



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1981 Volume III: Human Sexuality and Human Society

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## Introduction

The major focus of the seminar on human sexuality was the relationship between sexuality and human society. The seminar developed the theme that human sexuality is unique in the mammalian series in being more socially than biologically controlled. Sexual intercourse is no longer governed by the female estrus cycle, as it is in primates, but by moral laws, such as the incest prohibition. These moral laws are assimilated by each individual during the prolonged infant-mother interaction within the nuclear family. The seminar reviewed the experimental evidence showing that maternal deprivation in infancy injures adult sexual competence. Freud's views on infantile sexuality and the influences of psychosexual stages and sexual conflict on the developing personality were discussed.

The seminar placed a major emphasis on the social forces governing adolescent sexual behavior. Social class differences in attitudes toward adolescence were reviewed, with both a cross-cultural and historical perspective. Throughout the course of the seminar, the issues arising out of sex differences were examined. In particular, the interaction between biosocial and culturally assigned sex roles was seen as the background for sex differences in attitudes toward sexuality, as well as the widespread sexual inequality of women. The necessity for a firm background of scientific information emerged as something too often taken for granted rather than directly addressed in discussing human sexuality.

Within this broad theoretical background, the Fellows discussed their ideas for developing a variety of programs of instruction for their students. The ethical issues that inhere in teaching about sexuality became the subject of sometimes very moving debate among the seminar members. These ethical issues are incorporated as special topics for discussion in their curriculum units. As the following pages attest, all of the differing curriculum units bear the imprint of the Fellows' exposure to information bearing upon human sexuality from the sciences of psychology, sociology and anthropology. But most important of all, the problems of decision making, ethical choice and basic moral values can be seen as central in the texts of all the curriculum units.

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