

# isis Resource

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## Women & Sexuality

**EUNUCHS FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: WOMEN, SEXUALITY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH** by Uta Ranke-Heinemann

In this incisive analysis, Catholic theologian Uta Ranke-Heinemann daringly confronts her church's manipulation of its ancient doctrine and willful ignorance of the modern world. Using sources ranging from the earliest church fathers to recent popes, cardinals and bishops, she examines evidence that the church has denigrated women and their sexuality by its glorification of Mary's virginity; championed a perverse idea of celibacy by not allowing priests to marry; and damned birth control and unproductive sex to the extent that, even today, Catholic AIDS patients are forbidden to use condoms.

(New York, The Penguin Group, undated. 60p.)

**CHELEWA, CHELEWA: THE DILEMMA OF TEENAGE GIRLS** edited by Zubeida Tumbo-Masabo and Rita Liljestrom

The transfer from childhood to womanhood is a risky journey, more hazardous than is commonly admitted. This book is about teenage girls in Tanzania and is based on eight empirical studies conducted by the Teenage Girls and Reproductive Health Study Group at the University of Dar es Salaam.

With the introduction of education and better learning opportunities, girls in sub-Saharan Africa are now finding themselves trapped and torn between customary expectations and the claims of modernisation. The initiation rites and other rituals which prepare girls as gendered and sexual beings have become obsolete, and the emergence of biophysiological-driven sexuality has not been followed by any concrete

instructions on how to cope with it, or how to brave the confusing gap between childhood and adulthood. This book discusses this dilemma and the need for a cross-cultural approach to understanding and assisting teenage girls caught in it. (Sweden, SAREC, 1994. 218p.)

**WOMEN, RELIGION AND SEXUALITY: STUDIES ON THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS ON WOMEN** edited by Jeanne Becher

A survey conducted by the United Nations in 1983 with the theme "Equality, Development, Peace" revealed that the greatest barriers to women's participation in the public life were traditional beliefs and traditions. Focusing on this and the premise that religious teachings have a great impact in letting women participate in decision-making and for them to recognize their importance and contribution to the society, the researchers set out to study how the teachings affect the public concept of femaleness and to look for more information that would prevail over the taboos besetting the subject.

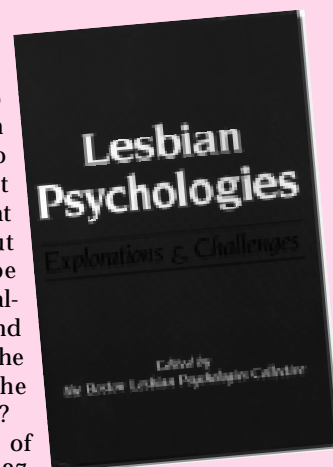
The book aims to show the origins of discriminatory practices based on gender, expose some of the taboos about female sexuality and contribute to the on-going discussion of women's role in religion. It looks on the different faiths: Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Protestantism and Islam. (Geneva, WCC Publications, undated. 265p.)

**LESBIAN PSYCHOLOGIES: EXPLORATIONS AND CHALLENGES** edited by The Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective

Responding to the demand for more written material on lesbians and their relationships, community and psy-

chology, the Boston Lesbian Psychological Collective authored materials and edited them to produce this book.

It answers the questions: Who is the healthy lesbian? What do people know about her identity, her couple relationships, her family and community relationships and her psychological strengths and struggles? What does the lesbian discuss with the psychotherapist or counselor she chooses to work with? What do mental-health workers need to know about lesbians? And what stereotypes about lesbians must be discarded as mental-health workers and others consider the diversities of the lesbian experience? (USA, University of Illinois Press, 1987. 375p.)

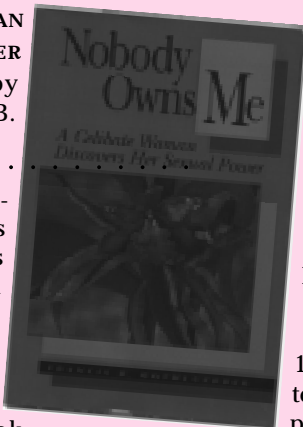


**ON INTIMATE TERMS: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS** by Beverly Burch

This provocative exploration of the internal logic of lesbian relationships argues that they are not patterned after heterosexual ones but rely on the interplay of psychosexual differences between women. Drawing upon interviews with individuals and lesbian couples, literature on lesbian psychology and contemporary psychoanalytic theory, Beverly Burch observes a special attraction between primary lesbians—women who have been attracted to other women from an early age—and lesbians who formerly were heterosexual. While the difference may be

a source of tension for lovers, Burch finds that it also attracts and bonds them in conscious and unconscious ways.  
(USA, The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 183p.)

**NOBODY OWNS ME:  
A CELIBATE WOMAN  
DISCOVERS HER  
SEXUAL POWER** by  
Francis B.  
Rothbluebber  
.....



With fierce tenderness and fearless intimacy, Francis Rothbluebber charts a celibate woman's midlife sexual initiation. Written in the form of a private journal, this book documents a pivotal year in the life of "Marilyn," a woman living in a religious community as she "learns how to awaken the sacred fire living in her body."

Every woman who reads this book will find her relationship to her own sexuality changed in some way—more deeply understood and honored, more fully claimed and celebrated. Anyone who works with women, especially in the areas of psychological and spiritual counseling, needs to know what is in this book.  
(California, Lura Media Inc., 125p.)

**ON OUR TERMS: A LESBIAN PRIMER**  
.....

"Are lesbians really men trapped in women's bodies? How do they make love? Why are they discriminated against? What is coming out? Who is a lesbian? Is there a Filipino lesbian culture?"

If you or your friends have been asking some of these questions, then *On Our Terms: A Lesbian Primer*, is a must-read for you. Published by Can't Live In the Closet (CLIC), Inc., *On Our Terms: A Lesbian Primer* seeks to provide answers to questions that Filipino lesbians and non-lesbians are wont to ask. It contains matter-of fact discussions on the myths about lesbians, identity issues, coming out, relationships, lesbian sex, homophobia

and the lesbian rights movement, among other things.

For international orders, cost is US\$17.00 (five copies inclusive of postage). For local orders, cost of primer is P50.00 excluding postage. For details, please contact CLIC at P.O. Box 2356, CPO, Quezon City 1163 Philippines; thru E-mail: clic@phil.gn.apc.org or thru pager: 141-266446.

**THE SEXUALITY PAPERS: MALE  
SEXUALITY AND THE SOCIAL  
CONTROL OF WOMEN** by Lal  
Conveney, Margaret Jackson,  
Sheila Jeffreys, Kay Leslie and  
Pat Mahony  
.....

The history of sex in the last 100 years has usually been written as a story of progress from "repression" to "sexual liberation."

This book argues that in practice, the reverse is true. It demonstrates that the "sexual revolution" came as a backlash to the women's movement that had challenged men's sexual abuse and tried to reconstruct male sexuality in women's interest.  
(London, Hutchinson, 1984. 109p.)

**THE SEXUAL LIBERALS AND THE  
ATTACK ON FEMINISM** edited by  
Dorchen Leidholdt and Janice G.  
Raymond  
.....

The book documents a concerted assault on the goals, principles and achievements of the women's movement. Filling a long-standing need for a radical feminist collection on contemporary sexual politics, this volume brings together an extraordinary list of contributors, including Phyllis Chesler, Gena Corea, Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin, Sheila Jeffreys, Sonia Johnson, Ann Jones, Catharine MacKinnon and Florence Rush.  
(The Athene series. New York, Pergamon Press, 1990. 244p.)

**MALE AND FEMALE: THE CLASSIC  
STUDY OF THE SEXES** by Margaret Mead  
.....

"What is to be a man? What is to be a woman?" asks renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead in *Male and Female*—a classic study first published

in 1949. Today, despite forty-seven years marked by political, cultural, racial and sexual turmoil. Mead's arguments remain as provocative and relevant as when they were first published. Drawing on her research into seven Pacific island cultures, Mead examine the inherent meaning of "maleness" and "femaleness" and establishes basic gender differences by analysing the dynamics of primitive societies. Then she delves into the fascinating and complex sexual patterns that drive American society.  
(New York, W. Morrow, s.n., 1996. 477p.)

**SEXUAL POLITICS** by Kate Millet  
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Kate Millet demonstrates how sexual politics works in every sphere of life where woman and man come into contact: in education, employment, family life, social life, relationships and sex.

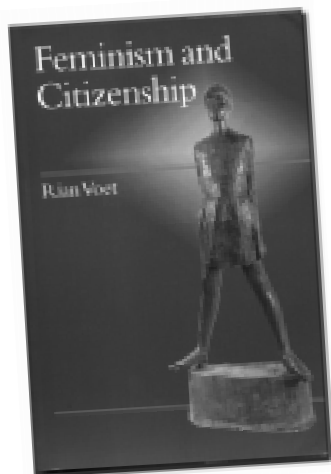
Section I of the essay is devoted to the proposition that sex has a frequently neglected political aspect. The author illustrates this by drawing attention to the role played by concepts of power and domination in some contemporary literary descriptions of sexual activity itself. She attempts to formulate a systematic overview of patriarchy as a political institution.

In Section II, she outlines the vast transformation in the traditional relationship between the sexes which took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the climate of reaction which later set in assuring the continuation of a modified patriarchal way of life and frustrating the possibility of revolutionary social changes in this for some three decades.

Section III focuses specifically on the work of figures Millet finds representative of this period, examining their responses to the prospect of radical changes in sexual politics. Section IV is devoted to the writings of Jean Genet with their theme of homosexual dominance, as an oblique approach to the issue of sexual dominance and oppression and the necessity for its eradication.

(London, First Sphere Books, 1971. 393p.)

**FEMINISM AND CITIZENSHIP**  
by Rian Voet



Since the Second World War, social liberalism has been the dominant theory of citizenship in Western liberal democracies. Only recently have feminists begun to criticize social-liberal and other citizenship theories explicitly on the issue of citizenship and its subthemes including liberty, rights, social equality, political identity, political representation and political judgement. They have argued that the content of citizenship theories should change by addressing women's position and needs.

The book attempts to contribute to the citizenship debate by taking feminism itself seriously and critically assessing feminist publications from the perspective of citizenship. And based on what

Voet finds lacking, she suggests a more satisfactory concept of citizenship that emphasises active citizenship, sex-equal citizenship, and a necessary circulation of elites and woman-friendly citizenship.

Voet does not claim to answer all the questions pertaining to citizenship; instead, she tries to convince the reader that there is a more attractive alternative to current proposed ideals. *Feminism and Citizenship* is a valuable work for students and academics in citizenship, as well as those taking courses in political theory, philosophy and gender studies. (London: SAGE Publications, 1998. 182p. ISBN 0 7619 5859 2)

**ORDINARY HEROINES**  
(TRANSFORMING THE MALE MYTH) by Nadya Aisenberg

Traditional literature is permeated with heroic figures. An overwhelming majority of legends, myths and fairy tales depict adventures of heroes. And while there is no dearth, and never has been, of courageous women, active women, spiritual women, women of leadership, we wonder why the Hero has nonetheless been Western culture's central symbol. As literature simultaneously reflects and forecasts the social world to which it is inextricably linked, we experience great trouble conceiving a heroine within our male-dominated culture.

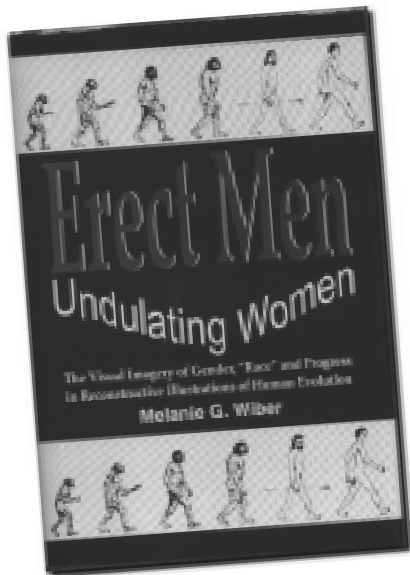
*Ordinary Heroines* examines this reality while asserting that since these heroes and corresponding Heroic codes come to us from core texts in our education, we absorb them uncritically and store them in our subconscious. It is further implied that this Heroic code is destructive to men as well as to women for it demands individual separateness, superiority, conquest all at the expense of negotiation, human relationships, pluralism and our connection to nature. But this does not mean that the solution to our destructive social pathologies is a shift from patriarchy to matriarchy because that would simply constitute a different skewing of power, again compromising principles of diversity and equality.

According to Aisenberg, what we need is a female Hero: one that substitutes moral courage and moral voice for the hero's physical courage and sense of predestination; one that is forward-looking, committed to a more humane society, and remains a responsive leader of the society from which she has emerged.

(New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1994. 240p. ISBN 0-8264-0652-1)



**ERECT MEN UNDULATING  
WOMEN** by Melanie G. Wiber



Despite efforts to include gender issues into anthropology, the study of human evolution seems particularly resistant to gender sensitivity. Titles of publications remain androcentric as with: *New Views of the Origins of Man* (Augereau & Dufour 1994) and “Skull in Ethiopia is Linked to Earliest Man” (Wilford 1994). Where textbooks or articles have been designed to avoid this overt androcentrism, many of the messages that no longer appear explicitly in text remain embedded in the illustrations.

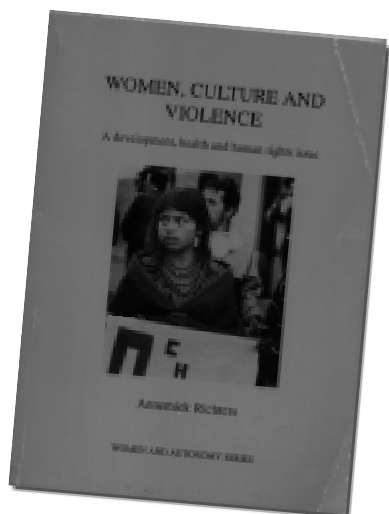
Wiber also reveals that embedded meanings in human-origin illustration, responses from students and colleagues and research into re-constructive illustrations and feminist criticism of Western art go beyond gender to include two other ubiquitous

themes: racial superiority and upward cultural progress.

*Erect Men Undulating Women* explores these often biased representation of human origins and in so doing, attempts to pioneer a critical evaluation of these reconstructive illustrations found in educational publications on human evolution. It aims to sensitise readers to the political nature of many different fields of science. It also aims to serve as a wake-up call for researchers to think differently about the nature of scientific knowledge, about the history of our species and our cultural institutions, and about the oversimplistic and misleading representation in visual form of these many complex ideas.

(Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997. 290p. ISBN 0-88920-274-5)

**WOMEN, CULTURE AND  
VIOLENCE: A DEVELOPMENT,  
HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
ISSUE** by J.M. Annemiek Richters



The fight against gender violence has today become a priority commitment for women all over the world. Gender violence is a complex phenomenon that needs urgent study because of its numerous negative impacts not only on a woman's physical health but also on her emotional and psychological well-being.

In *Women, Culture and Violence*, Richters takes us into the world of unimaginable cruelty of violence against women, perpetrated merely because they are women and thus at the wrong end of dominant power constellations. Richters approaches the problem from an innovative perspective by presenting gender violence as a human rights, health and

development issue.

Richters differentiates between two strains of gender violence: domestic violence and abuse as a component of organised violence. She further probes into which forms are considered universal and which may be considered as culture specific.

*Women, Culture and Violence* is valuable for its survey of issues important for conceptualising and combating gender violence as a human rights problem as well as its ability to establish linkages involving human rights, health and development.

(Leiden: Women and Autonomy Centre (VENA), 1994. 205p. ISBN 90-72631-37-4)

**WARRIOR MARKS: FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION AND THE SEXUAL BLINDING OF WOMEN** by Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar

**O**n 18 December 1991 Alice Walker wrote her first letter to Pratibha Parmar proposing to collaborate with her on a documentary film on female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM is done by removing a woman's clitoris, the prepuce, the inner or outer labia. This sometimes includes infibulation which requires the removal of the clitoris, the labia minora and majora before finally stitching up the vulva leaving a very small opening to pass urine or menstrual blood.

This book chronicles Walker and Parmar's journey to Senegal, Gambia, Burkina Faso, the United States and England while making the controversial and eye-opening film *Warrior Marks*. It contains the interviews of people concerned with this practice as a way of maintaining tradition and ensuring a woman's "cleanliness" and fidelity. It reflects the insights of two women activists who dare to write, film and struggle against this custom that has affected more than 100 million women and female children as they call our attention to this painful and sometimes fatal secret.

Alice Walker is the author of Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Color Purple* and best-selling novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* where she

first explores the issue of FGM and its physical, emotional and psychological consequence to a woman. Pratibha Parmar, the director, is an award-winning filmmaker whose work includes *A Place of Rage*, *Sari Red* and *Khush*. Both have been instrumental in opening up the debate on female genital mutilation among opinion-makers and ensuring that international agencies and conventions put this issue on their agenda.

A listing of organisations supporting the abolition of this practice in Africa, the United States and Europe is included at the end of the book.

(Florida: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996. 374p. ISBN 0-15-600214-0)

**THE HEALING CHOICE** by Candace Puy and Dana Dovitch



**F**or the past decades, statistics show that abortions have been increasing throughout the world and millions more continue to terminate unwanted pregnancies regardless of social, religious and legislative opinion.

This document is for any women who feels psychological

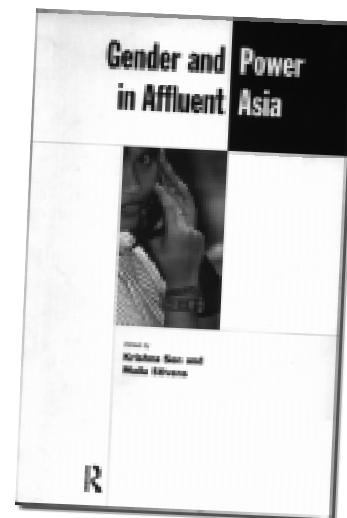
pain from her past abortion, any person who has strong feelings about abortion, any person who sees abortion as killing a child, and anybody who feels sure it is not.

The book also tackles stories regarding pregnancy and the reasons why women choose to have an abortion. It also deals with the impact of abortion on the woman's personal relationship, moral and religious beliefs and in causing anxiety when she deals with a planned pregnancy. It also focuses on how these feelings, when ignored, can possibly manifest themselves in more troubling ways, resulting in unstable relationships, self-destructive and addictive behaviors, depression and low self-esteem.

The book's primary goal is to lend insights and offers helpful ways to achieve postabortion healing, overcoming guilt and trauma, and acceptance of change.

(USA: Fireside, 1997. 237p. ISBN 0-684-83196-1)

**GENDER AND POWER IN AFFLUENT ASIA** by Krishna Sen and Maila Stevens



**G**ender and Power in Affluent Asia seeks to analyse the relationship between gender, power and modernity in the new-rich countries of Asia. It aims to analyse not only the effects on women of the dramatic economic

and social changes sweeping the region but also to show that Asia's modernisation has been a product of systematically gendered processes.

The book pursues two themes: first, that gender relationships are central to the making of middle classes and modernity in the region and, second, that representation of gender occupies a central place in

the contests about meanings and identities accompanying these processes.

The book presents ten contributions. These are: a) theorising gender, power and modernity in affluent Asia; b) Indonesian women at work; c) love and sex in an Indonesian mining town; d) sex, gender and the making of the new Malay middle classes; e) women

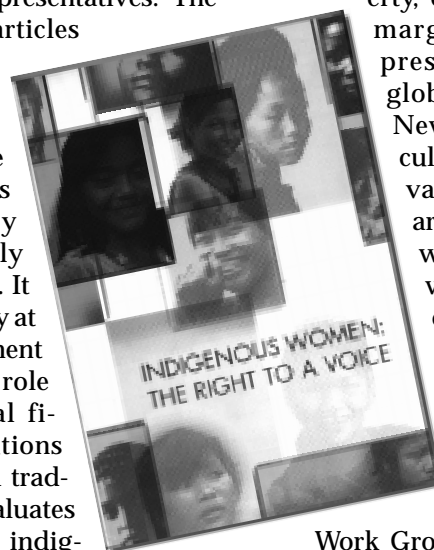
and the middle-class way of life in Singapore; f) women and consumerism in post-Mao China; g) changing gender constructions in the Yangtze River delta; h) Vietnamese women in the renovation era; i) estranged sisters' women in Thailand; and j) the gendering of postwar Philippine politics. (United Kingdom: Routledge, 1998. 323p. ISBN 0-415-16472-9 )

**INDIGENOUS WOMEN: THE RIGHTS TO A VOICE** by Diana Vinding

**I**ndigenous women like most other women struggle for recognition as people with rights, not only duties. They want to be seen not as second-class, child-bearers and housewives, but also as female human beings. They demand that their voices be heard as the expression of one single thought and one heart in order to strengthen their status as indigenous peoples.

This book provides a venue for indigenous women to exercise their right to a voice. The articles presented in this book have been writ-

ten by indigenous academics and by grassroots representatives. The topics for the articles range from the concrete narratives of their day-to-day life and the problems and issues they face in a rapidly changing world. It also looks deeply at global development trends and the role of international financing institutions and multilateral trading bodies. It evaluates their impact on indigenous women and their communities: from common problems



faced by most women such as poverty, domestic violence, marginalisation, oppression, effects of globalisation and the New World Order, to cultural traditions and values. Most of the articles deal in some way or the other with gender inequality, its impact on women's situation and the need for more equal opportunities.

(Denmark: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 1998. 328p. ISBN 87-984110-5-5)

**HIV PREVENTION AND AIDS CARE IN AFRICA: A DISTRICT LEVEL APPROACH** by Japeth Ng'weshemi, Ties Boerma, John Bennett and Dick Schapink

AIDS is considered as one of the major epidemics of this century especially in sub-Saharan Africa. This kind of epidemic is strongly rooted in human behavior and no cure is now available in the short run. The uneven appearance and spread of AIDS/HIV across Africa points to a strong need for a more

effective range of activities implemented at district level, which has now become the basis for health interventions.

The aim of this book is to synthesise experiences and tested methods related to the broad range of activities needed to meet the challenges that HIV/AIDS pose to district health systems. Its main goal is to serve as a source book, by sharing field experiences, discussing the difficulties encountered and explaining solutions found.

A range of activities to meet the two major challenges: a) Reducing HIV transmission and b) Coping with the consequences of AIDS. The many components of comprehensive district AIDS control program is presented: planning, monitoring and evaluation, the situation analysis, epidemiological and social science methods and monitoring and evaluation at district level.

(Netherlands: Royal Tropical Institute, 1997. 400p. ISBN 90-6832-1080)

**JAPAN: THE CHILDLESS SOCIETY?** by Muriel Jolivet



Is women’s increasing freedom to enjoy the good things of life, such as education and career, the reason behind the decline of the birth rate in Japan?

Muriel Jolivet in her book considers the reason why Japanese women are finding it increasingly difficult to accept the terms and conditions of motherhood, exploring the major factors of malaise in Japan today. These factors include: a) The “ten commandments of the good mother” which pertain to the guidance and rules that pediatricians give to mothers to

make them good child-rearers. They put so much pressure on women that the latter have ended up losing their profession. b) The changing role of the father is being destabilized due to career competition. c) Young women are increasingly attracted by the freedom afforded them by higher education and a job. d) The older generations exert pressure on young women to fulfil their traditional roles.

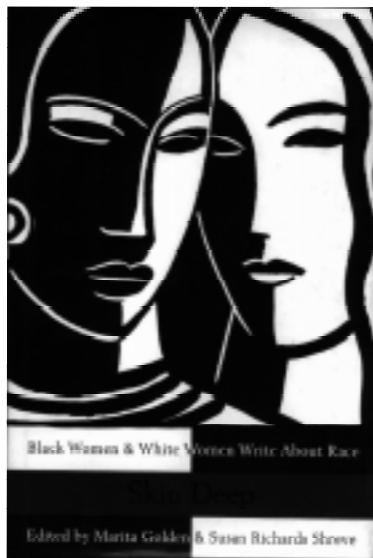
(England: Routledge, 1997. 244p. ISBN 0-415-14646-1 & 0-415-14647-X)

**SKIN DEEP: BLACK WOMEN AND WHITE WOMEN WRITE ABOUT RACE** by Marita Goldern and Susan Richards Shreve

As racial issues continue to flare, this book focuses on race from the point of view of women. *Skin Deep* captures the sound, the shape and the boundaries of the contemporary relationships between black and white women in the United States.

The book presents nineteen articles that are all accounts of the contributors’ day-to-day life experiences. It covers the wide spectrum of the female experience as it relates to race, exploring matters of identity, child-rearing, friendship and the unity and competition between black and white women’s struggles for equality.

(USA: Nan A. Talese, 1995. 309p. ISBN 0-385-47409-1)



**THE SAME RIVER TWICE** by Alice Walker

According to Alice Walker, “Art is the mirror, perhaps the only one, in which we can see our true collective face. We must honor its sacred function. We must let art help us.”

In her book *The Color Purple*, Walker attempted to let art mirror the truths about men, women, blacks and whites. Published in the early 1980s, it was a runaway bestseller and won the Pulitzer Prize as well. To top it off, Steven Spielberg offered to make it into a film. Fame, however, did not come without recrimination. Walker was accused of destroying the black community by promoting ideas of equality and tolerance; of hating men (black men, in particular); and of injuring woman and man relationships.

She met these challenges head-on in *The Same River Twice*. This collection of essays, journal entries and her version of a screenplay of *The Color Purple* lets us into Walker’s psyche as she wrestles with public scrutiny and her own ambivalence about the film. Her strength of character, sensitivity and wisdom carry her through all these challenges.

(New York: Washington Square Press, 1996. 302p. ISBN 0-671-00377-1)

# Reviews

## The Need for Love as a Health Hazard

A review of Jane Wegscheider Hyman and Esther R. Rome's *Sacrificing Ourselves for Love (Tenth Anniversary Edition 1997)* by Ma.Teresa Hocson

**“Though we are appalled when we read about foot binding or painful tattooing, we often do not see that with starvation diets and cosmetic surgery we also risk our health, and sometimes our lives, to look acceptable.”**

Health is wealth, so goes the expression.

Indeed, good health enables a person to experience and enjoy life to its fullest and be a productive member of society. It is, therefore, very disturbing that every day, the majority of women risk their health and well-being in order to be pleasing to others. Millions of women fall prey to the lure of self-starvation, dieting and cosmetic surgery to conform to the unattainable “ideal” body image. Many more put themselves at great risk by putting up with abusive relationships. *Sacrificing Ourselves for Love* explores these health hazards that arise out of the need for love and acceptance.

According to Hyman and Rome, women’s willingness to risk their health in order to please others is a result of three intertwined forces: the caring attitude that characterises many women; centuries of subordination; and the cultural traditions about how she should look, behave, and be treated.

Traditionally, an important part of women’s roles has been to accommodate, mediate, adapt and soothe. Care and concern for others are part of her moral strength and form the basis on which she makes many of life’s decisions.

Women define themselves in the context of relationships and these traditional roles. Aggression, therefore, is perceived as fracturing human connections. Some fear conflict because they are afraid of others’ displeasure, disapproval, anger, and sometimes, physical abuse.

Part I of the book, “Trying to look different,” deals with problems that women face in the attempt to conform to a standard that is externally defined and constantly changing. In the early ‘60s the goal was to be skinny and flat chested with long straight hair. In the ‘70s, the only way to be acceptable was to have curly hair and full breasts. Just as styles in clothes change seasonally, so women’s bodies are expected to change to fit these fashions.

There is a prevailing message that the woman’s body is not satisfactory the way it is. There is an emphasis on presentation as the central aspect of a woman’s existence that makes her extremely self-conscious. It demands that she occupy herself with a self-image that others will find pleasing and attractive. She must observe and evaluate herself, scrutinising every detail of herself as though she were an outside judge. She attempts to make herself in the image of wom-

anhood presented by billboards, newspapers, magazines and television. This makes her prey to huge fashion and diet industries that first set up the ideal images and then exhort women to meet them.

Cosmetic surgery has now become a natural “answer” to our lack of control over our body shape and size. Medical interventions, however, are not part of the solution but are a part of the problem. They are a medical “solution” to a purely social problem. The situation requires a major reorientation of medical and scientific education, organisation and practice based on the demands of the women’s health movement.

Cosmetic surgeries have come to be accepted as a normal, low-risk part of women’s lives. One reason for this is American culture’s narrow standard of beauty. Moreover, little information about the risks involved is readily available because the industry, with its large advertising budget and poor research, finds profit in a woman’s inability to make thoughtful, informed decisions.

The saga of breast implants is a glaring example of how beauty stereotypes have combined with suppression of information to endanger our health. We have been seduced into believing that we could surgically alter our bodies



to heighten our self-esteem and sexual appeal at no cost to our health.

“Though we are appalled when we read about foot binding or painful tattooing, we often do not see that with starvation diets and cosmetic surgery we also risk our health, and sometimes our lives, to look acceptable.”

Part II, “Living in Abusive Relationships,” identifies the cultural myths that encourage women to pick the wrong partners as well as the beliefs that help perpetuate abuse. It shows how women become increasingly trapped and outlines the health effects of abuse. It also discusses how abusers think, showing the inadequacy of what we have been taught about relationships.

The belief that men are supposed to “dish it out” (be strong and aggressive) and woman are supposed to “take it” by enduring pain and maintaining relationships at any expense carries a great health cost to women. And major changes within institutions are needed to enable them to respond better to women who are mistreated by their partners.

According to Hyman and Rome, “we must remember that saying no to violence is not a sign that we are trying to destroy or emasculate our partners. We are simply asserting our right to safety and to a supportive, loving relationship.”

The last part, “Dying for Love” deals with health problems that arise from the tradition that women should be receivers and men the initiators during heterosexual lovemaking. Three diseases (cervical cancer, pelvic inflammatory disease and AIDS) which can be fatal are discussed along with how these diseases can be detected and treated.

Everyday, women put themselves at the risk of infertility, illness and death by having sex without protection against diseases. Subordinates in lovemaking, women are less likely to insist on protection against diseases during sex, even though they are more likely

than men to be infected from a single exposure to certain harmful organisms causing sexually transmissible diseases.

This section also examines the difficulties women have in approaching the subject of safer sex, the government’s inadequate approach to prevention; and some of the larger social forces that have slowed efforts to halt the spread of these diseases.

Traditional culture encourages us to do everything possible to be attractive and “lovable,” even at the price of physical comfort, mobility and health. *Sacrificing Ourselves for Love* is an inspi-



rational message that with information and encouragement, we can help ourselves in counteracting social traditions that are detrimental to our health. It is a wake-up call for us women to discourage our own self-sacrificial thoughts and to learn to take care of ourselves so that others may take our needs seriously.

Hyman and Rome provide us with a comprehensive and well-integrated source of information that is exhaustive yet not too overwhelming. Language is simple and medical jargon is kept to a minimum. Thus, a wider audience of women can be effectively reached. In fact, the book seems to be designed both as a self-help manual for victims as well as a useful guide for others to recognise dysfunctional behavior in friends,

relatives and other women.

The authors’ use of the first person is crucial in the effectiveness of the message. The book is sensitive without sounding too preachy. The use of “we/us” gives the impression of solidarity and the reassurance that these health problems do not just happen to a few, maladjusted women but are a symptom of the grave effects of society’s unjust social arrangements that affect us all. Side-quotes throughout the book not only clarify some of the issues being discussed but also serve to assert that these health problems affect real women.

*Sacrificing Ourselves for Love* is factual and statistics are used throughout the book. While scientific in its approach to these health problems, it also emphasises the social and psychological aspects of the problem.

The book is useful because it does not bombard us with facts to overwhelm but immediately follows through with specific ways and strategies to cope. The sections are arranged logically such that each health problem is discussed extensively along with the cultural traditions that encourage us to endanger ourselves, followed by suggested actions to avoid or overcome the problem. Accepting the existence of strong societal pressure to conform to the prescribed ideal, the book also includes self-esteem exercises.

Thus, Hyman and Rome are successful in pointing out what is inherently dysfunctional in society today—yet, by being introspective, they manage to empower women to change their attitudes towards themselves. They do not deny that achieving this can be a difficult, lifelong process; even women in the women’s health movement are still teaching themselves not to be objects of sacrifice. Still, *Sacrificing Ourselves for Love* encourages us to work together, even as we help ourselves fight the abuse in our culture. ♡

*Ma. Teresa Hocson is taking up her Masters Degree in Women and Development at the University of the Philippines.*