

May 1968

Sex and the Single ... Lecture: An Editorial

Eugene J. Slowinski

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

Recommended Citation

Slowinski, Eugene J. (1968) "Sex and the Single ... Lecture: An Editorial," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 35 : No. 2 , Article 4.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol35/iss2/4>

Sex and the Single . . . *Lecture* — *An Editorial*

At a recent day of recollection I was asked to present a talk entitled "The Doctor's Role in Sex Education," to a group of 150 medical students representing all of the classes at Creighton University School of Medicine.

In order to dramatize the need for such a discussion, I asked for a show of hands to identify the upper classmen and the pre-clinical groups. Separately, these classes were then asked if they had ever had a lecture on human sexuality and marriage during their medical school career. The seniors had none, the juniors — one conference, the sophomores — two, and the freshmen — four. It was evident that had this conference not been scheduled, the senior students would have left our institution without a single lecture on human sexuality and its relation to the Judeo-Christian concept of marriage.

Although the result of this poll was disturbing, thinking back on my own medical education at another Catholic university I found it impossible to recall a specific lecture given on this topic. Perhaps the readers will find it equally difficult to identify a lecture or series of lectures on human sexuality given to them during their medical school careers.

"Sex and The Single — Lecture" will be all that the present graduating class will have to fall back upon as they take their place in the community which presumes them to

be knowledgeable health educators ready when called upon by their church, their school systems, or the many service organizations who feel the need of "professional assistance" when they consider presenting such programs. It is presumed that, because of their preparation in the basic sciences and clinical aspects of pathology, both of the body and mind, that these physicians will be supported by a background of factual material and clinical experience which will prepare them for their role as a "sex educator."

The fallacy of this community concept is not difficult to disprove. Dr. Harold Lief, Director of the Division of Family Study at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, emphasizes that physicians are hardly better informed about sex than their patients. He shows that the doctor's own bias, prejudice, and embarrassment can cause him to refrain even from following up a significant sexual problem lead opened up by the patient during medical history taking. Dr. Lief reviewed several interesting patterns of sexual background and activities which could be found in any representative medical student group. It was charitable of Dr. Lief to state that these medical students are hardly better informed about sex than their patients. When viewing his selection of aberrations in sexual concepts, one would get the impression that the patients were far better prepared to handle sexual problems than the physician in training.

A factual identification of deficiencies in sex knowledge in medical school were prepared by Dr. Leo Shatin who reviewed the Sex Knowledge Inventory From X, a multiple choice examination reviewing the factual storehouse of sexual knowledge, from a group of medical school freshmen late in their first year. These students had already completed gross anatomy, some biochemistry, much of physiology, and had 30 hours of instruction in normal personality development including psychosexual maturation. Despite this rather impressive background, certain questions concerning sexual activity and its relation to pregnancy, menstruation, menopause, venereal diseases, and contraception were answered incorrectly by well over half of this class.

One shudders to think of placing his own sex knowledge reputation on the block by taking this exam. However, Dr. Shatin's results prove that the responsibility for teaching human sexuality has been passed back and forth among the groups of formal and informal educators who are involved in the total preparation of a young man or woman for the practice of medicine. None of them have taken the burden upon themselves and prepared these students for their ultimate role as sex educators in the community.

The Creighton issue of the *Linacre Quarterly* has attempted to review sex education in all of its many aspects and has brought together the view points of professionals involved in all phases of our present day scholastic system. The first paper is a provocative review of the problem as posed by a career military man, Captain James Semmens, of the United States Navy,

who has been vocal and progressive in his approach to family life education both in and out of the military service. His many publications on family life education and his presentation to scientific organizations, both in and out of his specialty of obstetrics and gynecology, have made him one of the foremost advocates for a drastic change. His searching view of an identification of the reasons why sex education has been so deficient makes his article subject to great debate. Readers are invited to propose their rebuttals. Such a potentially spirited debate is necessary to bring into actual involvement with this problem the many readers of the *Linacre Quarterly* who may then help solve it.

Two religious celibates, active in educational programs within our parochial systems, present their structures of sex education in the primary and secondary school systems. Sister Ruth Sheehan presents a delightfully candid attitude toward sex education which has permeated her years of experience at the organization and augmentation of sex education programs. Frater Julian Slowinski, a Benedictine monk, will perhaps surprise many of you with the depth of material and concepts which he presents to a group of sophisticated private preparatory school students in New Jersey. Again, many of you will disagree with these professional educators on the scope, content, and mode of presentation which they have selected. We would welcome your involvement and comments.

The question of sex education of our men and women who choose the life of celibacy as part of their religious vocation is discussed by Father Van Greunsven, a marriage counselor and a lecturer at our school

of medicine. This counselor does not present a structure of sex education but does pose some searching questions and realistic suggestions for possible solution. Those readers who have been called upon to give such programs to trainees in the seminaries or convents will find Father Van Greunsven's article, perhaps, a review of their own thoughts.

Sex education is a continuing process and the adult educational system in the Archdiocese of Omaha is an excellent example of a well structured program. Miss Mary Dworak, the Director of this project, presents a brief description of the activities and scope of this parish level activity. What Miss Dworak has not included in her brief paper is a report of the enthusiasm with which these programs are received by the people in the parishes. I have been the speaker on several occasions at these presentations and have been greatly impressed at both the desire to learn about and willingness to discuss the problems of sexuality which was evidenced by these parishoners from all walks of life.

The Pre-Cana conference program has functioned efficiently in the United States for some 30 years. Father Vincent Mainelli of the Archdiocese of Omaha, who recently received his graduate degree in sociology, presents a brief review of Pre-Cana. The readers who are interested in additional material on this important educational activity are referred to an excellent article "Pre-marital Counseling: A Multidimensional Approach" by Robert B. McCready, M.D. in

Obstetrics and Gynecology (Vol. 13, No. 4, April, 1959).

The guilt and indecision felt by the administrations of our Catholic Medical Schools is presented by Father James J. Quinn, S.J., Jesuit Counselor of Creighton University School of Medicine. His view, approach, and possible solution to the problem of educating medical students in this essential area is probably the way it was handled in our sister schools. His frankness shows the importance he has placed on this educational area.

Daniel P. Murphy, member of the faculty of the Department of Psychology at Creighton University, presents an interesting and fresh approach to the task of counseling collegians on pre-marital sexual activity. From the background of his specialty, he presents a technique which stimulates the students thought processes and at the same time supports the ethical goals the student may have, all without mentioning morality. Readers who have assumed this counseling role in their communities may find this approach an appealing one.

It is hoped that this issue of the *Linacre Quarterly* will be the opening of a forum for liberal discussion of this important topic, human sexuality, and the techniques for sex education at various levels of our scholastic system. Your letters of comment will be welcomed and presented to the other readers in subsequent *Linacre* issues. Immediate answers on any of these aspects can be obtained by writing the authors through my office at Creighton University.

Eugene J. Slowinski, M.D.