of the slaves and this side-stepping of the underlying question of rights also permitted the disabilities under which women had suffered to continue.

The anti-slavery campaign was originally about basic concepts of human rights and responsibilities. It reached its end on the basis of judgments about specific acts. That the abolition of legal slavery appeared to end such acts allowed the fundamental issues to remain undealt with. Both Americans of African descent and all American women suffered the consequences for over a century more. The moral issue in slavery was not one of how masters treated slaves, but whether anyone had a right to be a master. The moral issue in women's rights was not how husbands treated wives, but whether husbands had a right to be a master. The moral illegitimacy of masters was not in whether they treated their legal subordinates well or ill, but in their assumption of the right to impose their will and conscience on others.

All individuals are ultimately responsible to God for their actions. One may decide that God has provided an explicit set of instructions as to which actions are acceptable and decide to conform to this. This is essentially the position of such groups as the Amish. Or one may decide that God requires us to exercise moral judgment in each specific set of circumstances according to basic principles by which we should structure our lives and interaction with others. Either position is quite defensible, but they have different social outcomes.

The first position leads to well defined communities with strong boundary maintenance. These can be nurturative, satisfying, and secure communities for those who choose to be in them, or can be experienced as restrictive and repressive by others who may choose to leave. The second position leads to heterogenous, associative communities which are less concerned with boundary maintenance. These can be nurturative, satisfying, and secure for those who choose to be in them, or can be experienced as unfocused, lax, and uncomfortable by others who may choose to leave.

The big problem is: If a religion rules out the possibility of schism and yet is not inclined to accept within one broader community of faith subsets who acknowledge (however grudgingly) the rights of other subsets to have different perspectives on this basic issue of the legalistic/ethical morality continuum, can that religion avoid being an irrelevance to most of the people of the world?

Jackson

Comments on Armstrong-Ingram's
essay by Linda Walbridge

Just a few quick thoughts on Jackson and xxxx's postings re: sexuality, which I have really appreciated...

I don't in the slightest want to diminish the importance of Jackson's message

on the diversity of human sexuality and sexual norms. I just want to add another perspective. The societies which you reported on, Jackson, as I recall, were cases of isolated societies. Many of these are in a transitional state. They are to various degrees having contact with the outside world and are becoming part of the world economy. Even in very remote areas, we find men going on to work for businesses, earning cash and leaving behind their subsistence way of life. This is very disruptive to old family structures.

For example, we might find a society that normally practices polygyny. That structure may have been the norm and the entire way of life of the community centers on this. However, once men start leaving the village for the city and working for money, nothing is the same. He can't afford to support more than one wife. Village women also migrate to the city. Their life experiences and expectations change. She would find no advantage to sharing a husband with other women. They would not be doing the type of work that would have made other women in the household useful. They can easily be exposed to movies and TV that show a different way of life for women that will make husband sharing less attractive. What tends to happen here is that men, accustomed to polygyny but, now, not in a situation to practice it, will take girlfriends. The usual controls of the village in regulating sexual behavior will have been disposed of and new societal rules will not have been put in place.

As I don't need to tell you, urban life tends to promote the nuclear household. (I know there are cases where this is not necessarily so, but in general this is how it has worked.) In such a situation, nothing really is more advantageous than the monogamous, totally faithful, enduring relationship of a man and a woman. (This does not address the issue of homosexuality, I know. That is still another matter)...

While the world is certainly a complex place, the tendency is for more experiences to be shared. My Iraqi friends living in the West are a very good example of all this. They are, for the most part, straight out of Najaf and Karbala. Their world was a very narrow one. Girls married at about age 13 and proceeded to stay at home and have children. Life in the West quickly disrupts this pattern. I am quite close to a family where there are four sons and three daughters. The sons all married in their twenties. The three oldest are trained as scholars, the youngest is in medical school. The oldest daughter was married off at age 13, the two older ones are unmarried and in college. I was told quite frankly that this (i.e., the daughters going to college) never would have occurred had the family remained in the M.E. There will never be any question about polygyny or even temporary marriage in this family. It is not that they have

become assimilated into American society. Not at all. But circumstances have forced changes - and some rethinking of things.

I suppose my point is that the Bahá'í teachings on sexuality and marriage will not seem so strange and out of place in most situations in the world today. I agree that if we go off to the heart of New Guinea where there is little culture contact we might run into some situations where we might think that there is no place at all for our notions of marriage and family. But those places I believe are rapidly becoming fewer in number.

This by no means makes me think that we can be complacent and think that our perception of the Bahá'í teachings can and should be forced down others' throats.

Nor do I think that we should quit discussing how individual variations in human sexuality can be accommodated in the Bahá'í community. Again, these are just musings on how I see the world today in connection with a particular aspect of the Bahá'í teachings.

Linda

Armstrong-Ingram's response to Linda Walbridge

Among the societies I discussed were the middle east, mediaeval Europe, 19th century America, and china. I don't think these count as isolated societies. Actually neither do most new guinea peoples. However isolated from the west they have been, most of these people have had long term contact with various local groups having cultures different from their own.

I do not think that urbanization can be equated with a drive toward monogamy or nuclear households. Polygyny is of course restricted to men with greater access to economic resources in those societies that favor it. Different types of wealth and social capital do not change that. Indeed, polygyny has been adapted to urbanization in various parts of Africa where relatively wealthy men (which can equal middle class by our standards, e.g. university professors) may have a suitably skilled urban wife to aid their career (often the only wife western friends know about) and a rural wife (wives) suitably skilled to manage their family land holdings. As a purely economic unit, if it is well managed a polygonous family has a definite advantage in the accumulation of wealth and often politically as well.

On urban living historically, there seems to have been no urban deterrent to polygyny in urban china or the middle east; the cliché harem is an urban institution. And the marriage system that is probably furthest from monogamy, Nayar group marriage, was an urban based system which aided the concentration of considerable economic resources in the hands of Nayar families. Actually the Oneida family was very successful economically too (Oneida flatware).

I would agree that the scale of urbanization is often different now and that one has to take into account the influence of the media. For example the hijra (a third gender in India) are assimilating to the traditional definition of their 'nature' and role western ideas about transsexualism....

Jackson

Comments on Armstrong-Ingram's
postings by Bev
Peden

Dear Friends:

...When people of other countries decide to follow the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, then they will come to terms as to how to fit their sexual patterns and liaisons in keeping with the faith. I, for one, have no intention of wasting my time instructing them on anything past the marriage laws (consent of parents and exchange of vow) when it comes to sex. So many sexual patterns and marriage patterns are based on survival of the tribe that it is hardly fair to sit in judgement. In Africa, for example, where polygamy is practiced, a man who has accepted Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is not required to put away any of his wives, but is required to honour his commitment to her, her children and to do so until the death of the wife or children...just like "regular" folks. He is required not to replace that wife with a new one, until natural selection leaves him with either one or none. Even the urban setting has not deterred polygamy here, in fact it has made it more "necessary" in the man's point of view. He has one wife in the city to look after his needs, meet social status obligations, and to keep his home there, and one wife (or more) in the village to look after his farm and land. But there are many Bahá'ís who are making the adjustment to monogamy...with time. I am sure the same holds true for same sex relationships. If it is explicit in the writings that this is not part of the Bahá'í teachings, and if those choosing to follow those teachings are sincere, they will make the required adjustment in their heart and do so willingly. Our responsibility is to assist them with love and understanding...they are people, not statistics.

I have had some wonderful friends (Iranian by birth) become quite agitated at mild nudity (not intended eroticism) in my paintings...their comment was that we wear underwear so that the earth will not be embarrassed by our private parts. It was at this point I realized that they had some kind of bias. I did not

feel it was my duty to try and change that. I didn't change my painting either.

I

have also stood with men who are wearing nothing but a cloth tied around their neck, and women with a flap of animal skin around their groin. Again, nothing felt amiss, I was not embarrassed, and neither were they...it didn't matter as the

different manners of dress was not on our agenda...besides, it was so hot I was envious of their freedom from my idea of conventional clothing. Their sexual practices were never part of the conversation in either case. It is not at all uncommon here in Africa for same sex friends to walk about holding hands...it has no sexual association...it is an expression of friendship.

Now, there is a lot in the writings which is not in English, and some which is not available, so I am not in a position to be an authority on what the writings

say. Can anyone get beyond our cultural hang-ups and really narrow the discussion down to:

- a) What do the writings identify as "Bahá'í sexual practices"?
- b) What exact liaisons are identified as being Bahá'í in nature?
- c) What interpretation is offered for their application by authoritative sources for these in the Faith?

Love,

Bev.

Armstrong-Ingram's response to Bev Peden

Further to Linda's comments: It is important to note that modern urbanization does tend to be more disadvantageous to women because it changes the nature of the family as an economic unit. For example, when peasant immigrants from Europe continued to practice pregnancy desertion in the US the consequences were much different. When a peasant husband went wandering in such parts as southern Italy he could not take with him the land, the chickens, the goat, etc.,

and the family's basic means of subsistence remained available. In a New York tenement with the family dependent on the husband's wage for subsistence, pregnancy desertion was a disaster. There is similarly a disempowerment of women when nomads either voluntarily or by government force become sedentary. The changes in the internal economy of the family and its relations with the broader society generally undermine the position of women. The deleterious effects of urbanization on previously non-urban families are not tied

to any particular family system (let alone sexual ideology), however, but are related more to the family's socio-economic resources.

Like Bev, I also tend toward the ... philosophy that if it isn't done in the street to frighten the horses it's a personal matter.

However,
the problems arise when personal and group sexuality is dragged into the street and used as a basis for judgments about broader social worth and rights. Also, not all erotically associated behaviour is confined to private occasions. Much public behaviour implies what may be occurring in private and judgments may be made on the basis of those implications (rightly or wrongly read) even more than on the basis of known private acts.

Bev's point about the diversity of response to the human body is also important.

I am all too familiar with the kind of reaction to art that Bev describes. My wife

is an artist who specializes in the human figure. There is almost nowhere in this area her work could be shown or sold, especially if the figure is male.

Also,
it needs to be understood (as I think came out from Bev's examples) that because a people expose most of the body doesn't mean they have no standard of modesty. They are as likely to distinguish between clothed and naked as Victorian England even if clothed means dusted with ashes.

Covering the body may be at least as much about prurience as modesty. One of the things I find most distasteful about television 'standards' in the US is the racist and sexist hierarchy applied to decisions about 'appropriateness' in showing the human body.

Jackson

Armstrong-Ingram's response to a posting on Gender

...As I would use [the terms "sex" and "gender"], "sex" is a biological matter referring to subsets of species which can share genetic information with one or more other subsets to result in a new generation that combines genetic information from all parents in a package that is distinct from any one parent, higher animals have 2 sexes some more creative lower life forms have a lot more (there is a slime mold with 11); "gender" refers to a social status with an associated role (set of behaviors). There is no given connection between gender and sex. There are well over a 100 societies with third gender roles; their marriage patterns reflect this.

Jackson

Loni Bramson-Lerche discusses
biological "gender"

I am still researching and thinking about the question of biological sex and gender, but I can give you a bit more information on the theory that there are more than two biological sexes. Unfortunately, I do not have much time and can only provide a very brief summary, which I hope will not distort the issues involved.

Most researchers agree that gender is socially constructed. In terms of biological sex, whereas it is usually easy to discern certain physical differences and similarities, how these are classified is, in the opinion of certain researchers, also a social construct. At this point in my research, I agree with these researchers.

Very briefly, if you think of a continuum, on one end there are XY individuals with body hair, a penis, testicles, narrow hips, etc. On the other end of the continuum are XX individuals with breasts, wide hips, little body hair, a vagina, clitoris, etc. In the middle of this continuum there is a variety, with XXY individuals, XX XY people, those with only one sex chromosome, X0, etc. It has been estimated that about 10% of the human population is found in the middle area of the continuum. The people in the middle area can also be classified as belonging there because of hormonal divergences from "the norm" during pregnancy (and sometimes after pregnancy). As you might know, at the moment of conception, and for about the first six weeks of life, everyone is female. If the right amount of androgen is not produced at exactly the right time, even if the individual is XY, a baby "girl" will be born. (There are also XX "men".) What this amounts to is that in some "men" and "women" there are different combinations of internal sex organs, secondary sexual characteristics, and external genitals. This is an overly short summary of the situation, but I do not have time for more than that.

In the international society that is developing, to decide whether someone is a woman or a man, the individual must be able to answer yes to a certain number of questions. Some of these questions have to do with: -the appearance of external genitals; -whether there is a Y chromosome or not; -the amount of certain hormones in the body; -and the sex assigned at birth.

The people in the middle of the continuum cannot answer yes to the whole set of questions. One possible way of resolving this situation is to say that, in fact, there is only one kind of human being which comes in a variety of shapes, sizes, and forms. Most people are not yet ready to think of there being only one biological sex and no such thing as gender, so there is a move to create a classification with more than two sexes. (And as you can see from Tony Lee's and J. Armstrong-Ingram's postings, more than two genders.) The move seems to be primarily in the "amateur" sports movement, specifically those sports (and events) that generate a lot of money. In order to participate in athletic events it

is required to pass a sex chromatin screening. The testers look to see if the athlete has Barr bodies or not. If you have Barr bodies you are female (because Barr bodies are produced by XX individuals), if you do not, then you are male.

The

problem is that you can have "women" who do not produce Barr bodies, and "men" who do, depending on what sex chromosomes they have and what hormones they produce or were subjected to. (Barr bodies are present because of one of the X chromosomes.)

This is why some geneticists, biologists, and people in other fields who research these questions are calling for a classification with more than two biological sexes. Since there is such a rigid definition of what a man is and what a woman is, they feel it is only logical and fair to create a new classification with more than two biological sexes.

Sincerely,

(Dr.) Loni Bramson-Lerche

Armstrong-Ingram's response to Bramson-Lerche

Adding to what Loni said:

There are two kinds of living species, those who reproduce asexually and those who reproduce sexually. The concept of sex has really no biological relevance outside reproduction. Therefore in the strict sense only those individuals who produce viable gametes can be said to have a sex. the number of sexes in a species is determined by the number of types of gametes, it has nothing to do with whole individuals. Specific individuals can be said to have a sex or no sex

based on the type of gamete they do or do not produce. The wide range of epiphenomena related to gamete production are not themselves of relevance in determining sex. Sex in human beings is a matter of male and female gamete producers. Categories like 'man' and 'woman' have no given correlate to this but

relate to how an individual functions socially: they are genders. Attribution to

genders is based on a combination of anatomical, physiological, and behavioral factors that are related to sex in complex and variably determined ways.

Jackson

Observations by Juan Cole

Tom Laquer, a historian at UC-Berkeley, demonstrated in his seminal book **Making Sex** that the Aristotelian-Galenic tradition that dominated medical thought in medieval Europe and the Muslim world posited a **one-sex** model of human sexuality. It held that women were inverted men. In fact, in medieval Europe there appears to have occasionally been fear that some women might pop out and become men. The one-sex model was upheld by Avicenna as well. It was only overturned in favor of a two-sex model with the Enlightenment and

nineteenth-century physiology, which rejected the medieval analogies that had been proposed betight pop out and become men. The one-sex model was upheld by Avicenna as well. It was only overturned in favor of a two-sex model with the Enlightenment and nineteenth-century physiology, which rejected the medieval analogies that had been proposed betel of human biology, and that it may underlie their view of the equality of the sexes. (The medieval one-sex model had still been highly patriarchal, since the female version of inverted masculinity was considered "inferior" by male physicians; however, one could build an equality scenario on a one-sex model, which they appear to have done).

cheers Juan Cole, History, Univ. of Michigan

Armstrong-Ingram's response to Juan Cole

This analogy model -- that male and female sexual organs were essentially the same but one was an 'outie' and the other an 'innie' --is of course why it was thought that women could not get pregnant without an orgasm. Both male and female had to ejaculate to conceive. The discovery of the ovum in the period transitioning between the renaissance and the enlightenment was very influential in leading to the passive conceptualization of female sexuality.

The

organs are in origin the same; they develop as female unless a 'switch' is pulled

hormonally to make them develop as male. The point I was emphasizing is that division into sexes is irrelevant in any context other than reproduction and there are two sexes in that context. Those two sexes are produced by having a female default form and a male variant form.

Your description of Holley, by the way, was all news to me. It really needs to be written up.

The short answer is: I agree completely. But in real life the answers are a bit longer.

Over 10 years ago, I completed the research and outline for a biography of Holley. We came to the conclusion that there was no way the book (or indeed any chapter of it) would get through review. Now, you can say how could we know that without trying? Well, of course, we can't for sure. But, writing 300 to 400 pages on the off chance that all one's experience to date is leading one to draw

an inaccurate conclusion is just too much of a risk. The specific issues that concerned us were all ones that had come up before and there was simply no reason to assume they would be any less of a problem than previously. Indeed, there was reason to assume that the totality of issues involved in this work would add up to an even bigger problem.

This is one of five books that I have completed research for, but see no

possibility of publishing within a Bahá'í context. And this is not simply a matter of what I might write, but of what the source materials say. The types of objections that would arise are related to the content of the historical record, not just interpretation of that record.

Now, if some are starting to think that this is the old 'review' issue starting up again and that's a 'community affairs' issue anyway and doesn't belong here, I'm afraid I have to completely disagree. The issues of creation, legitimation, dissemination, and control of 'knowledge' within a community of faith are absolutely central concerns in the sociology of religion and cannot simply be sidestepped by fiat. If there are issues that may not be addressed, or evidence that may not be adduced, then understanding why is essential to understanding that community of faith.

Let me give some examples of the kinds of things that are problematic if one wants to write seriously about the Bahá'í faith _and_ have that writing readily accessible to the community: i.e. one wishes to not only produce a scholarly discussion but also an account that is useful to the community for understanding where it came from and formulating its goals for the future.

Let's start with what seems like a fairly minor matter. There is a Bahá'í story that links the founding of Green Acre with Sarah Farmer visiting the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 (or hearing about it; or reading about it; or even being present at the talk in which the faith was mentioned; there are a number of versions). The problem with the story is that there is information about the program at Green Acre in 1892. (It is not entirely clear, but there is a possibility that even this was not the first year.) Of course, the World's Colombian Exposition was supposed to be held in 1892 (it was delayed because of the depressed US economy), so she may still have been influenced by advance publicity for the Parliament of Religions, but Sarah Farmer did not start Green Acre in 1893. In her later years, the poor woman was, as we say in Ireland, away with the fairies. There is a rather light- hearted account by Miriam Haney (who was helping to look after her) of how Sarah tried to stab her with a pair of scissors but was too weak to actually hurt her. Miriam says that nobody gets cross about such incidents because Sarah has no idea of what she is doing. Certain individuals and institutions have invested themselves in an account of Green Acre and Sarah Farmer which makes the discussion of such documentation unwelcome.

Since around 1919, there has been a standard account that a break away group (referred to as "the Reading Room Group") tried to split the Bahá'í community

in

Chicago around 1917 and that the House of Spirituality led by Corinne True and Zia Bagdadi fought valiantly to maintain the integrity of the community.

Actually, the records show that the Reading Room was established by the House of Spirituality c.1915; that as part of the tensions within the House and the broader community, True and Bagdadi were not in sympathy with those most involved with the Reading Room; and that True and Bagdadi formed a break away body to try to bring the community in line with their ideas of how it should function. At one time, there were actually three institutional bodies in Chicago:

the House; the True/Bagdadi assembly; and a moderate assembly that tried not to take sides and act as a unifying force (it didn't last long). As things worked

out, the True/Bagdadi faction was able to call on national support and won.

Thus, the later Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Chicago descends directly

from the True/Bagdadi group and only indirectly from the House of Spirituality.

In large part because of the activities of True's supporters at the national level

(especially Remy) this episode is very well documented. It is simply not possible to seriously discuss the development of the institutionalization of the

faith in Chicago or nationally without looking at what really happened at this time and on a number of other occasions for which there are traditional accounts which also stand in tension with the actual sources. Equally obviously, this episode has considerable implications for what we mean by schism.-->

...I have copies of hundreds of pages of wonderful pilgrim notes that would be problematic to publish. Bahá'ís have created an image of Abdu'l-Bahá which draws on 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' stereotypes and they often see him as a sort of semi-transparent, etherealized figure in a rose garden. However, Abdu'l-

Baha was a very physical person and interacted very physically with those around him. He touched, patted, held, stroked hands, arms and shoulders of both men and women while talking with them. He put his arm around people. He stroked their hair. He had a great sense of humor and indulged in horse play when in groups of men, slapping faces and bopping people with his umbrella. (He was also known for his extensive repertoire of dirty jokes in Turkish.) The response of many American women to him was also very physical, indeed could be profoundly sexual. At that time in the US, the epitome of male sexual attraction was a mature, bearded man. There were a large number of sects started in the US in the late 1800s and early 1900s by imposing, bearded men who gathered a disproportionately female following. In almost every one, these women were sexually exploited. One of the remarkable things about Abdu'l-Bahá is that there is not the faintest trace of a shred of a hint that he ever took advantage of the way women responded to him. And there certainly would have

been no objection on the part of many if he had tried. One of the beliefs of the American Bahá'í community at that time was that there was to be a third Manifestation for this dispensation born in America and there was quite an eagerness to be the mother. (Actually, Sohrab seems to have believed that he was to be/could be the father -- Richard knows more about this.) Abdu'l-Bahá both accepted the intensity of people's feelings for him and attempted to direct that intensity into suitable channels. Indeed, he even accepted the propriety of intense love relationships between men and women within the faith as long as that love did not lead to illicit sexual activity. (This is documented in both pilgrim notes and tablets. Some of the individuals involved in these couples were married to other people at the time.) Now, it hardly needs to be said that anything that even comes close to sex is a frontline freakout issue. But, how can we possibly understand Abdu'l-Bahá's relationship with the community, or indeed the issues involved in current interpersonal relations, without looking at such evidence?

From Tue Sep 30 13:19:44 1997 Date: Mon, 29 Sep 1997 18:30:35 -0500 (EST) From: Jackson Armstrong-Ingram To: Talisman Subject: Re: perversion, normality, the homosexual construct-->

...Let me try to disentangle some more of the concepts that have been conflated in this discussion so far.

Sexual reproduction is a particular form of reproduction that provides that offspring will possess a genotype that is composed of part of the genotype of each of its parents. In higher animals (most likely for reasons of economy) sexual reproduction is carried out in the context of a species having two sexes.

In some lower organisms this is not the case: There is a slime mold with 13 sexes. From a biological point of view, sex only refers to the ability to produce viable gametes and participate in the process of bringing gametes together to form a new generation. A organism that does not produce viable gametes does not in a strict biological sense have a sex.

In a species, such as human beings, that utilizes sexual reproduction the differentiation into two sexes is related to four different factors, or aspects of sex: genetic sex; hormonal sex; anatomical sex (which can be divided into internal and external); and physiological sex. If all four aspects align then an individual can be said to be of a sex when and while able to produce viable gametes.

In a dialectical relationship with this biological system of sexual differentiation, socio-cultural systems construct genders. Male and female are terms for sex; man and woman are the base terms for gender, but many societies also have other genders. (Societies may also have ideas about more than two sexes, or even about only one sex, but from the standpoint of Western biology there are two sexes.) The way(s) in which gender correlates with sex is not a given but itself a socio-cultural construct.

The gender system of a society exists within a fuller context of ideas about biology, ideas about families, ideas about bodies, ideas about pleasure, ideas about morality, etc. All of these ideas are socio-culturally specific and in turn influence how individuals perceive and experience biological facts.

Strictly speaking, only activities which can potentially lead to the conjoining of gametes can be called sexual. Other activities that are frequently so labeled are

more appropriately termed erotic. While people may engage in sexual activity without finding it particularly rewarding in itself because they wish to have children, the reason for engaging in erotic activity is that it is enjoyed in and

for itself. When erotic activity is labeled 'sexual' this tends to be done so as to

lend the legitimacy of the directed purposiveness of sexual activity to certain forms of erotic activity and deny it to others. Thus, erotic activity between individuals who could engage in sexual activity if they wanted to may be privileged although the specific activity in which they are engaged is no more potentially sexual than the same activity between individuals who could not act sexually.

Which activities are considered erotic and where the boundaries come between erotic and non-erotic activity is an individual matter mediated by enculturation

and experience. There is nothing automatically to be experienced as pleasurable in any erotic activity. E.g. kissing is a potentially highly erotic activity in Western culture; in many other cultures its appeal is quite inexplicable.

Even what seem by definition to be erotically charged activities in one society may have no erotic loading in another. There is a Latin American Indian culture in which it is a commonplace gesture for men to hold each others penises while conversing. An American anthropologist who was working in this society caused great embarrassment (and no doubt felt it) as he could not function in this expected interactional mode without having erections. The genitals are so completely an eroticized site for Westerners that there is probably no way a Western man could have anyone (irrespective of any erotic inclination toward that person) hold his penis without such a result outside certain very limited medical contexts that assume only brief touching.

The terms which as translated as 'adultery' and 'homosexuality' in translations of Bahá'u'lláh are zina and liwat. These are very specific concepts in Islamic

law. Zina requires penile penetration of a human vagina (the term covers both the traditional meaning of fornication and adultery in English --the issue of whether anyone is married can relate to the severity of the offense but doesn't change the term); liwat requires a penis and the anus of a woman, boy, or man, or anything suitable at the back end of livestock. In both cases it is something done by a person with a penis to another.

In Islamic law there are the associated concepts of a person who does an illegitimate act and a person who makes possible the doing of an illegitimate act by another. In both zina and liwat the person with the active penis is in the first category and the other individual is in the second. That is why in strict interpretation someone who is subject to rape cannot be without blame as they made possible the perpetration of an illegitimate act by another.

What is essential to these categories (as to the passage in the Aqdas on catamites) is that they represent exploitative acts in which one person uses another being for his own pleasure. This is what makes them immoral, not the specific erotic activities but the contextual imbalance of power.

Anal intercourse as a gesture of both the primacy of personal pleasure and the irrelevance of the pleasure of the person being used as a vehicle for that pleasure is a standard feature of the Middle Eastern erotic repertoire. It is a commonplace of interviews with Phillippina maids returned from Saudi Arabia that they complain of the insistence of Saudi men that they submit to anal intercourse. It is also the most favored means of avoiding the risk of getting a woman pregnant in pre- and extra-marital affairs. As well as being used in marriage for birth control (and as a bargaining factor by wives).

The morality of erotic activity cannot be determined simply by whether the parties are married or not. In the 1860s in Chicago a court required that a woman be returned to her husband. She had had vaginal surgery and her husband had raped her ripping out her stitches. She was rescued and the wounds resutured. She did not want to return to her husband. After the court required her return, he raped her again and she almost bled to death. The courts held that no action could be taken against him as he was simply exercising his 'right' of access as a husband. However, the courts could take action in another way. A newspaper editor in another state who publicised the case and editorialized that if he had attacked her with a knife he would have been charged with attempted murder but because he attacked her with his penis he was immune from prosecution was himself prosecuted, found guilty, and imprisoned for publishing an obscenity. It took more than a century after this case to get US courts to accept that a marriage license did not protect a husband from charges

of rape.

I remember my mother telling me of her disgust at two people she knew. They were married but loathed each other. Their religion did not permit divorce so they actually lived in different cities in different countries, meeting occasionally, as my mother put it, "for mutual relief." What occasioned the level

of disgust that caused her to tell me about this was that they had just got pregnant (their religion didn't go for birth control either). As far as she was concerned what they had done was worse than adultery or prostitution; and I agree. They were married, but their erotic and sexual activities were without any moral foundation because they simply constituted mutual use without any grounding in a relationship of care and respect.

Personally, I think that any God who has a lot of time to worry about who is having consensual fun with whom really hasn't been paying attention to what this world's problems actually are. I think any God worth bothering about is concerned primarily with how people treat each other. I think in a healthy society physical interaction between individuals would encompass many different forms ranging from the simple pleasures of appreciating that other people are warm, breathing, tactile beings who are accessible and can communicate by more means than just sight and sound, through the range of the erotic, to the tiny percentage of human encounters that are sexual. And I think that any system of categories that tries to classify people on the basis of valued and devalued acts is dehumanizing, because the essence of humanity is the ability to form complex, varied, and educative relationships. And that's what religion is about, not mere codes of determination about the rightness or wrongness of acts, but a higher context in which human relationships can flourish and in which actions derive from those relationships.

Jackson

METADATA

Views33197 views since posted 1997; last edit 2012;

previous at archive.org.../armstrong-ingram_bahai_faith_sexuality;

URLs changed in 2010, see archive.org.../bahai-library.org

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