

LISA PYTLIK

Sexual ideology subjective

Let's talk about sex. We certainly think about it enough. And in a variety of ways.

For example, about 100 "fans" visited the Reader's Choice bookstore Wednesday to get their Playboy magazines signed by featured models. Ironically, last week also marked the start of UNL's "Women's Week 1992," which began Thursday.

Research varies, but many studies report that men under age 40 think about sex an average of six times an hour, while men over 40 and women think about it slightly less often.

However, we all think about sex more than we talk about it. As a result, all sorts of ideas are left unquestioned and are often mistaken for indisputable black-and-white facts.

Myths even surround concepts seemingly as basic as gender. For example, many people believe that males and females are biological opposites. From this standpoint, it would seem that Women's Week is an exclusive celebration for only half of the student population instead of for campus as a whole.

But men and women aren't as extreme opposites as many assume. Although it's true that an embryo with XX chromosomes usually develops into a female and an embryo with XY chromosomes usually develops into a male, this is not always the case. A number of things can happen between conception and sexual maturity to change this genetic predisposition.

For example, if the proper amount of testosterone is, for some reason, not present during the appropriate critical period of the pregnancy, a baby with XY chromosomes could be born with female instead of male genitalia.

Furthermore, some people, who are known as hermaphrodites, are born with both types of sexual organs. In these cases, the parents and doctors often decide to assign a single gender to the child and one set of sexual organs is removed.

There also have been specific cases where children have been reassigned their sexual identity after birth. In one case, an infant's penis was accidentally removed during circumcision. As a result, the child successfully was raised as a female instead of a male.

In other cases, children have been misidentified sexually at birth because of having an irregularly small penis or enlarged clitoris. Sometimes the child's real gender is not discovered until age two or three.

Obviously, even one's biological gender is not always as clear an issue as many people think.

Culturally, issues surrounding sexuality are even less clear-cut.

A 1935 study by Margaret Mead, for example, described a society in New Guinea in which ideas of masculinity and femininity were almost exactly opposite of those tradition-



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ally illustrated in the United States. In this society, the women were the "breadwinners" and the men stayed home, reared the children, dressed up for their wives and often performed dances to entertain them.

But enough of this talk about sex in terms of gender.

Let's talk about "real" sex. Let's talk about the topics that most people think of first when they hear the word "sex."

Sexual intercourse, orientation and eroticism are all more examples of topics that people like to place in black-and-white categories of "right" and "wrong" without fully confronting the complexity of the issues.

Most students, for example, seem to automatically reject the ideas that their parents may have tried to instill in them concerning sexual abstinence. I would guess that most students were taught, as I was, that sex, especially premarital sex, is a no-no. Yet according to a 1990 health survey, only 22 percent of UNL students said they were virgins.

Unfortunately, it seems that many students reject their parents' views as overly conservative before seriously considering the benefits of sexual abstinence. For example, virgins don't usually get sexually transmitted diseases or worry they may be inadvertently fathering or mothering a baby.

Many people also claim that relationships are simpler without sex and that each partner can more easily and objectively evaluate his or her true feelings about the relationship without intense sexual emotions getting in the way.

Despite these benefits, knowing that virgins are such a minority, I'd be pretty nervous about revealing my sexual status — and I'm not saying whether I'm a virgin. Hypothetically speaking, I'd feel almost as nervous about "coming out" as a virgin as a homosexual would about "coming out" as a lesbian.

Speaking of homosexuality, here is another subject that people like to form rigid opinions around. Many people, for example, still label homosexuality as "immoral" or "sick." I

understand this because I used to share these views. However, after getting to know several people of various orientations, I've found that one's orientation does not have anything to do with his or her morality or mental health.

I attended several weddings this fall, but two of them stand out in my mind.

One was between a male and a female whose relationship was strewn with chaotic arguments, physical abuse and an unwanted pregnancy. The ceremony was large, formal, decorous and somehow fake. I wondered about the mental health of two people who would want to continue a relationship like theirs for a lifetime.

The other ceremony I attended would not have been considered a legal matrimony. It was between two women whose relationship was characterized by nurturing, devotion and mutual sacrifice.

The ceremony was small, plain, held in their home and more "real" than any marriage ceremony I had ever attended. They were not getting married for legal reasons, social pressures, money or any motive other than love. Nothing could be more moral than that.

Of course, some homosexuals can be just as mentally ill or immoral as some heterosexuals can. And virgins aren't necessarily more virtuous than those who choose to have honest and responsible sexual relationships, whether inside or outside of marriage. Finally, despite our biological commonalities, not all differences between men and women can be blamed on culture.

Judging different forms of sexuality may be as elusive and complex as the task of judging different forms of art.

Opinions vary over the differences between "art" and "obscenity" just as much as they vary over differences between "masculine" and "feminine" or between "morality" and "immorality." I've heard descriptions of Playboy, for example, which vary from "art" to "pornography."

The final analysis in any judgment, however, should take into account culture, motivation and effect. And, especially when one is judging the morality of various issues, sweeping generalizations should not be used.

Practices that harm others or are based on personal gratification through the exploitation of others should be labeled as "bad." But practices that promote self-esteem and are based on integrity and love should be recognized for their "good."

There is room for both types of practices in almost all sexual ideologies, and each case must be examined separately.

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Arts should receive no federal funding

It is always a treat to read the Daily Nebraskan. I invariably learn something new about myself. For example, just this semester I have learned that because I am white, I am automatically "racist" (and worse — I am responsible for crimes I didn't even know I committed against people I have never met, most of whom have been dead for hundreds of years). I have also learned that because I am a married heterosexual, I am "homophobic." Because I am a Christian, I am "intolerant." Because I believe that the principles underlying the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are based on Judeo-Christian values (which include religious tolerance and freedom), I am an "egotist." I assume from this that because I am male, I must also be "sexist." I'm sure that as I continue to read the DN, I will discover other "-ist," "-ic" and "-ant" labels that have been placed upon me by people who don't even know me.

Most recently, I learned that because I believe it is inappropriate for the federal government to dole out tax dollars for art, I have "meager artistic sympathies" (not to mention

that I am "self-righteous, homophobic, right-wing," whatever that means). This comes as a surprise to a pianist, organist, vocalist, composer and conductor who used to consider himself a patron of the arts.

Thank you for enlightening me with the truth, DN! Now that I know that white, male, heterosexual, Christian conservatives are the lowest form of life on the planet, one might wonder how I can stand to look in the mirror.

Actually, I can look in the mirror, because I know that I am neither racist, sexist, homophobic, intolerant nor overly egotistical. All these labels have been placed upon me by people who themselves personify the intolerance they profess to condemn.

I wish to point out that appreciation for art does not equate to advocacy of the NEA and its irresponsible handling of tax dollars. In their impassioned responses, Mr. Hejduk, Ms. Engel and Mr. Chumbley seemed to miss Mr. Fahlson's main point ("Federal funding for arts lunacy," DN, Feb. 28). He did not say funding of the arts is lunacy; rather, he as-

serted that FEDERAL funding of arts (of any kind, regardless of merit or lack thereof) is lunacy. The key word is federal. The NEA was a bad idea from the start. Those who say the NEA should not be subject to public scrutiny and that it should not engage in censorship are absolutely correct; it should be eliminated altogether. And Jill, the NEA is not a private "organization;" if it were, it could spend its money any way it wanted and I couldn't care less. Rather, it is a governmental agency, whose "pathetically meager" budget would be too high if it were \$1 a year.

I share Mr. Hejduk's vision of a day when the fine arts will enjoy the same level of interest, community pride and funding as sports. However, this never will be accomplished through federal "handouts." People should not be forced by art that violates their community values, whether it is obscene, sacrilegious, traitorous or even simply inept.

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