

A Witness on Sexuality for Friends

Why is Sexuality a Quaker Earthcare Witness concern?

Rapid population growth—the outcome of human sexual activity—poses a major threat to our natural environment. Human population has increased from two billion in the early twentieth century to 7.3 billion in 2015, and we continue to add about 80 million persons each year.² Each year more people add to the pollution of our water and atmosphere, the degradation of our soils and forests, and the extinction of species.

Friends' testimony on sustainability leads us to be concerned.

Why is Sexuality a Friends Concern?

Many pregnancies and births are unwanted. Low status gives many women few options besides early marriage and childbirth. Many women are forced to have sexual relations or to continue pregnancies against their will.

Friends' testimony on equality leads us to challenge this situation.

Sexuality in the 21st Century

In the United States sexual intercourse is not confined to marriage. Almost all persons have sex before marrying (94 percent of women, 96 percent of men).³ Among teenagers, 69 percent reported sexual activity by age 19, with little difference by gender in the timing of first sex.⁴

In the United States, teen pregnancy, birth, and abortion rates have reached historic lows, due mainly to more effective contraceptive use.⁵

But the US still has a much higher rate of teen pregnancy than most of Europe, despite a similar level of sexual activity among adolescents. This difference is attributable to Europe's more open, encouraging attitudes to contraceptive practice.⁶

Although the average age of marriage is increasing in the United States (and almost all populations in the world as well), cohabitation before marriage has also increased considerably. In interviews from 2006-2010, 48 percent of women in the United States reported cohabiting before marrying, compared to 35 percent in 1995.⁷

Contraceptive use is prevalent both in the United States and around the world. Worldwide, 62 percent of married women 15-49 years of age use contraception and 56 percent use modern methods.⁸ In the United States, for women aged 15-44, 62 percent use contraception while 58 percent use modern methods.⁹ Of women (15-44) in the United States who were sexually active and not wanting a pregnancy, 86 percent used some form of contraception.⁹

In general, women with access to education and economic opportunities are more likely to be equal partners in the decisions regarding sexual activities, contraception, and childbearing.

A Friends Witness on Sexuality, Contraception, and Childbearing

Sexuality and spirituality are at the depth of our being. Friends believe in the spiritual equality of the sexes: Marital partners in the Religious Society of Friends give identical marriage vows. Joint decision making of couples regarding sexuality, family planning, and fertility behaviors is a natural extension of our beliefs. We offer the following Friendly ideals:¹⁰

- We regard sexuality as sacred, as an expression of a couple's love for each other. Therefore, the separation of sexual intercourse and reproduction via contraception is appropriate. Use (or non-use) of contraception would be decided jointly and supported by both partners.
- Each episode of sexual activity would be voluntary for both partners and both partners would be involved in the decisions if unwanted pregnancy occurs.
- Couples would reach mutual clearness on their desired family size, and each intended pregnancy would represent a calling to parenthood, so that every child born into the world would be wanted and loved, and have equal opportunity to share in the world's resources.

By adhering to these ideals, we could enhance sexuality, minimize the occasion of abortions, slow population growth, and help preserve the natural world.

Queries

- What are our beliefs about the connections between sexuality and spirituality?
- How can our love and sexuality help to deepen our spiritual lives as a couple?
- How have religious teachings about sexuality affected our own beliefs and practices?
- Do we believe sexual energy can be channeled into spiritual pursuits through celibacy?
- What is our position about sexual activity before marriage? Outside of marriage?
- What beliefs about sexuality do we instill in our children by our reactions to nudity, reactions to their own sexual behavior, and responses to their questions?
- How does the de-linking of sexuality and childbearing via modern contraception affect our beliefs about sexuality?
- How has our position on same-sex unions been affected by outward and inward spiritual and secular influences?
- How is the macho attitude of some men related to their attitude as masters over nature, and how is this reflected in the general culture?
- How can we free men and women from their stereotyped gender roles?
- What is the relationship between sexuality and the balance of power within a couple?
- How do we balance our sexuality, our need to procreate, and our concern for the natural world?

Endnotes

- 1) Mary S. Calderone, 1973. *Human Sexuality and the Quaker Conscience*, Friends General Conference.
- 2) Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, 2015. *World Population Prospects 2015*. <esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DVD/>.
- 3) Finer, Lawrence D., 2007. Trends in Premarital Sex 1954-2003. *Public Health Reports* 122:73-78 <publichealthreports.org/issueopen.cfm?articleID=1784>.
- 4) Martinez, G.M. and J.C. Abma, 2015. "Sexual Activity, Contraceptive Use, and Childbearing of Teenagers Aged 15-19 in the United States," NCHS Data Brief No. 209 <cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db209.pdf>
- 5) Boonstra, Heather. D., 2014. "What is Behind the Declines in Teen Pregnancy Rates?" *Guttmacher Policy Review* 17: 3 <guttmacher.org/pubs/gpr/17/3/gpr170315.pdf>.
- 6) Sedgh, Finer, Bankole, and Eilers, Guttmacher Institute, New York, New York, 2014. *Adolescent Pregnancy, Birth, and Abortion Rates Across Countries: Levels and Recent Trends*. <jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X%2814%2900387-5/pdf>.
- 7) Copen, Daniels, and Mosher, 2013. First Premarital Cohabitation in the United States: 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth. *National Health Statistics Reports* No. 64. <cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr064.pdf>.
- 8) Population Reference Bureau, 2015. 2015 World Population Data Sheet <prb.org/pdf15/2015-world-population-data-sheet_eng.pdf>, pp 11.
- 9) Daniels, Kimberly, Jill Daugherty, and Jo Jones. 2014. Current Contraceptive Status among Women Aged 15-44: United States, 2011-2013. *National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief* No. 173. <cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db173.pdf>.
- 10) *Quakers Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality* <quaker.org/sexuality/Readings.htm#Q-integrate>.

QEW Population Pamphlets

- A Friends' Witness on Population
- Seeking Clearness on Childbearing in a Crowded World
- Adoption: An Earth-Friendly Alternative
- Immigration in a Crowded World
- Friends Seeking Clearness on Abortion
- Empowering Women: The Link to Population

Quaker Earthcare Witness works "to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God's creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right, and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring Earth's ecological integrity."

Quaker Earthcare Witness

P. O. Box 6787

Albany, CA 94706

info@quakerearthcare.org

QuakerEarthcare.org

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"Surely this power [of sex] and its mystery relate to the mystery of God's relationship to us."

—Mary Calderone, 1973¹

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