

Open these doors to high and low, history and myth,
Sacred and secular, fact and theory.

To all these worlds of possibility:
Open the doors most joyfully!
To a world of true diversity:
black and green, red and white, rural and urban, serious and silly,
To seekers and reachers, to curvy and straight,
to those who suffer and all those outside the lines, we say:

Open these doors with utmost pride and pleasure!

Finally! It's ready! Come on in!
Shout praise and cheer!
To liberty!
Shout praise and cheer!
To the library!

We say:
Let this place spark our imagination into flame!
Let it fuel our dreams!

We say: Sound the drums!
Open the doors!
Let's celebrate today!
Celebrate!

The Mystery and the Act: Towards a YA Human Sexuality Collection

by Teri Weesner

This essay is based on the premise that there is a connection between young people accessing porn via the internet and their innate curiosity about human sexuality and their own bodies. Young people viewing internet porn have an information need that can be addressed by youth services librarians and library collections. To ignore this information need is just as inaccurate and inappropriate as young people gleaming their information from internet pornography and cybersex chat. Young people's information needs are legitimate and the response of shaming from librarians is an ineffective tool for teaching, learning or discipline.

Cultural reluctance to educate young people about human sexuality and cultural reaction of shame and punishment for young people's experimentation and access to information through the prolific pornography industry is an intrinsically related combination which fosters unhealthy cultural human sexuality. Unhealthy in the sense that shame and ignorance become barriers to people's healthy and safe concepts and practice of sexuality. A culture which will not educate itself about sex in order to "protect" itself is left (on many levels) ironically unprotected.

We relegate a large percent of sexual culture to the pornography industry and keep it separated as forbidden knowledge. When pornography overextends these boundaries of separateness, as in the case of young people accessing internet porn, a body of accurate, accessible and respectfully presented knowledge is needed to turn to.

Go Ask Alice (<http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu> or the 1998 paperback) is one of the best resources I've seen in terms of medical accuracy and honest and respectful responses. Go Ask Alice is not only an indispensable resource of accurate health information for people of any age with questions but an excellent primer for librarians on honest and respect-

ful dissemination of "sensitive" information. As my signed copy says, "Be healthy and happy – Alice."

As librarians, our charge is to create an environment of information in relation to the needs of all people who would access that information as well as an ideology of honesty and respect towards all people and their information needs. Shooing young people off the internet is like obnoxious shooshing of their curiosity and hunger for knowledge. Young people speak with their behavior. When we are confused by their behavior, ask them what it is they really want to communicate and help them find it in your collection (which includes the library's computer). We are the gatekeepers and porn and cybersex chat are barriers in youth services. Our job as librarians is to open the gate when asked and assist young people to navigate those barriers.

As adults looking back at our own youth, think about how such dispassionate information may have benefited us to make informed, individual choices.

Take a look at your youth services human sexuality collection under the subject heading, "sex instruction." What proportion of the titles are current, accurate, respectful, dispassionate information in a form young people will read? Are the juvenile titles in the juvenile or the adult collection? Weed and reseed your collection for Teen Read Week, held annually in October.

The following are a few human sexuality titles I highly recommend.

Bell, Ruth with members of the Teen Book Project (1998). *Changing bodies, changing lives: A book for teens on sex and relationships*. Vintage Books: New York. Accurate information, illustrated with drawings and photographs. Uses real-life stories from teens themselves. Its authorship might make it especially trustworthy for readers familiar with the classic, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

Blank, Joani (1983). *A kid's first book about sex*. Yes Press: San Francisco, CA. "A first for this age child... the focus is on self image, the pleasures of sexuality and personal relationships, not on reproduction..." – School Library Journal. I picked this one up at the Women's

Presses Library Project booth at ALA. Visit their site at <http://www.litwomen.org>

<http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu>. Originally for Columbia University, the internet allowed Columbia to share the wealth of health information in a Q & A format. This site is still linked to ALA's "Teen Hoopla" site. Although Dr. Laura's nationally syndicated condemnation of ALA and Go Ask Alice was negative attention, it was attention none the less. Many people are now glad to know of this site with an archive of over 1,500 Q&A's.

Columbia University's Health Education Program. (1998) *The "Go Ask Alice" Book of Answers*. Henry Holt: New York. The book from the site of the same name. I picked up this gem for \$5 at ALA; my only regret is not buying an even dozen to share with all the libraries and resource centers I have contact with.

Harris, Robie (1994) *It's Perfectly Normal*. Candlewick Press: Cambridge, MA. A cartoon type illustrated book for youth, which is easily accessible in format and language.

Finally, here are two human sexuality books by favorite authors who have contributed greatly to children's literature.

Brown, Laura Krasny and Marc (1997) *What's the Big Secret?: Talking about Sex with Girls and Boys*, Little, Brown and Company: Boston MA. From the creators of *Dino Life Guides for Families* and the *Arthur* books comes a book about human sexuality for young children with neither dinosaurs nor aardvarks, but just as wonderfully illustrated. After discussing gender socialization and how that is not always an accurate indicator of gender, page 10 says, "Actually, the only sure way to tell boys and girls apart is their bodies." Homosexuality is not discussed.

Cole, Joanna (1988) *Asking about Sex and Growing Up: A Question and Answer Book for Boys and Girls*. Beech Tree Books: New York. Although 11 years old, if this book is still in your collection it is still valuable. "The most important thing to remember about sex as you

grow up is to respect yourself and others." She covers a wide-range of topics including homosexuality. At the end she encourages the reader to consult other resources (people and books) and emphasizes life-long learning.

If you have other titles to add to this bibliography, please send them to me at teri@libr.org.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences, by Bowker, Geoffrey C. and Star, Susan Leigh. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

Reviewed by Sanford Berman

Truth in Reviewing Declaration: An extremely flattering (and gratifying) reference to my own work appears on page 327.

This painstaking and sometimes fascinating work seeks to demonstrate that classification systems spring from cultural, social, and political contexts – and may have definite cultural, social, and political consequences. Given their pervasiveness and growing influence, it is wise to understand how and why these categorizing and naming codes develop, what their effects can be, and how to make them at once more visible and accountable. "Our job," say the authors, "is to find tools for seeing the invisible," to explore "systems of classification as part of the built information environment," and to examine how "classifications and standards give advantage or...give suffering" for specific individuals, groups or situations. They approach these tasks by sandwiching detailed studies of discrete systems that have been devised to categorize diseases (ICD), viruses, tuberculosis, race (in Apartheid South Africa), and nursing work (Nursing Intervention Classification) between opening and closing chapters dealing with theory and implications. References to related literature abound, their closely-packed bibliography extending to 32 pages.

Librarians may glean lessons, or cautionary tales, from much of the material, especially the experience of nurses – a similarly feminized and undervalued group – in crafting a veritable inventory of what they actually do in order to establish their worth and professionalism (the product, however, being subject to possible adverse uses by management). And there is explicit recognition of the power of naming, which easily applies to subject cataloging practice. Here's one relevant quote: "Many patients feel that one of the greatest burdens of having chronic fatigue syndrome is the name of the illness." A comparable situation has long obtained with respect to "leprosy," still a Library of Congress subject heading. Both