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# Sexuality and Spirituality in Women's Relationships: Preliminary Results of an Exploratory Survey

Gina Ogden, Ph.D

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# SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIPS

—Preliminary Results of an Exploratory Survey—

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**Gina Ogden, Ph.D.**

36 Shepard Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138

Phone: 617-4910603

FAX: 617-661-7360

E-Mail: [womanspirit@earthlink.net](mailto:womanspirit@earthlink.net)

**Visiting Scholar**

Wellesley Center for Women

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## *A*bstract

Respondents from the first large-scale survey designed to investigate the connections between sexuality and spirituality reported that their sexual responses were more than physical; they also involved meaningful interactions with themselves, their partners, and the intangible presence of Spirit, or the Divine. For these respondents, (n=3810) connecting sexual and spiritual experience was linked to personal and relational health, to age, and to religious background. Attitudes of male respondents indicated more convergences than differences with female respondents. The narrative material (1465 letters) suggests expanded language for describing sexual experience and also suggests a model for clinical assessment of the spiritual dimensions of sexual relationship. Survey data challenge both negative cultural beliefs about women's sexuality and the current trend to over-medicalize sexual experience. Further, they provide a new avenue for a woman-positive discourse about sexual relationship, and suggest that broadening the understandings of sexual partnership can help effect both personal and cultural healing.

A review of the literature on sexuality and spirituality is provided along with suggestions for secondary analyses of the survey data by future researchers.

## A Note on Terms Used

### **Sex, sexual, sexuality, sexual experience:**

The commonly held definitions of these terms involve responses of the body and the senses, in particular, orgasmic response to intercourse and other forms of genital stimulation. These definitions derive from quantitative and medical perspectives such as those of Alfred Kinsey, et al., 1948, 1953; William Masters and Virginia Johnson, 1968, 1972; and Helen Singer Kaplan, 1974, 1979. These perspectives continue to inform today's thinking about sexual function and dysfunction as evidenced by clinical definitions of dysfunction from the most recent *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2000) to the popular literature on women's sexual function (e.g., Laura Berman and Jennifer Berman, 2001).

In this paper, these terms are also used in a broader sense. They include subtle, non-physical dimensions, such as relational connection, emotional feelings, intentionality, imagination, memories, beliefs and judgments, spiritual connections, and transformation, that is, a sense of movement or change from one state of being to another. These non-physical dimensions are not unusual in the psychological literature, and are part and parcel of Abraham Maslow's construct of peak experiences (1964) and of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's study of "flow" in optimal experiences (1990). Including non-physical dimensions in defining sexual experience may be considered to be controversial, however, in that they are not represented as definitive in the mainstream sexological literature. There is ample contemporary evidence, though, both within clinical sexology (e.g., Judith Daniluk, 1998; Peggy Kleinplatz, 2001; Leonore Tiefer, 1991) and within the spiritual/religious literature on women's sexuality (e.g., Carter Heyward, 1989; Patricia Jung, et al., 2001; Joan Timmerman, 1992) to support the notion that these subtler, non-physical dimensions are important to women's sexual function and satisfaction.

For purposes of this paper, sexual experience and relationship may validly occur with or without a partner and may be considered to be positive (as in pleasure, excitement, and love), or negative (as in fear, forcing, and abuse)—a spectrum of sexual possibilities made clear by Rita Brock and Rebecca Parker (2002) and Wendy Maltz (1988).

### **Spirit, spiritual, spirituality, spiritual connection:**

These terms describe dimensions of experience that are beyond physical and sensory boundaries—what Carl Jung referred to as "irrational facts of experience." Spirituality appears in the formative conceptualizations of various psychologies (e.g., Roberto Assagioli, 1965; William James, 1929; Carl Jung, 1959) and continues to appear in psychological theory (e.g., Judith Herman, 1997), self-help (e.g., Pema Chodron, 1997), and current brain research (e.g., Antonio Damasio, 1999; Susan Greenfield, 1995).

The term "spirituality" is often associated—and even equated—with religion and religious faith and practice, as confirmed by recent scientific surveys on personal definitions of spirituality, spiritual intelligence, and "mindfulness" by Kenneth Pargament, 2000 and Richard Wollman, 2001. Other authors, such as Riane Eisler, 1995;

Marija Gimbutas, 1989; Daniel Helminiak, 1996; and Miranda Shaw, 1997, hold a different view: that spirituality and religion are distinct—spirituality being characterized most often by personal and individual inspiration and "knowing" and religion being characterized most often by specific community, cultural tradition, and ritual.

When used in conjunction with sexuality, the term "spirituality" has been variously associated with meaning (e.g., Joan Timmerman, 1992), love (e.g., Paul Tillich, 1954), intuition and extraordinary sensitivity, (e.g., Jalaja Bonheim, 1997; Margo Anand 1989), transcendence and transformation (e.g., Rita Brock, 1988; Carter Heyward, 1989), oneness with one's self, with a partner, and/or with universal or divine presence (Thomas Moore, 1998; James Nelson, 1978), and the experience of personal power (Marija Gimbutas, 1989; Audre Lorde, 1978; Linda Savage, 1999; Miranda Shaw, 1994, 1997).

This paper takes the position that "spirituality" implies a continuum of the complexities expressed in all of the interpretations above. It is used here as a term that is personally and variously defined by survey respondents, and that therefore may or may not include religion or religious faith or practice.

## SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIPS

—Preliminary Results of an Exploratory Survey—

This paper describes a survey designed to investigate the connections between sexuality and spirituality in the lived experience of women and men, connections that have been compromised and marginalized through history. The paper focuses on the importance of these connections in the relationships of women respondents and suggests that documenting these connections may help generate more inclusive research regarding both sexual and spiritual experience. Data from male respondents are included to acknowledge the significance of male partnership in the relational attitudes of many of the female respondents and also to indicate that spiritual values in sexual relationships were not solely the concerns of the female respondents (and hence open to marginalization), but of the male respondents as well.

The overall goal of this paper is to illustrate the realms of spiritual and relational potentials within the experience of women's sexuality. Specifically, this paper aims 1) to review the literature on sexuality and spirituality in support of the argument that acknowledging connections between sexuality and spirituality is important to the understanding of women's sexual relationships, 2) to explore the importance of these connections in the relationships of women respondents through an overview of seven preliminary survey results, 3) to propose a method for assessing the spiritual dimensions of sexual relationship based on these results, and 4) to promote the possibility of secondary in-depth analysis by future researchers by providing initial descriptive statistics of the survey results.

### Background

Mainstream Western belief systems routinely separate the concepts of sexuality and spirituality. This separation is part of a dualistic frame of reference traced back to pre-5<sup>th</sup> century BCE by historians and anthropologists (e.g., Riane Eisler, 1987; Marija Gimbutas, 1989). Consequently, in North America today, medicine, religion, law, politics, and the media all conceptualize sexuality as primarily concerned with physical performance, and spirituality as primarily concerned with moral and religious values. Such definitions have sanctified the systemic religious and political control of women's sexual behavior; results range from compulsory procreation to outlawed abortions. They have also fueled the current medicalization of sex as epitomized

by the Viagra boom that began in the late 1990s (media launch date: March 28, 1998). Moreover, dualistic definitions leave out much of what is most important to women's sexual experience, such as its meanings, along with spiritual and relational issues such as love, commitment, and intimacy that contemporary clinical evidence shows are crucial to women's sexual satisfaction (Judith Daniluk, 1998; Gina Ogden, 1994, 1998a, 1999, 2000; Leonore Tiefer, 1991).

Since the late 1970s, feminist scholars have argued for a reconceptualized frame of reference that would unite physical sexuality with its spiritual roots. These scholars include theologians and practitioners of both traditional and earth-based religions such as Margo Adler (1986), Bernadette Brooten (1996), Mary Daly (1978), Carol Christ (1987), Lucy Goodison (1990), Carter Heyward (1989), Mary Hunt (2000), and Charlene Spretnak (1982); physicians such as Christiane Northrup (1995); psychotherapists such as Judith Jordan (1987); holistic healers such as Jeanne Achterberg (1991), Barbara Brennan (1987), and Rosalyn Bruyere (1994); sexologists and writers on sexual politics such as Evelyn Accad (1991), Rebecca Alpert (1997), Emily Culpepper (1997), Oliva Espin (1997), Sheila Kitzinger (1983), and Miranda Shaw (1994); cultural historians such as Riane Eisler (1995), Paula Giddings (1984), and Marija Gimbutas (1989); and free thinkers and poets such as Natalie Angier (1999), Judith Grahn (1984), Audre Lorde (1978), and Starhawk (1989).

This paper will draw on the work of these and other scholars and will present a new form of evidence to affirm their thinking: survey data from thousands of respondents who reported that spirituality was an integral part of their sexual experience.

### The socioscientific discourse on sexuality and spirituality

The predominant socioscientific discourse on sexuality defines sex primarily as penis-vagina intercourse and secondarily as genital stimulation. Major sex surveys (e.g., Alfred Kinsey, et al., 1948, 1953; Edward Laumann, et al., 1994) along with medical sexologists (e.g., Laura Berman and Jennifer Berman, 2001; Helen Singer Kaplan, 1974; William Masters and Virginia Johnson, 1966, 1970; Susan Rako, 1996) define optimal sexual function as requiring a goal of physiological orgasm. Feminist sexologists point out that by emphasizing sexual performance, this discourse can produce false-positive diagnoses of sexual dysfunction (Judith Daniluk, 1998; Peggy Kleinplatz, 2001; Naomi

McCormick, 1994; Gina Ogden, 1999; Leonore Tiefer, et al., 2000). Moreover, this discourse supports a culturally created model of male sexual dominance that engenders domestic violence along with child and adult sexual abuse (Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, 1981; Riane Eisler, 1987, 1995; Wendy Maltz, 1988). Further, by focusing on sex defined primarily as penis-vagina intercourse, this discourse separates issues of sexual relationship from other life issues and marginalizes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals (Judith Daniluk, 1998; Patricia Jung, et al., 2001; Linda Savage, 1999). Since penis-vagina intercourse is a major avenue for the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, it may be argued that this socioscientific discourse on sexuality has also become a public health issue as well as an issue for sexuality education, clinical treatment, and ethical debate. Finally, this discourse limits scientific research on sexual experience by limiting the research questions to be explored (Peggy Kleinplatz, 2001; Gina Ogden, 1999; Leonore Tiefer, 1995). The synergies among the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of sexual experience remain unaddressed in the literature on sexually related measures (see Clive Davis and William Yarber, 1998).

### **The socioreligious discourse on sexuality and spirituality**

There is an emerging literature on religion and sexuality. This literature can be somewhat misleading as it tends to equate the notion of religious experience (often culturally and communally defined) with the notion of spiritual experience (often personally defined). For instance, the religious literature on sexuality typically describes an “embodied spirituality” that includes the ability to transcend ordinary experiential boundaries into realms usually attributed to “religious ecstasy.” For the most part, these works center on the consciousness of God in relationship to consciousness of the self (Jeanne Becher, 1990; Carl Jung, 1959; Paul Tillich, 1954; Phyllis Trible, 1978; Elizabeth Puttick, 1997).

The interfaces of religion, spirituality, and sexuality were initially defined by men such as Paul Tillich (1954) and Carl Jung (1959), followed more recently by James Nelson (1978), George Feuerstein (1989), and Thomas Moore (1998). These interfaces are now being increasingly defined by women (e.g., Jalaja Bonheim, 1997; Rita Brock, 1988; Rita Brock and Rebecca Parker, 2002; Riane Eisler, 1995). There are emerging feminist theologies that connect the body with personal power and self-determination (e.g., Carter Heyward, 1989; Mary Hunt, 2000; Joan Timmerman, 1992) and with

social justice (e.g., Rita Brock, 1988; Patricia Jung, et al., 2001; Kathleen Sands, 2000). The literature on transcendent and transformative sexuality includes the mystical erotic “raptures” of St. Teresa of Avila (c. 1575) along with contemporary works on ecstatic sexuality and Tantric practices (Rebecca Alpert, 1997; Margo Anand, 1989; Jalaja Bonheim, 1997; Zsuzanna Budapest, 1989; Audre Lorde, 1978; Miranda Shaw, 1994, 1997; Marianna Torgovnick, 1997). Insights on the connections among religion, sexuality, and spirituality are often based on the sexual energy and ritual implicit in Goddess worship (Marija Gimbutas, 1989; Linda Savage, 1999; Miranda Shaw, 1994, 1997). Riane Eisler’s 1995 book, *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body* was the first anthropological and cultural history of sexuality and spirituality. The study that is the subject of this paper is the first to investigate sexuality and spirituality using survey results from respondents from across North America.

### **Creating a Survey on Sexuality and Spirituality**

My experience over 25 years as sexuality therapist, educator, and researcher has been at variance with the widespread view that sexuality and spirituality are inherently separate from one another. Most of the women who have talked with me have expressed the importance of the non-physical aspects of their sexual experience along with the physical aspects such as intercourse and orgasm. That is, whether they were describing positive or negative sexual experience, they were vitally concerned with how sex felt and what it meant in their lives and their relationships. Conversely, I found the separation of spiritual and sexual experience to be a major source of the sexual problems and dysfunctions for which many of these women had sought help. These problems included inhibited sexual desire, orgasmic difficulties, genital pain, and vaginismus (involuntary vaginal spasms). They also included cultural conditioning, lack of information, relationship discrepancies and problems, abuse, addictive behaviors, and pleasure anxiety—a condition described by psychia-

orgasm to the exclusion of the larger issues of the emotional feelings and spiritual meanings connected to trist Wilhelm Reich (1942) as a generalized fear of feeling good.

Coincidentally, I observed that sex surveys themselves had contributed to a generally narrow concept of sexual normality, by focusing on genital stimulation and sexual experience. Julia Eriksen’s 1999 *Kiss and Tell: Surveying Sex in the Twentieth Century* outlines a century of

such survey bias. Eriksen points out that even the most methodologically revered sex surveys, such as those by Alfred Kinsey, et al. (1948, 1953), and Edward Laumann, et al. (1994), had made almost no attempt to explore questions beyond those aspects of sex that could be readily counted and measured: numbers of partners, kinds of genital stimulation, occurrences of orgasm, and the like. These limited survey perspectives reinforced the historical male-medical bias of sex research. Coincidentally, they also served to discredit data from sex surveys by women—such as the 1976 *Hite Report* on female sexuality—for their “unscientific” methodology and for their “anecdotal” evidences of emotions and meanings. Perhaps most significantly discredited, even ignored, were data from the first American sex survey, by Dr. Clelia Mosher, whose study of 45 married women between 1892 and 1912 revealed that many of these wives were sexually vital and interested in an age generally regarded as the height of female prudishness. Mosher's findings were corroborated by Katharine Bement Davis's *Factors in the sex lives of twenty two hundred women* (1929), survey results that also evidenced that women could possess “sex drives” as distinct and natural as men's, and could enjoy sex with male partners, with female partners, and with themselves, that is, on masturbation.

In contrast, since the 1930s, data from large, institutionally funded sex surveys by men, including the *Kinsey Reports* on male and female sexual behavior (1948, 1953) and the Laumann study of American sexual practices (1994) have been widely circulated in media that range from scientific monographs to talk-show television. Their findings are routinely cited to define sexual experience as primarily physiological, to catalogue women's sexual inadequacies, to shape heterosexist models of sexual relationship, to promote marriage as the default template for healthy partnership, and to further the medicalization of sex, from behavior modification to Viagra. Moreover, they have been used to limit the legal definition of “sex” to penis-vagina intercourse, which in many states has narrowed definitions of incest, rape, and sexual abuse. Who can forget Anita Hill's 1991 protracted testimony about what constituted sexual harassment, or President Clinton's 1999 tactical evasion about his encounters with Monica Lewinsky: “I never had sexual relations with that woman.”

With this history in mind, I reasoned that an exploratory survey of contemporary attitudes about the integration of sexuality and spirituality would address some important and underresearched aspects of sexual response, such as love, oneness, and transcendence. This might serve two

purposes. First, it might determine the degree of interest in a subject that had never before been systematically surveyed on a large scale. Next, even if the results could be labeled as primarily anecdotal by scientific standards dictated by the male medical model of research, they might generate information that could open further inquiry into broader definitions of human sexual response.

An independent exploratory study was completed in 1999—the first large-scale survey of the emotional, spiritual, cultural, and relational dimensions of sexual relationships. Although it was not based on a randomly selected sample, the number of respondents (3810) places it among the largest U.S. scientific sex surveys, and the 1465 letters spontaneously returned with these surveys constitute the first descriptions of the interfaces of sexual and spiritual experience from women and men all over North America. (A copy of the survey questionnaire is appended to this paper.)

### Developing the survey

The 45 survey questions were developed between 1995 and 1997 in consultation with colleagues who offered various valuable perspectives. Scientific perspectives were offered from Beverly Whipple at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey and Robert Hawkins at The State University of New York at Stony Brook; holistic and feminist perspectives from Mary Krueger at Bowling Green State University, and Peggy Kleinplatz at Ottawa University; religious perspectives from Robert Francoeur at Fairleigh Dickinson University; advice on survey design from Elaine Young at Massachusetts General Hospital and Carol Ellison at the Institute for Imaginal Studies; statistical advice from Douglas Wallace at the University of California at San Francisco. Moral support from The Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality was important to developing the survey, as was the luxury of living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where I could hone my own perspectives on spirituality through attending lectures at the Harvard Divinity School and conduct a comprehensive literature search while a Visiting Scholar at the Radcliffe Institute's Schlesinger Library (1999-2000).

Every aspect of the study was self-funded. The advantage of this was the freedom to explore this area of inquiry without having to answer to an institutional funding source, which, in the name of academic rigor, would surely have demanded that survey questions be based on those already tested for statistical reliability in other surveys and instruments. (As Julia Eriksen (1999) observes, the majority of American surveys of sexual

attitudes have essentially retried the same questions about intercourse and genital stimulation based on the male medical model described above.) On the theory that such statistically reliable questions may have evoked only a fraction of women's sexual experience, I chose instead to base questions on larger concepts such as commitment, love, and meaning, that empirical data and my clinical observations had revealed were vitally important to women's relationships. Questions for this survey addressed both sexual and spiritual experiences. They also addressed the common denominators of connection, communication, and satisfaction, and of relationship to self, partner, and a "higher power," which was the term I chose to represent the realm of spirit. Finally, I decided not to limit the survey to women, but to survey men and transgendered people as well, on the theory that their perspectives were crucial to a broad understanding of women's experience of sexuality and spirituality.

### Phases of piloting the survey

There were three phases of piloting the survey. The first phase yielded 229 surveys collected during 1996, mainly from women health professionals who attended sexuality trainings and workshops I conducted. The second consisted of two focus groups totaling twelve women journalists and authors from the National Writers Union. The final pilot group consisted of ten women colleagues in academia and the mental health field. Comments from these pilot groups helped focus the questionnaire, especially to address potential resistances to the idea of connecting sexuality and spirituality, and the potential confusion of spirituality with religion. One pilot respondent phrased this view vividly: "I can fill out the sex part, but the spirituality part is really scary—my grandmother was an Italian Catholic, and I can feel her turning over in her grave right now." As a result, two questions (#19 and #20 on the attached survey) were added to address distinctions between spiritual and religious experience, adapted from an early draft of Kenneth Pargament's (2000) spirituality survey. A third question (#18) was added to address specific connections between religious worship and sexual romance: the symbols and rituals common to both. This was adapted from a premise in Riane Eisler's (1995) research on the historical and ongoing links between sacred and sexual rituals. In addition, other questions were refocused so that they were grounded in everyday terms likely to be understood by potential survey respondents, especially women.

Legal advice was obtained from a National Writers Union attorney to ensure that the language introducing the survey would constitute permission for the educational use of both quantitative and qualitative data while also protecting respondents' rights to privacy and confidentiality.

### Survey distribution and cohorts of respondents

The final survey was distributed in 1997 and 1998 in three phases. The first phase involved face-to-face distribution of the survey to a spectrum of groups that are known to have divergent views on both sexuality and spirituality. Distribution of 2000 surveys by this means accounted for 1098 responses for a response rate of 55%. Seventy percent (n=767) of these responses were from women, 30% (n=255) from men, and one from a transgendered individual. To reach these groups I enlisted the aid of eleven colleagues. Four colleagues collected 577 completed questionnaires from undergraduate and graduate students in sexology, family therapy, and theology. Another colleague collected 32 questionnaires from Catholic, Methodist, Mormon, and Unitarian Universalist clergy members. Another collected 26 questionnaires from incarcerated male sex offenders, while yet another collected them from 13 female sex offenders. My own data collection efforts resulted in completed questionnaires from 344 nurses, family therapists, and other health professionals. Five other colleagues and I collected the 106 remaining questionnaires from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals, sex workers, sexual abuse survivors, and homemakers.

When this face-to-face distribution was well under way, *New Age* magazine (presently titled *Body and Soul* magazine) offered to publish the questionnaire in its January, 1998 issue (the follow-up article of these results is Ogden, 1999a). The circulation of this magazine at that time was approximately 500,000; the advertised readership included men and women from ages 20-50 who tended to be politically liberal and also interested in holistic health and spiritual relationships. The magazine had recently published a survey on spirituality by Richard Wollman (which became the basis for his 2001 book, *Thinking With Your Soul: Spiritual Intelligence and Why it Matters*) and were eager to follow it with a survey on sexuality and spirituality. The questionnaire in *New Age* accounted for 1285 completed responses, 78% (n=1007) from women, 21% (n=270) from men.

These were mailed in over the three months following publication.

Shortly thereafter, *New Woman* magazine offered to publish the same questionnaire in its July, 1998 issue (the follow-up article of these results is Ogden, 1998b). The circulation of this magazine at that time was approximately 1,500,000; the advertised readership consisted primarily of women under 40 whose attitudes ranged from conservative to liberal and whose interests tended toward self improvement, including how to enhance their sexual relationships. The magazine was undergoing a shift in editorial management and was eager to branch out beyond its usual performance-focused articles on sexuality. By October, 1998, publication in *New Woman* had accounted for 1427 survey responses, 94% (n=1336) from women, 4% (n=59) from men, and less than 1% (n=10) from transgendered individuals.

Although it might be valuable to compare the survey results from the three different cohorts of the sample, this task is not within the scope of this paper. Nor is it within the paper's scope to compare subgroups of the sample. Rather, the paper will focus on results of the sample as a whole, concentrating on results relevant to women's relationships.

### The narrative data

Remarkably, because the survey questionnaire required no narrative replies, 38% of these respondents—1465 of them—sent letters, poems, and stories describing their personal experiences of love, sex, and intimacy; guilt, abuse, and recovery. Many more jotted informal notes in the margins of the survey itself. Some were eloquent, some were brief and down to earth; most consisted of one-to-four paragraphs that detailed respondents' thoughts about sexuality and spirituality, how they discovered that sex could be spiritual, and their most memorable experiences. With a few exceptions, the women's narratives tended to be longer and more detailed than the men's. As a whole these documents constitute an astonishing body of new information, the first to differentiate between satisfaction levels in sexual experiences that contained a spiritual component and sexual experiences that lacked spirituality.

Personal distribution of the survey accounted for only 2% (n=39) of these narrative documents, 77% of these (n=30) from women and 23% (n=9) from men. Responses to the survey in the magazines accounted for the

rest. One can speculate that publication of the survey in the magazines served as permission for respondents to send their stories, or that respondents imagined the magazines might publish their stories.

Sixty-three percent (n=911) of the narrative documents accompanied the *New Age* survey responses, 83% of these (n=760) from women, 17%, (n=151) from men. Most of these narratives reflected the views of the magazine's advertised readership. Many respondents described themselves as health professionals, teachers, or artists, with counterculture interests that led them to favor "alternative" modalities such as meditation and energy healing, Eastern religions such as Buddhism, and earth-based religions such as Wicca. As a whole, their letters expressed comfort with the idea of connecting sexuality and spirituality, and their descriptions tended to be imaginative and sophisticated.

Thirty-five percent (n=515) of the narratives accompanied the *New Woman* survey responses, 98% of these (n=501) from women, 2% (n=14) from men, and two from transgendered individuals. Occupations of the writers were somewhat more traditional than the *New Age* respondents, however, representing more business people and homemakers. As a whole, their letters were as open and frank as the *New Age* narratives, but characterized by more ingenuousness about connecting sexuality and spirituality and sometimes anxiety in describing their experiences. For instance, there were letters from readers who had never before told their stories, many asking for validation, advice, or help. Letters describing affairs (only 34 of them, but written with a great deal of energy) spoke of shame and guilt as well as excitement and pleasure.

### Recording the survey data

Coding of all the statistical data into SPSS Base 10.0 was supervised by Douglas Wallace, a research psychologist at The University of California at San Francisco. The *New Woman* statistical data were entered by Market Probe, Inc., in New York City. All the other statistical data were entered by three graduate students in family therapy at the University of Connecticut as part of their work-study program. Transcription of all the narrative data into MS Word was supervised by me. The *New Woman* narrative data were entered by the magazine's editorial assistants. All the other narrative data were entered by three independent assistants hired by me. All originals have been kept in locked files in my office.

## Survey biases and limitations

To put this investigation into context, it is important to note the survey biases and limitations at the outset. First, the survey questionnaire was focused on non-physical aspects of sexual experience, especially the emotional, relational, and spiritual aspects. Survey data are therefore not representative of individuals for whom physical aspects of sex were and are of primary importance, nor are these data directly comparable to findings from sex surveys that focused on physical aspects of sexuality. Second, the survey questionnaire was distributed by means of a snowball convenience sample and by publication in two magazines, not by methods that would create a random or probability sample. Although the sample was large, purposely diverse, and geographically varied, it is considered skewed by scientific survey standards, and therefore its results cannot be construed as representative of the U.S. population as a whole. Finally, this is the first large survey investigation of the connections between sexuality and spirituality. The data gathered must therefore be considered preliminary rather than statistically significant. All of these biases limit the generalizability of the results. Hopefully, however, they will also serve as starting points for possible future research in this subject.

### The Survey Sample

In total, the survey amassed 3810 respondents. Eighty-two percent of the respondents were women (n=3110), 18% were men (n=684), fewer than 1% were transgendered (n=11), and five respondents did not specify their sex. Respondents ranged in age from 16-86 (average age is 38) and included women and men from every state in the U.S. and from two Canadian provinces (Ontario and British Columbia). Forty-one percent of the respondents (n=1562) gave their names and 16% (n=605) gave contact information, so that some longitudinal follow-up is possible. These respondents identified as conservatives and liberals, church-goers and atheists, teachers, nurses, parents, students, artists, and laborers. They also revealed identities less likely to be talked about in everyday conversation. They were lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, sexual abuse survivors and sex offenders, addicts and recovering addicts, survivors of religious cults, incarcerated prisoners, sex workers, crossdressers, women and men engaged in sexless marriages and clandestine affairs.

Interestingly, in view of the controversial nature of the survey, the questions these respondents most often chose not to answer did not have to do with either sexuality or spirituality. The three subjects most often left blank were income (by 17% of the respondents, n=657), occupation (by 12%, n=420), and age (by 10%, n=393). These are categories that respondents of surveys on other subjects have also been reluctant to answer. But in this survey, these omissions stand in odd contrast to questions respondents might well have been even more reluctant to answer, such as the question about sexual orientation, which was answered by all but 1% of the respondents (n=34), and those about childhood and adult sexual abuse, which were answered by all the respondents.

Respondents' occupations reflect a fair amount of diversity in how they lived their lives. Of the 88% of the sample (n=3390) who stated their occupations, 45% (n=1511) were white collar workers and business people; 610 were students and 208 were teachers, artists, dancers, writers, and editors, which totaled 24% (n=818) representing education and the arts; 15% (n= 510) were professionals, such as physicians, nurses, social workers, psychologists, sexologists, priests, ministers, pastoral counselors, lawyers, and engineers; 11% (n=388) were skilled and unskilled laborers, such as truck drivers, food service employees, janitors, and gardeners; 6% (n=191) were housewives; 5% (n=159) were in nontraditional occupations, such as midwives, hands-on healers, psychics, and priestesses of earth-based religions; 3% (n=117) were retired; less than 1% (n=27) were unemployed, and 6 listed "disabled" as their occupation.

The **table on page 10** shows averages and percentages for this group of respondents in terms of their age, income, education, race/ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation, and experience of sexual abuse. It also shows how these respondents compare with the U.S. population in the categories in which figures are available. Note that the national figures quoted may not accurately reflect the population of the U.S. (for instance, information on race, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation, and sexual abuse is not required on the national census). Therefore, these figures are offered only for a generalized sense of comparison with the survey sample.

Table 1.

	Survey Sample			U.S. Population			
	Women	Men	Trans-gender	Total	Women	Men	Total
Number/ %	3110/82%	684/18%	11/<1%	<100%	51%	49%	100%
Average age	38	36	41	38			35
Average Annual Income	\$54,505	\$62,164					\$41,994
College degree or higher	2082/67%	347/51%	9/82%	64%			24%
Race-Ethnicity							
Caucasian	2541/82%	563/82%	6/55%	82%			77%
Multi-ethnic	122/ 4%	22/ 3%	1/ 9%	4%		-	
African-American	98/ 3%	27/ 4%	1/ 9%	4%			13%
Hispanic	83/ 3%	20/ 3%	1/ 9%	3%			13%
Native American	36/ 1%	10/ 1%	1/ 9%	1%			2%
Asian	40/ 1%	11/ 1%	1/ 9%	1%			4%
Other	35/ 1%	35/ 5%	-	2%			7%
Childhood Religion							
Catholic	1152/37%	303/44%	4/36%	38%			x
Protestant	1071/34%	201/29%	4/36%	33%			x
Fundamentalist	210/ 7%	34/ 5%	-	6%			x
Jewish	142/ 5%	34/ 5%	1/ 9%	5%			x
Buddhist	14/<1%	1/<1%	-	<1%			x
Mormon	43/ 1%	7/<1%	-	<1%			x
Atheist/ Agnostic	156/ 5%	23/ 5%	-	5%			x
None	93/ 4%	26/ 5%	-	4%			x
Other	148/ 5%	46/ 7%	-	6%			x
Adult Religion							
Catholic	562/18%	171/25%	2/18%	19%			28%
Protestant	588/19%	112/16%	3/27%	18%			55%
Fundamentalist	143/ 5%	21/ 3%	-	4%			x
Jewish	85/ 3%	20/ 3%	2/18%	3%			2%
Buddhist	81/ 3%	17/ 2%	-	3%			x
Mormon	29/<1%	7/<1%	-	<1%			x
Atheist/ Agnostic	119/ 4%	44/ 6%	1/9%	4%			x
None	735/24%	133/19%	1/ 9%	23%			x
Other	625/20%	147/21%	-	20%			x
Political Affiliation							
Liberal	1807/58%	339/50%	7/64%	57%			x
Conservative	520/17%	161/24%	3/27%	18%			x
Pro-choice 2479/80%	2479/80%	502/73%	6/55%	78%	30%	25%	27%
Anti-abortion	418/13%	97/14%	4/36%	14%	20%	17%	19%
Sexual Orientation							
Heterosexual	2693/86%	601/88%	6/55%	87%	90%	91%	90%
Lesbian/ Gay	130/ 4%	37/ 5%	3/27%	4%	4%	3%	4%
Bisexual	228/ 7%	37/ 5%	2/18%	7%	4%	5%	5%
Sexual Abuse							
in childhood	851/27%	83/12%	2/18%	25%	20%	12%	16%
in adulthood	453/15%	26/ 4%	3/27%	13%			x

x = data not available

Discrepancies in numbers represent responses missing from system and/or percentages rounded off to the nearest decimal.

National data extrapolated from US Census 2000: <http://censtats.census.gov/data/US/01000.pdf>.Abortion data from [www.albany.edu/sourcebook/](http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/)

Sexual abuse data from David Finkelhor (1994).

## Sex and gender

That 82% of the survey respondents were women far exceeds the national average—the 2000 National Census shows that women comprise 50.9% of the U.S. population and that men comprise 49.1%. This preponderance of female respondents is not surprising, as the survey was distributed to groups of nurses, social workers, and family therapists who were predominantly women. Also, one of the magazines through which the survey was distributed, *New Woman*, was and is specifically targeted to women. Moreover, the kinds of questions asked on this survey were about emotions and spirituality and therefore more likely to appeal to women than to men. The remarkable fact was that 684 men actually did respond to the survey, and that the quality of their responses was generally open and sympathetic with its premises.

## Age

The median age of respondents (age 38 for women, age 36 for men) is slightly higher than the national average of 35. The age range of the survey sample was 18-86, with enough respondents representing each decade to warrant an analysis of the similarities and differences among various age groups.

## Income

The annual income of respondents (\$54,505 for women, \$62,164 for men) is higher than the \$41,994 per household or \$50,046 per family reported in the 2000 National Census. This discrepancy possibly reflects that the survey was distributed to professional and college audiences and to readers of relatively high-end magazines. It also reflects that a few survey respondents reported very high annual incomes; but for these, the average income of respondents would have been closer to the national average. Income did not surface as an issue in respondents' letters, and no attempt has been made in this paper to analyze income.

## Education

The 64% of respondents who reported attaining a college degree or higher is well above the national average of 24%. This discrepancy may be even wider, given that 16% (n=610) of the respondents were collegestudents at the time they filled out the survey. Like income, education was not named as an issue in

respondents' letters, therefore no attempt has been made in this paper to analyze the role of education in the attitudes of the survey sample.

## Race/ Ethnicity

Consistent with the national average, respondents were primarily white. The percentage of Caucasians (82%) was somewhat higher than the 77% national average, however, and the percentage of African Americans (3%) and Hispanics (3%) was lower than the 13% national average. Not enough data specific to race and ethnicity was offered in the narratives to warrant major scrutiny in this paper. That said, it is important to acknowledge that the perspectives of different races and ethnicities offer potentially rich resources for furthering understandings about sexuality and spirituality. Among the authors who have begun to explore these resources are Rita Brock (1988), Oliva Espin (1997), Paula Giddings (1984), and Gail Wyatt (1987).

## Religion

The percentage of Catholics (19%) and Protestants (18%) among respondents was considerably lower than the national average (28% Catholic and 55% Protestant), while the percentage of Jews (3%) was about the same. It is difficult to make other meaningful comparisons between respondents' religious data and national averages, as the focus of this survey differed from that of the National Census. For instance, the Census did not ask about religion of childhood, yet the table above indicates conspicuous shifts in survey respondents' childhood religious affiliations and their religious affiliations as adults. About one-half to one-third of the respondents who were brought up as Catholics, Protestants, Fundamentalists, Jews, and Mormons were no longer members of those religions by the time they filled out the survey. The greatest migrations were toward a religion not specified on the questionnaire, i.e., "Other" or else toward no organized religion at all. Attitudes and changing attitudes about religion figured heavily enough in respondents' narratives about their sexual experience to warrant further scrutiny in this paper.

## Politics and views on abortion

Politically, most of the survey respondents indicated that they were liberal (57% n=2153). No reliable data from the National Census, nor from the Democratic or

Republican National Committees can be found to compare with this percent. Most survey respondents also indicated that they were pro-choice (78%), although many commented that these labels were over-simplifications. Twenty-one percent wrote of more complex political alliances, such as: "I don't identify with a particular party, I vote on the issues." Six percent wrote of more complex views on the issue of abortion, such as: "I am for abortion when the life of the mother is at stake." Only 14% indicated that they were anti-abortion. Averages prepared by the Gallup Organization for the 2000 *Sourcebook* indicate a much lower percentage of the national population reporting pro-choice attitudes (27%) and a somewhat higher percentage indicating anti-abortion attitudes (19%). Not enough survey data was collected about political affiliation to warrant further scrutiny in this paper.

### Sexual orientation

Eighty-seven percent (n=3300) described themselves as heterosexual and 11% (n=437) as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or "other"—slightly higher than the estimated U.S. average of 9%. This may or may not be a meaningful difference, as accurate statistics on sexual orientation are notoriously difficult to gather. One reason for the difficulty is that sexual orientation may be fluid over the lifespan. For instance, a woman may identify as heterosexual through her childbearing years and later change her identity to bisexual or lesbian. The narrative data bear out this fluidity, describing instances of women connecting sexuality with spirituality when they shifted from their sexual relationships with men to sexual relationships with women. Another reason for the difficulty in gathering accurate data on sexual orientation is that both women and men have been known to misrepresent themselves on surveys to protect themselves from censure. One couple, seeing humor in the rigid distinctions ascribed to sexual orientation, queried in their survey response: "Heterosexual? Homosexual? Are you sure? What about elves? We are both Celtic and under 5'6". Material on sexual orientation will be incorporated into the data on relationship.

### Sexual abuse

About one in three survey respondents reported that they had experienced some form of sexual abuse—25% as children (n=936), 13% as adults (n=482), 34% as both (n=1295). This exceeds the national figure available for sexual abuse survivors: an estimated 16% of children under age 18 (Finkelhor, 1994). The effects of sexual

abuse were often and feelingly described in the narrative data. Yet, like much of the rest of these data, these descriptions increased the complexity of the results rather than offering clear and simple distinctions. For instance, these narratives described the debilitating consequences of incest, rape and other violations. Yet they also described the redemptive qualities of recovery. A 34-year-old Nevada psychologist summed these up in her letter: "While in treatment for 'adults molested as children' I realized the 'gift' of being molested...once I cleared the anger, shame, hatred. Forced me to love my body and soul for its life force, pleasure, creativity and power." Material on sexual abuse and recovery from sexual abuse enrich the data on both health and relationship.

### When respondents first connected sexuality and spirituality

Timing of respondents' first connections of sexuality and spirituality is a variable that was not captured on the questionnaire. Nonetheless, an indicator of sorts was reflected in the narratives. Some respondents wrote that they had been aware of the connections from earliest memory ("I learned from the good, respectful, and sexy marriage of my parents." "I grew up on a farm and connected sex with birth, death, etc."). Some wrote that they discovered it late in life (a 55-year-old wrote: "I discovered the connection when I was 48") and some as recently as "last week." Some wrote that filling out the survey was what had helped them make the connection. Others wrote that they were acutely aware that there was a profound connection between sexuality and spirituality even though they had never personally experienced its full power. A few wrote that they saw no connection between sexuality and spirituality, either because they perceived sex as "dirty" and "manipulative," or because their belief systems would not allow them to link the physicality of sexual activity with spiritual matters.

### Survey Results and Their Potential Contributions

Survey results are drawn from both statistical and narrative data. The seven observations below challenge current conservative beliefs about the sexual limitations of women and medical assessments of women's sexual pathologies. They also offer indicators for exploring a broader understanding of sexual response and experience, and suggest that such broader understandings could further both personal and cultural healing.

### 1) Most respondents reported that they connected sexual and spiritual experience

Most respondents reported that their sexual experiences consisted of more than physical sensations and activities; they also consisted of non-physical phenomena, which in this survey, were grouped under the umbrella term: “spiritual.” Non-physical phenomena listed by respondents included love (81%, n= 3072), safety, (59%, n=2244), and oneness with a power greater than self (58%, n=2018). Many respondents agreed with statements that sexual experience is more than physical. Eighty-five percent (n=3224) agreed that: “Sex is physical, but it also involves love, romance, even mystical union.” Seventy-eight percent (n=2953) agreed that: “Sex is much more than intercourse; it involves all of me—body, mind, heart, and soul. Forty-five percent (n=1714) agreed that: “It’s through my senses that I often experience God”

This degree of connecting sexuality and spirituality challenges the limitations of current physiological definitions of sexual function and satisfaction

and of performance-based norms such as intercourse and orgasm. It suggests the validity of researching sexual response that involves more than physical stimulation; that also involves relationship with self, partner, and a higher power beyond both.

### 2) Respondents who connected sexuality and spirituality reported more indicators of health than those who did not connect sexuality and spirituality

Sixty-nine percent of the survey respondents (n=2484) indicated that sex always or sometimes needed a spiritual element to be satisfying. These respondents also reported a high incidence of factors that are generally associated with personal and relational health: acceptance and love, oneness with a partner, honesty, intense inner vitality, integration, oneness with self, and oneness with a power greater than self. In contrast, 9% of the survey respondents (n= 306) indicated that sex seldom or never needed a spiritual element to be satisfying. These respondents reported a lower incidence of the above factors. **Table 2, below**, puts these into perspective.

**Table 2**

#### Respondents’ Reports of Sexuality and Spirituality, and Personal and Relational Health

	For respondents who reported: “Sex always or sometimes needs a spiritual element” 69% of respondents (n=2484)	For respondents who reported: “Sex seldom or never needs a spiritual element” 9% of respondents (n=306)
<b>Sexual experience involved these factors:</b>		
Acceptance and love	88%, (n=2183)	67%, (n=205)
Oneness with a partner	87%, (n=2115)	76%, (n=217)
Honesty	86%, (n=2068)	76%, (n=208)
Intense inner vitality	84%, (n=2008)	59%, (n=163)
Integration	79%, (n=1833)	59%, (n=160)
Oneness with self	76%, (n=1797)	60%, (n=167)
Oneness with a power greater than self	69%, (n=1594)	25%, (n= 65)

Discrepancies in numbers represent responses missing from system and/or percentages rounded off to the nearest decimal.

In addition to reporting the above factors, many respondents acknowledged that connecting sexuality and spirituality affirmed the healing and redemptive qualities of positive sexual interaction: For instance, 47% of the total sample (n=1774) agreed with the following statement: "For people who have been sexually disappointed or hurt, consciously giving and receiving sexual pleasure can be healing."

These observations question current medical and mental health practices that separate sexuality from personal and relational health, whether through avoiding sexual issues entirely or through focusing solely on dysfunctions of intercourse. They suggest specific areas of focus for expanding understandings of the connections between sexual experience and health.

### **3) Older respondents reported more connections between sexuality and spirituality than younger respondents**

Older respondents reported more connections between sexuality and spirituality than younger respondents did, and they also employed a greater number of strategies such as eye-contact, meditation, and sharing deep feelings to incorporate spirituality into their sexual experiences. Age differences in the integration of sexual and spiritual experience reported by respondents were sometimes striking. For instance, 41% (n=77) of respondents age 60 and older reported that "sex always needs to have a spiritual element to be satisfying" compared with 15% (n=136) of respondents under age 30. Similarly, 58% (n=83) of respondents age 60 and older reported having "experienced God in a moment of sexual ecstasy" compared with 23% (n=198) of respondents under age 30.

Reports of these respondents run counter to the routine pathologizing (and even caricaturing) of sex for post-menopausal women, and also for their post-coattail male partners. They challenge the popular notion that sexual desire and satisfaction necessarily diminish after mid-life. These reports suggest that further research on the scope of sexual desire for women at mid-life and beyond is warranted along with further research on women's increasing capacity for multidimensional sexual satisfaction as they mature. These reports also suggest that spiritual connection may be a viable alternative to purely performance-based sex as women grow older. Finally, these reports suggest that prescribing hormone replacement and Viagra may be less than universally effective. These pharmaceuticals are designed to prolong the

capacity for successful sexual intercourse, but not the capacity for sexual desire and satisfaction or for vital erotic relationship.

### **4) Connecting sexuality and spirituality was often experienced in the context of respondents' religious beliefs**

Many survey respondents reported that religious beliefs were a modifying force in their sexual and spiritual choices. They wrote that religious beliefs affected their sexual attitudes and behavior, detailing nuances of reverence, hope, and fear, along with the dos and don'ts of marriage, affairs, sexual orientation, conception, abortion, self-control, body image, the merging of body and soul, and overall "goodness." As in other survey results, the responses were complex. Some respondents wrote about these sexual issues from the perspectives of their childhood religions, some from the perspective of religions they had chosen as adults. Some respondents clearly differentiated between spirituality and religion in regard to sexual issues, others fused the idea of spirituality with religious doctrine. Respondents reported that some religious beliefs about sex fostered love, intimacy, altruism, and oneness with the divine and other beliefs fostered sexism, guilt, shame, and separation from self. Respondents who changed from their childhood religions tended to support more connections between sexuality and spirituality than those who remained with their religions of origin. The trend among these respondents to question the institutional religious values of their childhoods is supported by the survey data. For instance, fewer respondents reported that they found significance in religion (23%, n=876) than in spirituality (83%, n=3162). Narrative data suggest a further trend in this sample of survey respondents: that those who questioned their childhood institutional religious values may also have questioned other belief systems and have sought more personal connection in their spiritual lives as adults, including sexuality as part and parcel of their spiritual quests.

### **5) Male as well as female respondents reported connecting sexual and spiritual experience**

The 684 men who responded to the survey reported many of the same spiritual dimensions of sexual desire, arousal, communication, and satisfaction that women respondents reported, dimensions that were corroborated in their narrative material. This result was

unexpected because as Murray Research Center's Jaqueline James has pointed out (1997), so many studies in the last three decades have pointed to categorical differences rather than convergences between men and women, masculinity and femininity (Sandra Bem, 1993; Eleanor Maccoby and Carol Jacklin, 1974; Deborah Tannen, 1990). Investigation on sex and gender differences includes not only the mainstream sex surveys cited earlier in this paper but also feminist theory spearheaded by Jean Baker Miller (1976), Nancy Chodorow (1978), and Carol Gilligan (1982), feminist sex research (e.g., Judith Daniluk, 1998; Carol Tavris, 1992; Leonore Tiefer, 1991), and also brain research (e.g., Antonio Damasio, 1999; Susan Greenfield, 1995).

Although the focus of this paper is on the connections between sexuality and spirituality in women's relationships, this result on men is nonetheless important to include because the majority of the female respondents reported having, or having had, male sexual partners, a factor that clearly affected their physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational responses. (Ninety-three percent of the female respondents identified themselves as either heterosexual or bisexual. Compare this with the estimate from the 1994 Laumann survey that 80%-90% of American women have male partners.) That the men responding to this survey found emotional and spiritual connections to be an important part of sexual interaction, and that their reports were more often than not similar to those of women respondents, are an indication that some men can and do focus on more than physical gratification. This notion strikes at the core of the discourse that portrays women and men as inherently different in terms of sexual thinking, feeling, desire, and performance.

At its most optimistic, these observations extrapolated from the survey data offer hope that equal power balances between women and men may indeed be a possibility in the new world order that is predicted by today's poets and shamans. On a more modest scale, they suggest that today's researchers might well broaden perspectives about assessing the differences in sexual desire and capacity between women and men, with the intention of increased communication in male-female sexual relationships.

## **6) Respondents' language focused on spiritual, emotional, and relational aspects of sexual response**

Respondents' language in these narratives departed from the language usually used to describe sexual experience,

be that scientific, pornographic, proscriptive (as in moral restrictions) or prescriptive (as in women's magazines and how-to books). The survey narratives focused on relationship and meaning rather than only on physical performance.

A most interesting occurrence, and one of the surprises of the entire data analysis, concerns the word counts of the four elements that command the greatest focus of mainstream sex surveys and sex research. These elements are: body parts, genitalia, intercourse, and orgasm. In the 1465 survey letters there were only 327 mentions of the physical body, as compared with 4412 mentions of spiritual, emotional, and relational aspects of respondents' sexual experience. Moreover, of these 327 mentions, there were only 23 mentions the genitals. That is an average of about one mention of the genitals for every 65 respondents who wrote a letter. Considering that the genitals have been the major focus of every major survey on human sexual response since 1930, this is a major departure. In addition, there were only 96 mentions of intercourse. That is an average of about one mention of intercourse for every 15 respondents who wrote. Considering that intercourse has been the basis for all mainstream definitions of sex from *The Holy Bible* to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the psychologists' guide to identifying pathology), this is another major departure. Finally, the outcomes of sexual activity described in these letters were not always described in physical terms. There were 247 mentions of orgasm, one for about every six respondents who wrote. Yet there were many more mentions of sexual outcomes that had a spiritual, emotional, or relational dimension, such as ecstasy, energy, freedom, acceptance, and safety. These non-physical outcomes number 1712, an average of more than one for every writer.

Although these narratives have not yet been analyzed for male-female attitudinal differences, it can be assumed that the word counts generally reflect women's attitudes because most of the narratives (88%, n=1291) were written by women.

Language in these narratives suggests that the current idiom for describing sexual experience includes only a fraction of the whole picture. It also suggests that the picture changes when women's voices are factored in. Still further, it suggests that the picture may also change when research questions expand beyond those limited by the socioscientific discourse on sexuality outlined at the beginning of this paper. Since language is both a predictor and a reflection of attitudes and behavior, it stands to reason that broadening the language of sexual

experience might also help to broaden the actual scope of sexual experience. These narratives contain the kind of descriptive language that might be thoughtfully added to scientific investigations, sexuality education courses, and also popular treatments of sexual subject matter.

### 7) Respondents' narratives focused on spiritual, emotional, and relational meanings of sexual satisfaction

In their narratives, respondents evaluated their sexual experiences—how they felt and how they affected the context of their whole lives. Information in most of these narratives differs markedly from the kinds of evaluations that have emerged from sex surveys that focused on physiological and performance issues. It differs also from the current trend toward medicalizing sexual experience and for labeling and treating specific dysfunctions in order to help women achieve a goal of physical orgasm. Rather, these survey narratives described a broad and often oceanic sense of eroticism in keeping with relational theory proposed by contemporary American feminist therapists (e.g. Judith Jordan, 1987, 1991). Respondents' descriptions of satisfaction were also consistent with transformational experiences reported by contemporary American energy healers (e.g., Barbara Brennan, 1987; Rosalyn Bruyere, 1994), and shamanic practitioners (e.g., Mircea Eliade, 1972; Sandra Ingerman, 1991). As such, the survey narratives raise awareness of a broader scope for future research about sexual relationship and satisfaction.

Many respondents used the term “ecstasy” to describe their level of sexual satisfaction. For some respondents, ecstasy meant love and attachment with an empathic partner or a soul mate. For others, ecstasy meant the creation and nurturing of new life—conception, childbirth, and breast feeding a baby, occurrences that literally embody the spirit of sexual union. For still others, ecstasy meant physical sensation so intense that the language of the body could not express it without merging with the language of imagination, memory, love, hope, and other non-physical phenomena. Both men and women waxed lyrical in their descriptions: Sexual ecstasy was “holy,” “transcendent,” “a path to God and Goddess,” “an entry into the primordial waters, the ocean of universal love.”

Respondents reported that when they felt sex and spirit to be fully connected, they were able to expand their sense of self, love, creativity, altruism, and even religious faith. These respondents described sexual

satisfaction as far more than, or even other than, physical orgasm. For some, satisfaction was a means of traveling beyond ordinary physical and mental boundaries to experience non-ordinary, multidimensional realms of reality. Many respondents, such as this 29-year-old woman from Nebraska, used the word “soul” to locate that realm.

*I have experienced sex as a gateway to the soul—my soul, the soul I am making love to, and God, and all that is—including spiritual guides. By experiencing sex as a spiritual tool, I have grown strong in intuitive and telepathic abilities, and grow closer and closer to God. More oneness with All and more power to open doors to create what I choose.*

Although the concepts of “soul,” “spiritual guides,” and “telepathic abilities” she mentioned may seem to be distant leaps from the usual physical concepts of sexual satisfaction it is important to note that the outcomes of navigating both worlds were concrete for her: they brought more power, choice, and even holiness into her here-and-now life. In this regard, her description is typical of the many other survey letters that suggested that sexual experience was a portal to the mysteries of something larger, something beyond them: God, Goddess, Great Spirit, the Universe. Letters like these underscore that reducing “sex” or “sexual satisfaction” to its physical components alone removes these other, broader possibilities.

The notion that sexual relationship is a complex and multidimensional concept is a crucial feature of these survey narratives. That is, when these respondents wrote of “relationship,” they were not always referring to a partner. Some narratives described relationship as the intense connection to the woman's own self—self-awareness, self-knowing, the ability to touch one's own heart. Others described relationship as something beyond self and partner: They spoke of relationship to an energetic principle beyond themselves, variously named by respondents as God, Goddess, nature, creativity, a higher power, or some other term denoting life force. Many respondents stated or implied that “sex” was a kind of relationship in and of itself, in that it connected them with the realms of nature and spirit as

well as of human beings. A 32-year-old “artist, journalist, and stay-at-home-mom” from North Carolina, described just such a relationship.

*Some of my “best sex” has been creating beauty in the world in art, writing, and gardening—sharing gifts from Spirit. Sacred sex is spiritual and not just found in intercourse. It’s all around, in everything we see, hear, smell, touch, taste. Honey is sex. A fresh warm strawberry is sex. Living is a sacred sexual experience.*

It must be noted that not all sexual experience is positive for women, and this fact adds to its relational complexity. Some survey narratives reflected the devastating effects negative sexual relationships had had on the bodies, souls, and lives of their writers. Many letters described the guilt, shame, fear, and sexual paralysis instilled by proscriptive religious messages. Said one: “Man, Catholicism sure does screw up one’s ‘pleasure thoughts.’” Yet religion was not the only source of respondents’ sexual distress. The respondent below, a 51-year-old housewife from Vancouver, was one of many who recounted the kind of pervasive personal and social dysfunction that can lead to trauma, sexual dysfunction, and abusive life story. In her instance, it finally led her to experience spiritual dimensions of sexual relationship. The content of her letter borders on the genre of confessional self-help and may seem somewhat sensational in the context of this paper. But her story echoes other survey narratives and also characterizes the kinds of transformational experiences women often bring into therapy for clinical evaluation. It is included here to represent those contexts.

*When I was young, I lived in a house where no one kissed, hugged, or touched. I never knew about sex, as it was “taboo.” On my wedding day, my mother told me: “It takes about 10-15 minutes. Just lie there and take whatever he does, after that you can take a shower.” My uncle molested me when I was 13. My mother caught him in the act and banned him from the house. I*

*was not allowed to talk about the experience.*

*My first husband taught me the pleasures of sex, and the first years of our marriage were beautiful. After he became addicted to drugs, however, he became abusive and our sexual life was a nightmare. Once he “sold” my “services” for a bag of H [heroin]. I was repeatedly sodomized and needed surgical repair. My second husband unfortunately became impotent for the last three years of our marriage before he died.*

*My third husband has been “heaven-sent.” It has been with him that I’ve discovered that spirituality and sex need not be separated and that the core of each of us is the essence of the universe—love. When we come together physically, it’s as if the Goddess and the God are there also. Although we’ve only been together 6 years, we’ve never had an argument. Each time we make love it is total ecstasy spiritually, mentally, and physically. For the first time in my life I understand the concept: “The two become one flesh.” We also become one with the Great All, Love.*

*Physical love is the deepest expression of the creator we can experience on this plane of existence.*

For some respondents, the relationships between self, other, and higher power expanded well beyond the sexual boundaries commonly accepted by the culture, as in the letter sent by this psychologist from California.

*I have had sexual experiences in which I left my body; left the Earth; was jettisoned out into space above the earth and looked back down upon it. During this experience I*

*felt as if I touched the face of God and was one with God and all of nature. The feeling was one of ecstasy and exhilaration and a sense of otherworldliness. I believe the aspect of deep, committed, intensely devoted love and complete trust was what enabled me to completely let go and lose myself in the experience. Loving so completely somehow created an environment in which I transcended the physical and went beyond the bonds of being a mere mortal.*

Narratives such as the one above raise the issue of evaluation and interpretation. This woman's story encourages questions: Is this sexual health or pathology? Is it sacred or blasphemous? For instance, measured by a physical orgasm standard this narrative is well off any of the conventional charts. This narrative does not fit accepted parameters of sexual experience. Can it figure as a *bona fide* example of sexual health? Possibly not. It may, however, invite an interpretation of personal pathology. By *DSM-IV* standards this woman's out-of-body experience with God might label her as suffering from dissociative disorder and/or delusional ideation. By the same token, her story might invite negative religious interpretation. For instance, by some conservative religious standards her quite Biblical touching of "the face of God" might be interpreted as a sacred experience had it been religiously inspired; but given its sexual inspiration, this God connection might well be labeled blasphemy, unless it were in the direct service of the bond of matrimony or an act of procreation. Although the statements by the woman above may invite negative argument, they also indicate very clearly that her experiences were grounded in the contexts of "devoted love," "complete trust," and transcendence. All of these attributes are highly valued by society at large, including its clergy and therapists; sex therapists are among those who particularly value her reported ability to let go of control.

Clearly, the positive significance of these narratives do not depend on the final verdict of this or that reader. Their significance is that they encourage an examination of institutional parameters, definitions, and truths. That there are over 1000 letters delivering

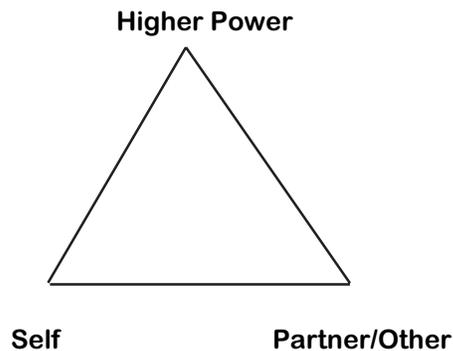
messages about various spiritual dimensions of sexual experience offers a persuasive argument of its own, even though this sample of respondents is far from a representative of the nation as a whole.

### Toward Assessing the Spiritual Dimensions of Sexual Relationship

Cumulatively, these survey narratives build a strong case for expanding the present methods of clinical assessment of sexual relationship and also for expanding the conceptual language for the general public. The narratives suggest that an expanded method of assessment be based on the spiritual dimensions of sexual relationship rather than on physical performance alone. Such a method is consistent with the observations of the Stone Center's Judith Jordan (1987) and contemporary sexuality educators and therapists such as Margo Anand (1989), Deborah Anapol (1997), Carol Ellison (1999), and Linda Savage (1999). It is also consistent with the feminist literature on sexual justice, or "good sex," as most recently outlined in thought-provoking collections edited by Patricia Jung, Mary Hunt, and Rahdika Balakrishnan (2001), and Kathleen Sands (2000). In *The Birth of Pleasure* (2002), Carol Gilligan offers an even wider view of the spiritual dimensions of sexual relationship by discussing their time-honored mythic heritage in the form of Cupid and Psyche.

The survey narratives suggest that the context of sexual relationship extend beyond partnered individuals, and that the idea of relationship include interactions with one's self and also the presence of something beyond—a universal energy larger than both. This notion of Universal Presence is consistent with the religious literature on sexuality mentioned earlier in this paper (e.g., Rita Brock, 1988; Rita Brock and Rebecca Parker 2002; Carter Heyward, 1989; Joan Timmerman, 1992). This insight offers a way to begin conceptualizing the basic geometry of these relational dimensions. Below is a diagram—a triangle—representing this geometry. Consistent with the survey narratives, this triangle adds a third dimension to the usual dyadic construct of sexual relationship as self and partner. The third dimension is labeled "Higher Power." Also consistent with survey narratives, other names can be substituted to respect differing belief systems; respondents variously used "God," "Goddess," "Nature," "Higher Intelligence," or simply "Spirit."

Table 3

Spiritual Dimensions of Sexual Relationship

It needs to be understood that the Self, Partner, and Higher Power of the diagram above do not perpetually co-exist in equidistant and static relationship as depicted. These relationships necessarily shift and fluctuate with conditions and circumstances. For instance, in some sexual experiences, focus may be very much on the physical self, while the presence of spirit is implicit in the meanings attached to these experiences. Or the relationship with a partner may be negative, while spirit may be present in the response (or non-response) to that partner's negativity. Or one may not have a partner, while the presence of former partners or messages and memories from people in the past (such as parents, doctors, teachers, preachers, or lovers), may imply a strong partner presence.

It needs to be understood as well that the method proposed above will not fit everyone. Even in this self-selected survey sample, only 69% of the respondents (n=2484) indicated that sex always or sometimes needed a spiritual element in order to be satisfying. Nine percent (n=306) indicated that sex seldom or never needed a spiritual element and 23% (n=811) indicated that they were neutral on the question. It is tempting to think that these Likert-scale results might be somewhat misleading, however, on the grounds that not all the survey respondents could have been aware of the full range of spiritual elements in their sexual experiences, given the cultural conditioning and lack of information

on the subject. Perhaps, given a larger frame of reference, more than 69% of these respondents might have indicated that sex needed a spiritual element to be satisfying for them—a speculation worthy of further investigation.

The value of a method of inquiry that includes spiritual dimensions of sexual relationship is that it offers a frame of reference into which women—and men—can fit experiences that are outside the scientific models that presently dictate national attitudes and behavior. The prototypical scientific model is the William Masters' and Virginia Johnson's 1966 Cycle of Human Sexual Response that charts physical phases from arousal to orgasm to resolution. The addition of both relational and spiritual dimensions to the notion of human sexual response validates a more expansive perspective, one that can acknowledge the presence of subtle phenomena and even phenomena commonly thought to be beyond the scope of sexual experience. This perspective allows for the notion that in the context of healthy sexual relationships it is possible for human beings to come into contact with experience beyond "mere mortality," as mentioned by the psychologist above, who reported that she had "touched the face of God."

A spiritual method of assessing sexual relationship is particularly relevant for individuals who do not exactly match the sexual profile commonly

assigned as “normal” in this society, that is, heterosexual, young, monogamous, and genitally focused (but not too blatantly focused if one is a woman). In the sexuality-spirituality survey, for instance, respondents who reported most strongly connecting their sexuality with their spirituality tended to be those whose life situations—relationships, age, boundary issues, spiritual dilemmas—had led them to make the most seemingly complex choices. Those respondents include lesbians, bisexuals, sexual abuse survivors, recovering addicts, and people over 60. Interestingly, they also include women and men who had changed from their childhood religions to adopt a new religion or no religion at all. A method of inquiry that includes the realm of spirituality may therefore be potentially more inclusive of these complex segments of the population than are the physically focused models of sexual response that now exist.

### Potential Contributions of the Survey Data

Although there are emerging feminist and theological literatures on sexuality and spirituality, and on sexuality and religion, these survey data present an explicitly personal level of sexual experience not addressed in either academic feminism or theology. They are also unique in presenting a nuanced picture of meaningful sexual experience based on a large self-report sample. The survey data provide a potential springboard for a woman-positive discourse about new possibilities for sexual relationship, especially in the areas of religious messages, aging, sexual abuse and healing, and sex and gender studies. Moreover, these data challenge current widespread beliefs about women's sexual inadequacies and suggest that broader understandings of the responses to sexual experience will further both personal and cultural healing.

The narrative material offers special contributions of its own. The most obvious is that its sheer volume represents a unique record of the diversity of American sexual attitudes at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A primary contribution of sex surveys is to affect national conversation. These narratives have the potential to expand the sexual vernacular, which is so far limited to romance, street slang, clinical techniques, and survey statistics. Shifting sexual terminology from a focus on genital performance to a more complex focus on relationship

and meaning may predict more sexual safety and connectedness for women—and men.

Despite the survey limitations outlined at the beginning of this paper, the resulting data stand as valuable material for creating a scientific instrument with more structured questions about sensuality, emotions, spirituality, memory, relationship, religion, and transformational possibilities of meaningful sexual experience. Such a follow-up to this survey is in process at this writing: the Meaningful Sexual Experience Measure (MSEM) is a psychometric instrument being developed to investigate the multidimensionality of sexual experience. In addition, two quantitative studies from the present survey data are presently under way at the University of Ottawa on age, gender, and sexual orientation.

### Areas for Future Research

Both statistical and narrative data from this survey will be archived at the Human Sexuality Collection at the Kroch Library at Cornell University. Information will therefore be available for other researchers on a variety of topics concerning challenges to sociocultural and religious definitions of sexual experience, the integration of sexuality and spirituality, and the broadening of sexual definitions.

For instance, there will be source material for investigating behaviors and attitudes of subgroups of the survey respondents. These subgroups include women and men; heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals; politically conservative and liberal individuals; individuals whose attitudes are pro-choice and anti-abortion; addicts, recovering addicts, and those who reported never being addicted to substances; sex offenders and survivors of sexual abuse in childhood and/or adulthood, along with those who reported never having been sexual abused. As the age range of respondents is 18-86, there will also be data for investigating perspectives of various age groups along with relationship choices from marriage and committed cohabitation to diverse forms of non-monogamy.

Other areas for future research provided by survey data include perspectives from the 22 religious faiths and denominations represented in the survey sample. Also available are racial and ethnic perspectives including Caucasian, African-American, Native American, Asian-American, and Hispanic/ Latina, and geographical perspectives including major areas of the United States.

Finally, there is an opportunity for researchers to undertake computer-generated narrative analyses of the 1465 survey letters. A poignant and profound value of these letters is that they parallel long-discounted narratives from the earliest sex surveys by sex-education pioneers Clelia Mosher (1892) and Katharine Bement Davis (1929) mentioned at the beginning of this paper. A valuable research project would be a comparison of letters from these surveys and perhaps from later sex surveys by women as well. Taken together, these letters span a period of more than a century. They document

that the desire to broaden the definitions of sexual experience is grounded in women's narrative history and is much more than a "New-Age" or end-of-the-millennium phenomenon.

Despite its imperfections, this exploratory survey represents a crucial step in developing a contemporary understanding of how sexuality and spirituality might be integrated in women's lives, and it has generated a body of data that will be available to future researchers.

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**APPENDIX**

**INTEGRATING SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY**

—A Survey— ©1997

*This is the first survey to inquire about how we integrate sexuality and spirituality, and your participation is extremely valuable. Since each person's experiences are unique, there are no right or wrong answers. You are invited to add your personal statements at the end. If this survey raises uncomfortable feelings, please write them down, even if you do not complete the survey. All the information you provide will remain anonymous. It will be used to educate and inform others. With many thanks for your participation.*

**Gina Ogden, Ph.D., Lic. Marriage and Family Therapist, Cert. Sex Therapist**

*FIRST, PLEASE TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF: Check the alternatives that best describe your experience, adding whatever information may be necessary.*

1. Age \_\_\_\_ Gender: Female  Male  Crossgender  Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

2. Area you live in (please write first 3 digits of ZIP code) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Highest education completed 1 Grade School  2 High School  3 College  4 Masters  5 Doctorate   
6 Post Doctorate

4. Ethnic identification (check all that apply) 1 Caucasian (White)  2 African-American (Black)  3 Hispanic   
4 Native American  5 Asian  6 Other  (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Yearly household income (round numbers) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

6. Religion you grew up with 1 Roman Catholic  2 Protestant  3 Fundamentalist Christian  4 Jewish   
5 Buddhist  6 Mormon  7 Atheist  8 Agnostic  9 None  10 Other  (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

7. Religious affiliation now 1 Roman Catholic  2 Protestant  3 Fundamentalist Christian  4 Jewish   
5 Buddhist  6 Mormon  7 Atheist  8 Agnostic  9 None  10 Other  (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

8. Political philosophy 1 Liberal  2 Conservative  3 Other  (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

9. Attitude toward abortion  
1 Pro Choice  
 2 Anti-Abortion  3 Other  (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

10. Sexual Preference 1 Heterosexual  2 Bisexual  3 Lesbian/gay  4 Other  (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

11. Relationship status 1 No current partner  2 Married  3 In a committed relationship  4 Separated  5 Divorced   
6 Widowed  7 Other  (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

12. Number of years (or fraction of years) with current partner \_\_\_\_\_

13. Gender of current partner 1 Male  2 Female  3 Crossgender

14. Disabilities/chronic illnesses 1 Cancer  2 Heart Disease  3 HIV/AIDS  4 Diabetes  5 Arthritis   
6 Depression  7 None  8 Other  (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

15. Experience of sexual abuse 1 As a child  2 As an adult  3 Never

16. Addictive use of alcohol and/or drugs 1 In the past  2 In the present  3 Never

17. Here are some comments people have made about sex and spirituality. Check *all* that reflect your experience.

1  "Sex usually means intercourse."  
2  "For me, sex is much more than intercourse; it involves all of me—body, mind, heart, and soul."  
3  "I associate spirituality mainly with going to church."  
4  "When I open myself to warmth, desire, depth, expansion, and trust, there is no separation between sex and spirit."  
5  "Sex is for conceiving babies and has little to do with spirituality."  
6  "It's through my senses that I often experience God."

- 
- 
- 7  "All my life I've been told that people who love sex *too much* will go to hell."  
 8  "Mainly, sex means connection with my partner."  
 9  "Sex is physical, but it also involves love, romance, even mystical union."  
 10  "For people who have been sexually disappointed or hurt, consciously giving and receiving sexual pleasure can be healing."
- 

**18. Sexual romance and religious worship have many kinds of symbols and rituals in common.**(check *all* that you associate with *both* your sexuality *and* your spirituality) 1  Candles 7  Special foods 2  Incense  
 8  Words of comfort 3  Flowers 9  Words of love 4  Wine  
 10  Laying on of hands 5  Music 11  None of the above 6  Dancing  
 12  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**19. When I use the word "spirituality" in the context of my sexuality, I mean:** (check one) 1  Spirituality but not religion 2  Religion but not spirituality 3  Spirituality and religion combined 4  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**20. To me, it seems sacrilegious to talk about sex and spirituality together** 1 Yes  2 No

**21. What do sexuality and spirituality involve in your life?**

(For each pair of statements, check line segment closest to statement that best reflects your experience)

<b>Sexuality Involves</b>	
1 Excitement Boredom _____	2 Honesty Deception _____
3 Caring for others Caring for self _____	4 Numbed senses Heightened senses _____
5 Intense body pleasure Minimal body pleasure _____	6 Intense inner vitality Minimal inner vitality _____
7 Constraint Liberation _____	8 Integration Fragmentation _____
9 Oneness with self Distance from self _____	10 Oneness with partner Distance from partner _____
11 Oneness with a power Distance from a power _____	greater than self greater than self 12 Worship Blasphemy _____
13 Other (please specify) _____	
<b>Spirituality Involves</b>	
14 Excitement Boredom _____	15 Honesty Deception _____
16 Caring for others Caring for self _____	17 Numbed senses Heightened senses _____
18 Intense body pleasure Minimal body pleasure _____	19 Intense inner vitality Minimal inner vitality _____
20 Constraint Liberation _____	21 Integration Fragmentation _____
22 Oneness with self Distance from self _____	23 Oneness with partner Distance from partner _____
24 Oneness with a power Distance from a power _____	greater than self greater than self _____
25 Worship Blasphemy _____	26 Other (please specify) _____

22. Which *one* of the above statements would you say is *most* true:

(1) of your current SEXUAL experience? \_\_\_\_\_

(2) of your current SPIRITUAL experience? \_\_\_\_\_

23. Sex needs to have a spiritual element to be really satisfying. (check one) 1  Always true for me 2  Sometimes true for me 3  Neither true nor untrue for me 4  Seldom true for me 5  Never true for me

24. With which of the following has sex been a spiritual experience for you? (check *all* that apply) 1  Husband 2  Wife 3  Committed partner 4  Casual encounter 5  Affair while committed to someone else 6  Self 7  None of the above 8  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

25. Sex has been *most* spiritual with which partner in Question 24? (write in number) \_\_\_\_\_

26. Sex has been *least* spiritual with which partner in Question 24? (write in number) \_\_\_\_\_

27. Which of the following have contributed to sex being a spiritual experience for you? (check *all* that apply) 1  Being in love 2  Conceiving a baby 3  Being pregnant 4  Having no fear of getting pregnant 5  Feeling committed to my partner 6  Feeling free of responsibility to my partner 7  Feeling safe 8  Experiencing a personal crisis 9  Feeling in control 10  Feeling controlled 11  Being in the mood 12  Aggressive thrusting 13  Danger 14  Drinking or drugs 15  None of the above 16  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

28. Which *one* of the above circumstances has contributed *most* to spiritual sex? (write in number) \_\_\_\_\_

29. Which *one* of the above circumstances has contributed *least* to spiritual sex? (write in number) \_\_\_\_\_

30. Which of the following have you done to help bring a spiritual dimension to your sexual experiences? (check *all* that apply)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Made eye contact with my partner     | 9 <input type="checkbox"/> Kissed soulfully              |
| 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Shared deep feelings with my partner | 10 <input type="checkbox"/> Played music                 |
| 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Lit candles or incense               | 11 <input type="checkbox"/> Danced                       |
| 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Bathed                               | 12 <input type="checkbox"/> Fantasized or daydreamed     |
| 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoyed special foods                | 13 <input type="checkbox"/> Laughed together             |
| 6 <input type="checkbox"/> Meditated before getting physical    | 14 <input type="checkbox"/> Let go of control            |
| 7 <input type="checkbox"/> Made love in a special place         | 15 <input type="checkbox"/> Did nothing special          |
| 8 <input type="checkbox"/> Touched reverently                   | 16 <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____ |

31. Which *one* of the above choices has been *most* helpful in bringing a spiritual dimension to your sexuality? (write in number) \_\_\_\_\_

32. Which *one* of the above choices has been *least* helpful in bringing a spiritual dimension to your sexuality? (write in number) \_\_\_\_\_

33. How have your spiritual beliefs led you to express your sexuality more fully? (check *all* that apply)

- 1  By affirming that love is good in all its forms and expressions
- 2  By teaching that making love is holy
- 3  By opening me to risk deeper intimacy
- 4  By giving me faith when I've felt like running away from pleasure
- 5  By sanctioning my feelings of longing and passion
- 6  By making the physical part of relationship into a sacrament
- 7  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

34. How have your spiritual beliefs prevented you from expressing your sexuality as fully as you might? (check *all* that apply)

- 1  By giving me the message "good girls don't"
- 2  By making sexual desire a source of guilt
- 3  By making the body a source of shame
- 4  By teaching that sex is not for pleasure, but for procreation (conceiving babies)
- 5  By teaching that pleasure is more important for a man than for a woman
- 6  By keeping me from exploring sexual taboos
- 7  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

35. Has anything else in your life prevented you from experiencing a sex-spirit connection? (check *all* that apply)

- 1  Childhood abuse
- 2  Abuse as an adult
- 3  Drinking and/or drug use
- 4  Depression and/or anxiety
- 5  Physical disabilities
- 6  Worry about how I look
- 7  Getting older
- 8  Not having a partner
- 9  Pregnancy
- 10  Parenthood
- 11  My partner only thinking about physical kicks
- 12  Not loving my partner
- 13  My partner not loving me
- 14  Sex isn't that interesting to me
- 15  Spirituality isn't that interesting to me
- 16  I've never thought of spirituality as a part of sex before now
- 17  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

36. Which *one* of the above choices has *most* prevented you from experiencing a sex-spirit connection? (write in number) \_\_\_\_\_

37. Have you ever experienced sexual ecstasy? 1 Yes  2 No

38. Have you ever experienced spiritual ecstasy? 1 Yes  2 No

39.-40. Some people feel that experiences they associate with sexual satisfaction are similar to experiences they associate with spiritual satisfaction. What do you associate with your sexual satisfaction and/or spiritual satisfaction? (check *all* that apply)

	39. Associate with Sexual Satisfaction	40. Associate with Spiritual Satisfaction
Release of body tension .....	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Release of emotional tension .....	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Heightened senses .....	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Clarity of understanding .....	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Surge of energy .....	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Peace and serenity .....	6 <input type="checkbox"/>	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling loved and accepted .....	7 <input type="checkbox"/>	7 <input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling loving and accepting .....	8 <input type="checkbox"/>	8 <input type="checkbox"/>
Oneness with self .....	9 <input type="checkbox"/>	9 <input type="checkbox"/>
Oneness with partner .....	10 <input type="checkbox"/>	10 <input type="checkbox"/>
Oneness with nature .....	11 <input type="checkbox"/>	11 <input type="checkbox"/>
Oneness with a power greater than self ..	12 <input type="checkbox"/>	12 <input type="checkbox"/>
Other .....	13 <input type="checkbox"/>	13 <input type="checkbox"/>
(please specify) _____	(please specify) _____	

41. Which one of the above experiences is *most* essential to your SEXUAL satisfaction? (write in number) \_\_\_\_\_

42. Which one of the above experiences is *most* essential to your SPIRITUAL satisfaction? (write in number) \_\_\_\_\_

43. In a moment of SEXUAL ecstasy have you ever had a sense of experiencing God/Universal energy? 1 Yes  2 No

44. In a moment of SPIRITUAL ecstasy have you ever felt a surge of sexual energy? 1 Yes  2 No

45. Please indicate how important the following concepts are for your present life situation (circle numbers below)

	Not at all Important	Extremely Important
1 Sexuality .....	1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 ..... 6	
2 Spirituality .....	1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 ..... 6	
3 Religion .....	1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 ..... 6	

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(Optional)

Below or on a separate piece of paper, please tell us more about your sexuality and spirituality. How did you discover that sex can be spiritual? What are your most memorable experiences—by yourself and/or with a partner?

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(Optional)

Please *print* your name and phone number below if you are willing to be interviewed by telephone about your sexuality and spirituality. If you consent to an interview, the data will not be associated with your name.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

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