

## HUMAN SEXUALITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY: AN AFRO-CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

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### **Abstract**

*This study seeks to undertake an Afro-Christian exploration of the relationship between human sexuality and homosexuality. Obviously, human sexuality plays a major role in everyone's life. It is an integral part of the human person, what he/she does and in fact a person's basic composition. However, over the various epochs, and especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there have arisen various serious dislocations and misconceptions in the understanding, interpretation and positioning of human sexuality. One phenomenon which has particularly stirred ethical waters is homosexuality. Various debates have ensued as to its legality or otherwise. In the midst of the global debates on homosexuality as a practice in human sexuality, the average African Christian has maintained an aloof position towards the legality of homosexuality. This study therefore undertakes an evaluation of the African Christian view on homosexuality as it relates to, and affects human sexuality. The study employs the qualitative research design. Data are gathered from secondary sources. The expository and evaluative methods are used for data analysis. The study found out that Africans generally, and African Christians in particular, have a conception that homosexuality is an abnormality in both the African and Christian worldview. The study recommends that African ethical foundations should be adequately considered before taking a stance on the debate on homosexuality. The study surmises that even though the debate and attitudes to homosexuality are varying and continuous, it is necessary to adequately contemplate and consider the human nature in order not to fall into unnatural aberrations and abnormalities.*

### **Introduction**

Human beings are necessarily sexual beings. People are oriented towards various genders either appropriately or inappropriately. In essence, human sexuality is part of the social life of humans, but it is governed by social norms and implied rules of behaviour. Understandably, each society has different norms of sexual behaviours. Individuals are socialized to these norms. Society's views on sexuality have continued to change throughout history and are continually evolving. We live in an age where many changes in sexual standards have occurred; an age where new dramatic artificial birth control devices are being introduced daily, such as different makes and sophisticated condoms and diaphragms. Ours is an age where the pornographic industry has blossomed geometrically; it is an age that has been battered by the evil of homosexuality. Yes, it is a world that has witnessed and is

witnessing tremendously negative shifts in sexual behavior; a world that is caught betwixt and between the contradiction of living righteously and woefully. All of society has been affected by these seeming contradictions. The Christian church has been in the middle of the arguments and positions regarding sexuality. Obviously, their conceptions have equally been varying. This study therefore explores an average African response to the issue of sexuality.

### **HUMAN SEXUALITY: AN OVERVIEW**

Human sexuality plays a major role in everyone's life. Regardless, whether we are young or old, man or woman, boy or girl, Nigerian or Japanese, it is an integral part of what we do and who we are. Human sexuality is the capacity to have, or the inclination towards erotic experiences and responses. It involves a person's sexual attraction to another person which may be determined by one's sexual orientation. This is because sexual behavior and intimate relationships are strongly influenced by a person's sexual orientation. Sexual orientation refers to your degree of emotional and physical attraction to members of the opposite sex. Same sex or both sexes. **Heterosexual** people are attracted to the members of the opposite sex. Homosexual people are attracted to people of the same sex. Those who are bisexual are attracted to both men and women. There is equally the state of not being attracted to anyone in a sexual manner at all (asexuality). Human sexuality impacts cultural, political, legal, and philosophical aspects of life (Carlson and Heth 683).

Generally, interest in sexual activity typically increases when an individual reaches puberty (684). The determinant of sexual activity is still not very clear. This has prompted the **nature versus nurture** debate. Here, some researchers assume that sexual behavior is determined by genetics, and others assert that it is molded by the environment. Nature here could be defined as those behavioral traits that are due to innate characteristics, such as instincts and drives. On the other hand, the concept of nurture can be defined as the environmental factors or external stimuli that influence behavior, emotions, and thinking (Buss and Schmitt 76). However one views it, human sexuality is central to human life as each person belongs to a particular sexual inclination, whether right or wrong.

### **COMMON SEXUAL DISORDERS PLAGUING OUR SOCIETY TODAY**

Men (boys) and women (girls) have many sexual problems which frequently arise because of other problems within a relationship, inclinations, indoctrination or simply because of individual differences in expectations, assumptions, desire, preferred behaviors, and relationship conflicts. Although these differences create sexual problems in both men and women, sexual disorders among men and women are different. Thus, sexual disorder refers to the various ways in which an individual is unable to participate in a sexual relationship as he or she ought to naturally. In the words of Ellen and Rayna, "they are disturbances in sexual desire

and psycho physiological changes that characterize the sexual response cycle and cause marked distress, and interpersonal difficulty" (52). The following are the common sexual disorders among most youth today:

**FETISHISM:** Fetishism is a sexual disorder which involves the use of nonliving objects, especially of the opposite sex, for sexual gratification. Among the more common fetish objects are women's underpants, bras, stockings, shoes, boots, or other wearing apparel. The person with Fetishism frequently masturbates while holding, rubbing, or smelling the fetish object or may ask the sexual partner to wear the object during their sexual encounters. Usually the fetish is required or strongly preferred for sexual excitement, and in its absence there may be erectile dysfunction in males.

**FROTTEURISM:** This is a sexual disorder in which a person derives sexual pleasure or gratification from rubbing, especially the genitals, against an unconsenting person, usually in a crowded place. Etymologically, it is derived from the French verb *frotter* which means "to rub". Most perpetrators of this act are males and the majority of the victims are females, even though few female-on-male frotteurs also exist. Adult-on-child frotteurism is a common stage in child sexual abuse.

**SEX ADDICTION:** This refers to an irrational appetite for sexual intercourse. Sex addiction has been called the athlete's foot of the mind: It is an itch always waiting to be scratched. The scratching, however, causes wounds and never alleviates the itch. A female sex addict is known as nymphomaniac. In the words of Agan, "such a lady is permanently frustrated because she never gets sexual satisfaction from love-making, or rarely, if ever, reaches orgasm and for this reason, constantly searches for men who would satisfy her sexual desire" (56).

**SEXUAL SADISM:** This is a sexual disorder where the psychological or physical suffering (including humiliation) of the victim is sexually exciting to the person carrying out the act. It involves the torture, cruel treatment and even murder of someone for sexual satisfaction. The sexual sadist reaches orgasm only when his victim is undergoing pain.

**EXHIBITIONISM:** It is a sexual disorder by which one exhibits parts of the body (breasts, buttocks, thighs, abdomen, penis, etc) to a stranger to arouse sexual desire in him or her. It involves exposing parts or all of the body in order to captivate the attention of another. **BESTIALITY:** This is a sexual intercourse between a human being and an animal. it is a sexual aberration whereby one is sexually attracted to any animal, say, dog, goat, horse, etc. **VOYEURISM:** This is a psychosexual disorder in which a person derives sexual pleasure and gratification from looking at the naked bodies and genital organs or observing the sexual acts of others ([www.amassn.org](http://www.amassn.org)). The voyeur is usually hidden from the view of others.

**INCEST:** This refers to sexual relations between members of the same family cycle, say, father and daughter, uncle and niece, cousins, etc. This could be cemented or unconsented.

### **HOMOSEXUALITY: PLAGUE OF THE 21ST CENTURY**

Homosexuality simply means having sexual attraction or orientation toward people of the same sex. Homosexuality is the opposite of heterosexuality, which we have seen, is sexual orientation toward people of the opposite sex. Originally, female homosexuals are called lesbians, while male homosexuals have been regarded as gay. In recent years, however, the term gay has been applied to both homosexual men and women.

Homosexuality, also known as sodomy, has a biblical origin. It was the abomination that drove God to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, from where its other name sodomy is derived (Gen. 19: 4-5). Today, homosexuality appears in virtually all social contexts within different community settings, socioeconomic levels, ethnic and religious groups. The number of homosexuals in the population is difficult to determine, and reliable data do not exist. However, current estimates suggest that the term homosexual may apply to 2 to 4 percent of men generally. Estimates for lesbians are lower. This is because not all people who engage in homosexual activity necessarily identify themselves as homosexual.

The Judeo-Christian moral codes have always treated homosexuality as immoral and sinful. Other secular views regarded homosexuality as a pathology. By the beginning of the 20th century, psychoanalysts viewed homosexuals as the victims of faulty development. Austrian physician Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, considered homosexuality a deviant condition. Thus, during the first half of the 20th century, attitudes toward homosexuality were overwhelmingly negative. Homosexual activities were hidden and spoken of only in whispers, and homosexual behavior, even among cementing adults, was a criminal offense in most countries of the world. Homosexuals were subject to stereotypes and prejudice. Gay men were viewed as effeminate, lesbians were portrayed as mannish, and both were seen as being obsessed with sex, with little self-control or morality. It was only in 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association eliminated homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses and, in 1980, dropped it from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2009. © 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation).

However, at the turn of the century, this ignoble act gained clandestine momentum. In 2001 the Netherlands became the first country to legalize same-sex marriages, giving same-sex couples the same rights that heterosexual couples have in areas such as inheritance, taxes, divorce, and pension benefits. Belgium legalized same-sex marriages in 2003. Spain and Canada followed suit in 2005.

Canada became the fourth nation to legalize same-sex marriage and the first outside of Europe. Several other European countries recognize homosexual unions, although these unions are generally called civil unions or registered partnerships rather than marriages. The United Kingdom, for example, permitted civil partnerships beginning in December 2005. The same month the Constitutional Court of South Africa struck down the country's Marriage Act as unconstitutional because it did not permit same-sex marriage. The court stayed its ruling for one year to allow parliament to amend the act, but it stipulated that the ruling would go into effect regardless by December 2006. In December 2006 South Africa became the fifth country to legalize gay marriage. The federal district of Mexico City allowed civil unions for same-sex couples in late 2006. The campaign is still on by adherents of this inhuman practice. What an aberration of the good creation of God! What a derogation of the rationality of humanity even lower animals do not engage in homosexuality!

### **SOME EFFECTS OF SEXUAL DISORDER**

There are various ugly effects of the above sexual disorders. Firstly, the scourge of the dreaded HIV/AIDS pandemic and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases is on the rampage. Today, the statistics of those who are bewildered by these sexual mishaps is in the increase. Statistics are that worldwide there are over 340 million STDs a year. More than half of all STDs occur in adolescents and young adults aged 15-24 years (WHO).

There is also the negative effect of the embarrassment caused the perpetrators of these ills. Some have been arraigned before law courts, some have been beaten and battered when discovered, and others have had to spend plenty of money facing various legal litigations. These disorders have often led to divorce and family crises. This owes to the fact that long contacted and untreated STDs have often led to childlessness in marriages and the embarrassment caused by spouse's sexual misconducts. Over and above all, these disorders sever our relationship with God. The bible states it very clearly; no one who does any of these things will enter the kingdom of heaven.

### **THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND SEXUALITY**

Most world religions have sought to address the moral issues that arise from people's misguided sexuality in society and in human interactions today. Each major religion has developed moral codes covering issues of sexuality, morality, ethics etc., which have sought to guide people's sexual activities and practices. The influence of religion on sexuality is especially apparent in the long debated issue of gay marriage versus civil union.

Traditionally, Christianity has viewed human sexuality as primarily, though not exclusively, aimed at reproduction and as tainted by concupiscence after the fall.

Saint Paul spoke of the flesh as at war with the spirit and struggled to control it, though he saw the body itself as holy and a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). He stated that a celibate lifestyle was preferable for serving God undistracted, which was later cited as a reason for priests having to give up sex and marriage. Saint Augustine believed that sex was only justified in marriage with a view toward procreation, and that when aimed exclusively at pleasure it was tainted by sin. Saint Augustine speaks of the three goods of marriage, the good of fidelity (*lidei*), of offspring (*prolis*), and of the sacramental bond (*sacramenti*).

The Bible, precisely in the book of Genesis 2:24-25, states that a husband must stick to his wife and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. The becoming one flesh is the sexual act which according to this, does not lead into shame. On the other hand, only the husband and wife are supposed to be submissive sexually to their partner, no longer having authority over their own bodies, and cannot deny each other sex. The bible only permits sexual activity within a marriage between man and woman; thus, it is a sin to engage in homosexuality, bestiality (sexual relations with animals), incest (sexual relations within the immediate family structure), fornication (sex outside marriage), adultery (cheating on husband or wife), rape, and viewing pornography. It is believed that those who are sexually immoral are separated from God and will not share in God's inheritance upon death (Rathus, Geffrey and Lois 83).

The Catholic Church teaches that sexuality is "noble and worthy" and that it must be used in accordance with natural law. For this reason, all sexual activity must occur in the context of a marriage between a man and a woman and must not be divorced from the possibility of conception. All forms of sex not open to conception are considered intrinsically disordered and sinful, such as any sex with contraceptives, auto-sexual activity (e.g. masturbation), and homosexual acts. Recent currents of Catholic thought, such as John Paul "5 Theology of the Body, have placed special emphasis on the dignity and beauty of human sexuality, calling it a Special gift of God that is preserved and respected by reserving it for marriage and marriage alone. This is why human sexuality, especially of the catholic youth, must be harnessed to the service of God. But how can this be done?

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

The truism remains, that human sexuality ought to be harnessed to the service of God. The following are the steps that can help in this task. Firstly, Christians who will be good sexual vanguards of God need self-discipline. This entails self-discovery and self-mastery. It means the ability of each man and woman, boy and girl to realize himself/herself as a rational being, to have a sense of duty, responsibility and sobriety. It is this kind of discipline that Chinua Achebe describes aptly that it "does not invite supervision by an external force, but is imposed by the individual from within. Indeed, discipline is either self-discipline

or it is nothing at all” (Achebe 28). This means that before embarking on any sexual act, one must necessarily examine his/her conscience rather than dabble thoughtlessly into what would bring regrets and sorrow. The second basic ingredient is good foresight and setting of goals to be achieved. This is because the idle mind is the devil’s workshop. Thus, any fore sightless, goalless, ambitionless Christian cannot transform his/her sexuality to God’s service. Life is full of challenges, but behind every challenge, there opens a door of opportunity. It is only the mind that is goal driven and that has foresight and good ambition that overcomes these sexual challenges. It is the same goal drive and foresight that boosts one to diligence and hard work towards achieving whatever task one hopes to accomplish, even the control of one’s sexuality.

Another basic step to harness the sexuality for God is the striving to discover one’s talent and employing it adequately. Within the being of everyman reside treasures good talents which if discovered and properly harnessed, bring fortunes to the bearer and the society at large. The truth remains that life is actually what one makes of it, and what one makes of life always depends on how much of one’s talent he/she is able to discover. Izu asserts this fact when he prophetically observes that “your talents. And your dreams all seem set to propel you to attain the loftiest heights” (12). Unless the Christian discovers and harnesses his/her talent to his development, he/she continues to wallow in darkness and may never live a fulfilled life; and one who does not live a self-fulfilled life can scarcely work for God as he falls easy prey to various temptations.

One major ingredient that would build the Christian, especially youth sexuality, is the virtue of perseverance. In life, the people that win are those that keep swinging until they get a good place to settle well. Sometimes, the path that great people follow to the apex of their being makes the aura they possess. The more tough the path, the better the success attained. Many people however quit only when they are a step to success. Due to the toughness and seeming impossibility in attaining set goals. Yet history is replete with list of great people who attained heights in morality and other spheres of life due to their perseverance and long suffering. People like Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Carnegie, and Mahatma Gandhi. Martin Luther king Jr. and many others attained the heights they did because of one common denominator: perseverance. If the African Christian of today must become successful with handling his/her sexuality, then he/she needs to be persevering, to know that what seems like a stumbling block could be turned into a stepping stone, that what seems like failure could become a spring board to resounding success. Christians must learn to persevere in moral deeds.

Equally, Christians must safeguard themselves from the snare of pornography. They must refrain from it themselves and preach against it wherever they see it

practiced. They must in all sincerity, honesty; dexterity and seriousness denounce the evil of homosexuality. This is because engaging and advocating homosexuality means asking God “why did you create Adam and Eve rather than Steven and Anthony or Evelyn and Eucharist”. The corollary to this is that when the Christian youth reach the age of parentage, they must give adequate sex education to their children and wards.

Finally, the purity of the Virgin Mary is a lesson for the Christian to learn from. Catholic youth today must strive to be holy, just like the Lord their God is holy. They must make the Blessed Virgin Mary their model. They must eradicate any sexual disorder that ties them down. In all these, they must constantly seek the face of God and beg for his grace without which nothing is possible.

### **CONCLUSION**

Human sexuality or human sexual activities or human sexual practices or human sexual behavior refers to the manner in which humans experience express their sexual inclinations. In other words, it is the way in which we experience and express ourselves as sexual beings (Rathus et al 46). Issues regarding sexuality are issues that affect all and sundry. And one must add. They are issues that seem simplistic but are very delicate to handle. As an African Christian of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, you may have found yourself in the quagmire of one of the sexual disorders heated in this discourse. This is anti-Godly. The gift of sexuality is necessarily supposed to be harnessed to the glory of God.

For a conclusion, therefore, there are certain facts African Christians need to know. Although the world is full of sexual challenges, it is also full of the overcoming of these challenges. Although many doors may seem to get closed to us every now and then, especially when we seek to do the right thing, many more doors get open each time, but human beings look too long at the closed doors that they do not see the other doors that are open to them. Christians must strive to awaken the interior spiritual life that slumbers within them; they must arouse the unquenchable thirst to live differently that lies in them.

Christians must realize today that in the struggle to lead a moral sexual life, when they come to the deep waters, they are not meant to be drowned but to be cleansed. They must not allow today's seeming sexual contradictions overwhelm them, but consider more of what their gains as Christians are here and hereafter. Christians must live differently from the sexually contaminated world around them. For, as Christ would say, “unless your righteousness goes deeper than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, then you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mtt 5:20).



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