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*Some Comments on the Sex Education in Sweden  
and on the Goals of Sex Education*

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The recent interest in sex education in Israel has become documented by the event of the First International Symposium of Sex Education, in 1972, by the creation of the Society for Sexual Education, 1973, and by the planning of the Second Seminar on Sex Education in Tel Aviv, 1974.

The Chief Inspector E. Kimron, who recently began to collect material to plan for sexual education in Israeli schools, has asked me for some relevant information on sex education in Sweden. To mediate information on sexual education implies a great responsibility, for two reasons. Firstly, because I believe that the stability of a society depends on the degree of mutual understanding and on the warmth and generosity of the interrelationship between men and women, of which sexuality constitutes one aspect. Secondly, because there is the danger in a young and vital country, as Israel, to take after whatever is considered best abroad, whereas it seems necessary to weigh carefully the possible good and the possible adverse effects of whatever may be considered best abroad.

Sweden has made a tremendous pioneering contribution in the field of sex information. But, no country devised, as yet, the ideal and adequate sexual education by which I mean an education in sex as an integral part of the totality of human interpersonal experience. This realization prompted me to write:

- 1) Some comments on the current books, pamphlets etc., used for sex education in Sweden
- 2) Some points of view on the ideal goals of sex education.

*I. Some comments on some of the current sex information in Sweden.*

The Swedish sex education books for the small children are excellent; Haegler (1964) deserves the highest praise and is truly worthy of being translated. The information to the parents (Curman, 1958) on how to explain sexual issues to children at different ages—from 4 years of age, when the child may begin to ask—is, likewise highly commendable.

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The school material on biology and sexual education [3,4,5,6,] gives information on anatomy, physiology, contraceptive techniques, venerology etc., yet, it does not deal with the *emotional* context, i.e. the individual-subjective aspect of sexual relationship and experience. This may be a result of an attempt to be matter of fact in the matter of sex. The information is very thorough. I do not see, however, that it offers any guidance to youth, as regards to e.g. what attitudes to adopt, what is the price of freedom and what are the limitations necessitated by the reality limitations outside and by the magnitude of the emotional obstacles existing within the individual. It supplies no guidance as regards to when, with whom and under what circumstances sexuality ought to or ought not to be lived out, and how to cope with the demands of an interpersonal relation. Youth under the age of 15 is badly in need of set standards and mere factual information may tend to make this youth insecure.

It is difficult to say how much the present sex education has contributed to such sociological effects as that for example, of sexual experience becoming a status symbol, or of girls being pressurized to sexual intimacy for which they are not mature. Such pressures may have been exerted, because, "enlightened" youth may have perceived intimacy as "a thing to do," girls may have felt that if they refused intercourse they would become deprived of the *social* contact with boys which is so essential at a time when the members of the opposite sexes need to learn to know each other. It seems that lately these pressures diminished. The boys, instead, became anxious whether they would be able to meet the demands of the emancipated girl. Youth has also become weary of sexual education. There is at present a rebound. Sex education is taught at 10, 12, later at 13, 15 years of age and again in the gymnasium at which level the School Board emphasized that attention be paid to psychological, ethical and social points of view (Aktuellt fran Skoloverstyrelsen 1965/66: 27) [7], each time more extensively. Whereas factual information given to adults is invaluable in order to supply the knowhow in the essential sphere of life, and to take away some of the mysticism around, and some of the double moral within, the sexual sphere, youth, apparently, wants emotional support, a more colorful and charming introduction to sexual experience, than mere facts. It is, therefore, of great importance, when planning sexual education, to learn the tolerance and the knowledge on the subject from Sweden, but to avoid the possibility of alienation of sexual education from the total human emotional, psychological and sociological as well as own, specific, cultural value content.

The books for teenagers on sex (Asklund & Wickbom 1964, 1966) are worth recommending, because they offer guidance towards maturity and hence *respect* and *consideration* towards the sexual partner — an essential cornerstone of sexual education.

## II. *Some points of view on the ideal goals of sexual education*

Apart from an emphasis on respect and consideration which should constitute an obvious part of sex education, another cornerstone of adequate sex education is its ability to inspire a sense of freedom within a mature relationship, i.e. sexuality free from the paralysing shame inbred into it earlier. This shame still haunts the subconscious of both teachers and parents in spite of "emancipated" views, or, even, "emancipated" practice. Thus, the teachers of sexual education need more support to be able to teach on the subject than it is generally realized.

The ultimate goal of sex education is to help youth to achieve a positive, sincere interrelationship with the partner, on the emotional plane, and a *playfulness* within the sexual interrelationship, which makes it possible and natural for the partners to teach each other about each other's needs in order to make sexuality a satisfactory experience. Such sexuality of approach instead of reproach (the latter often not even verbalized) is a good sexuality, a freeing experience, as opposed to the "forbidden" and shame generating, guilt inspiring unsatisfactory experience it can become in youth (and adults) not free and positive towards it. The present-day trend is comparable, in history, to the brief Elizabethian period e.g., when reverence was shown to the joys of love. The poetry of that period, however, is missing in our day. There are some signs, appearing lately, indicating that youth is beginning to seek for it.

How should we go about devising sex education which aims at creating a free permissive attitude towards sexuality, yet not permissiveness, i.e. to guide youth into a generous attitude towards sexuality and yet prevent debut of sexual experience before emotional maturity is reached? It seems to me that youth needs to learn the *responsibility* implied in a sexual relationship just as urgently as it needs to learn the physiology, anatomy and the medical data on sex. It has to be told of the possible traumatic emotional effect of e.g. premature or non-selective sexual contacts and of the possible long term effect on the future interpersonal relationships. It needs to be taught of the long term social consequences of sexuality divorced from responsibility. In spite of the rapid progress in contraceptive technique, the unloved, unwanted child is still a reality, and I believe that the unloved child is the potential destroyer of society, in particular in a historical setting which favours manifest destructivity.

How should we go about aiming at educating youth towards the goal of being able to make a satisfactory choice of a secure enriching relationship, unless we teach of the different profiles of male and female psychology, of the different needs, different pressures, biological and social put on each of the two sexes in a given culture?

Another important issue the educator ought to bear in mind is that not all sexuality lived out as such, is an expression of true sexuality, why some sound general psychological insight needs to go hand in hand with sexual education. As we all know the sexual act may serve as a means to diminish anxiety, or to satisfy the need of self-assertion, status-seeking, or reassertion of a weak sexual identification. Various emotions may be lived out as sexuality, depending on the prevailing cultural patterns. It seems that each society makes it difficult for at least one emotional basic need to come to an expression, whereas, it encourages the expression of another basic emotion. Sexuality, when curbed or severely censored in a society can be acted out through a display of aggressivity, overeating and so on, while, aggressivity, when curbed by a cultural pattern, may be acted out, amongst others, as sexuality.

Finally, there is a need for integration of sex education with a socio-cultural and ethical value reassessment and reassertion.

To sum up: sexual education ought to be a means of achieving an inner unity as opposed to "genitals dissociated from heart, heart severed from head, heads dissociated from genitals" (Laing, 1965), an antidote to the dangers of the increasing alienation process which we witness in the modern world.

For an extensive review on sex and society see e.g. Linner (1967), the Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Sex Education (11) 1972 and the literature recommended by the Riksförbundet för Sexualupplysning RFSU, Stockholm (13).

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