

# A Workshop in for

ONE hears very little debate nowadays about whether or not sex education should be a part of the curriculum of our schools. Of course the debate is still hot and heavy about *what* should be taught, *when* the teaching should take place, *which* institutions should be responsible for providing sex education, *who* should do the teaching, and whether these opportunities for educational experience should be included in a curriculum as required or elective activities. Sooner or later, nearly everyone in our society is caught up in the debate.

No doubt anxiety bordering on fear enters the minds of many mothers and fathers as they read or hear about the sex education curricula of their schools or churches. These feared curricula usually list such concepts as family living, human development, reproduction, care of the baby, human biology, dating, selection of a mate, menstruation, and birth control, or even homosexuality. Occasionally such topics as venereal diseases, abortion, unwanted pregnancies, sexual aggression, and deviant sexual activities are broached. However, in the minds of many, if not most, of the parents is the fear that what is actually going to be discussed and stressed will be the techniques of copulation! Further, many parents are convinced that sex knowledge serves only to encourage sexual desire and behavior. And so the debate continues.

An approach that the authors have used successfully in helping interested adults and parents to develop an understanding of sex education programs, such as the one developed by Beacon Press for early teenagers called *About Your Sexuality*, is to conduct an 18-hour human sexuality workshop for these adults. In this workshop a rule of operation is to have the adults act as full participants, not allowing them to hide their feelings and thoughts by accepting the role of passive listeners or of parents who are just there to examine a program "for the kids."

The primary goal for participants in this workshop in human sexuality is to have them develop for themselves an awareness, an understanding, and an acceptance of the multiplicity of human sexual behaviors. The rationale for offering the workshop to adults, usually parents of early teenagers who will be taking classes in sex education, is that by attaining the goals of the sexuality workshop, these participating adults will be able to receive and respond positively to the prepared programs in sex education for their early teenagers. Hopefully, some of the unspoken needs of the adults themselves will be met, too.

Following the dictates of the primary goal for the workshop, most of the knowledge dealt with in the workshop falls in the affective domain. However, as the need arises, cognitive information is provided. Usually

# Human Sexuality

## Parents

**JACK MEGENITY\***  
**JEAN MEGENITY**  
**BARBARA BARNUM**

this means that some time is spent dealing with the anatomy and physiology of human reproduction. The major emphasis, though, is on dealing with feelings, attitudes, values, and valuing processes.

### Value Continuums

At the beginning of a workshop with 20 to 25 participants, much time is spent in developing identity, trust, and openness. In addition to the usual warm-up and get acquainted games, this calls for small group activities involving sharing and decision making. From these group-building activities, the workshop moves to exercises involving valuing processes and value decisions. The rationale for working with valuing and values at this point is that by becoming involved with some simple, easy-to-make value decisions which do not deal directly with sexuality and by handling these decisions successfully, the participant will then be more able and ready to move toward becoming involved in value decisions dealing with sexuality. These exercises include voting, ordering, prizing, and publicly acclaiming value positions. As this type of activity proceeds, the topic at hand, human sexuality, is gradually confronted.

Ample opportunity is offered to accomplish this introduction to the topic, since human sexuality is indeed value laden. For

example, the idea of rank ordering according to personal preferences and values is introduced by asking that the following set be so ordered by the participants: good looking, rich, famous. Then the next set is so ordered: loved more than you love, loved less than you love. After a few sets have been rank ordered, the participants are asked to develop their own sets for ordering, with instructions to limit these sets to sexuality concepts. This is best done in small groups since it provides an opportunity for the participants to verbalize about sexuality for the first time in this setting.

Another example of activity designed to permit the participants to become involved gradually in decision making concerning sexuality is the use of value continuums. This activity calls for setting up an imaginary continuum across the floor of the room, ranging from strongly agree or accept at one end to strongly disagree or reject at the other end, with the neutral position in the middle. The participants then are asked to place themselves physically along this continuum

*\* Jack Megenity, Assistant Professor, Curriculum and Instruction, Georgia State University, Atlanta; Jean Megenity, Assistant Professor, School of Nursing, Emory University, Atlanta; and Barbara Barnum, Editor, McGraw-Hill Book Company, St. Louis, Missouri*



Adults in the human sexuality workshop explore valuing processes.

according to how they feel about a stated idea. Fairly easy decisions such as asking for positions on capital punishment are called for first. Gradually decisions involving sexuality are introduced. Such decisions may call for taking a position on legalizing abortions, premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, masturbation, and sex crimes.

Following these introductory activities and valuing exercises, inventories are made of the participants' factual information, experiences, attitudes concerning sexuality, and topics about which they may have difficulty communicating. These inventories include the "Sex Knowledge Inventory" developed by McHugh and by Family Life Publications, Inc., the Beacon Press "Checklist of Attitudes," and the "Range of Experience with Sexual Outlets" questionnaire. Information from these inventories provides direction from this point. Plans to fit the needs and desires of the group can be made. For example, aspects of sexuality toward which attention may be turned are lovemaking, homosexuality, masturbation, birth control, physiology and anatomy, standards of sexual

behavior, concepts of masculinity and femininity, and sex education for the young.

## Attitudes and Feelings

In approaching any and all of these aspects, a special effort is made to keep the presentations open and honest, with ample opportunity for all participants to inquire into and clarify attitudes and feelings toward human sexuality. There is no hidden agenda.

Primarily to facilitate communications among the participants and to demonstrate that the workshop is to be conducted on an open, frank, down-to-earth level, an activity dealing with slang terms is presented at this point. To start this activity, large sheets of newsprint are spread around the floor. At the top of each sheet a different word for an anatomical structure or a physiological process such as intercourse, penis, vagina, homosexual, masturbation, menstruation is written. Participants are then asked to walk around the room and write under each term the slang words they know which are sometimes used for the term. After the group finishes, members are asked to read the words aloud. Without prompting, the members will reveal which words are new to them. This activity serves well in breaking the existing



The lyrics of some popular music deal explicitly with sexuality.

language barrier. This language barrier exists because of social practices and ignorance of terms. Of course the terms may differ from one region of the country to another and from one generation to another.

From this point the methods of handling each aspect of human sexuality to be examined are much the same. A basis for group interaction on a given topic is provided. Usually this would be a filmstrip, a record, a poem, a photograph, a work of art, or verbal input from the workshop directors or from participants. (Visual and audio materials developed by the Beacon Press are commonly used here.) The participants then interact in small groups, expressing their views and feelings concerning the topic under consideration. Time is provided for questions and clarifying responses when all of the participants are together again in the large group.

For example, an activity dealing with homosexuality would be viewing a series of pictures or a filmstrip showing humans coming into physical contact with each other in some way. Representative frames may include a picture of two fully-clothed women embracing, or of one man kissing another on the cheek. Each participant is asked to reveal on a checklist continuum how he feels about each picture. Does he fully accept and find pleasure in the picture, or is he repulsed and moved negatively by the picture? The participant then takes his checklist to his small group for group interaction. Hopefully this group interaction, with occasional input from workshop directors, serves to help the participants become aware of mental and emotional barriers present in their own minds. It is assumed that such an awareness is a first step in understanding and accepting a multiplicity of human sexual behaviors.

In dealing with lovemaking, the group may listen to records of various persons recalling their first lovemaking experiences. Then the members are asked to express their feelings concerning what they have heard.

Another source of input for group reaction and interaction is to listen to the lyrics of songs popular with the early teenager. (The parents themselves are able to provide records of these songs.) Very often these



Small group activities develop trust and openness among participants.

lyrics deal very explicitly with aspects of human sexuality. It is always interesting to ask the parents to recall and react to the lyrics of songs that were popular in their dating days.

The instructional strategy employed here is that of having the participant verbalize publicly his questions, attitudes, and anxieties concerning any aspect of human sexuality, and so become aware of his feelings and the feelings of others. Again, it is assumed that such activities will serve as a stepping-stone for the participant in understanding and acknowledging, though not necessarily condoning, a multiplicity of human sexual behaviors.

By having the workshop participants involved in verbalizing, valuing, and decision-making processes concerning human sexuality, it is our contention that they, usually parents of pre-teenagers and teenagers, are better able to understand the scope and focus of sex education in our schools and churches. Further, it is our contention that the workshop participants are less dogmatic, more open, less fearful, and more able to accept themselves and others when it comes to dealing with human sexuality after they have experienced such a program. □

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