

SEX *and*
SELF-RESPECT

*The Quest for Personal
Fulfillment*

PHILIP M. HELFAER

Bioenergetics Press

*Alachua, Florida
U.S.A.*

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i> , by Alexander Lowen	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	xiii
Part I Toward an Organismic Theory of the Self	1
1. Sex and Self-Respect in Personal Fulfillment	3
2. Identification with the Genital	25
3. Seeing the Person: Bioenergetic Analysis	47
Part II Violations of Sexuality	75
4. The Sexual Misery of Our Time	77
5. Genital Incest Desires	95
6. Sexual Crazyness versus Sexual Passion	103
7. Shock, Genital Injury, and Dissociation	113
8. The Hated Child	123
9. Shame and Guilt	135
Part III Toward a Self-Respecting Sexuality	155
10. The Vital Connection	157
11. A Facilitating Environment for Self-Respect	163
12. The Individual in the Couple	181
13. Living One's Sexuality	201
<i>Notes</i>	213
<i>References</i>	227
<i>Index</i>	231

Part I

TOWARD AN ORGANISMIC THEORY OF THE SELF

Part I presents the essential concepts of organismic functionalism. Pulsation, the ordinary rhythmic movement of living tissue, is the fundamental biological phenomenon of this view. Sex and self-respect are analyzed in terms of the principles of organismic functionalism. An individual's sexuality and selfhood are the outcomes of developmental adaptations of that person's biology to life in a given family and sociocultural world. An identification with the genital, or its disturbance, is the core of that adaptation, and will be reflected in the very being of the man or woman as he or she seeks fulfillment. The self's fulfillment originates more in the life of the cells of the body than in the ego's accomplishments.

SEX AND SELF-RESPECT IN PERSONAL FULFILLMENT

The living *simply functions*, it has no "meaning"
—Wilhelm Reich

SEXUALITY AND SELFHOOD

We humans are essentially sexual creatures. Our pursuit and fulfillment of a sexual life and reproduction are key elements of our personal fulfillment. Paradoxically, however, while they are key to personal fulfillment, they are not simply matters of personal choice: they are behavioral expressions of our biology. We do not choose to be or not be sexual beings.

Sex reaches into the deepest biological layers of the organism, and it extends into every aspect of the individual's social functioning. Consider a specific sexual act. Its bodily engagements—desire, genital sensations, the body's whole response in orgasm—are obvious; its social aspects, perhaps less so. Most usually, sex is experienced as a personal event apart from society. Its refreshment comes, in some measure, from just that aspect of the experience. In reality, however, meanings, feelings, roles, and relationships experienced in sex are also intrinsic to or derived from society and the individual's history and position in a society. We see here a polarity between organismic—bodily—aspects of sex and social aspects, both meeting in, and having a common root in, the individual person.

We see the same kind of polarity in the case of self-respect. Self-respect is an organismic, bodily matter, not simply a psychological one. It rests on the same biological functions as sex, and it arises from the same biological heritage as sex. At the same time, self-respect, a keenly personal matter, reflects our sensitivity to our position within our group, our tribe, our community. In fact, our sociality, itself, is given to us through our biological

heritage at the same time it is indelibly colored by a unique, personal, sociopsychological history.

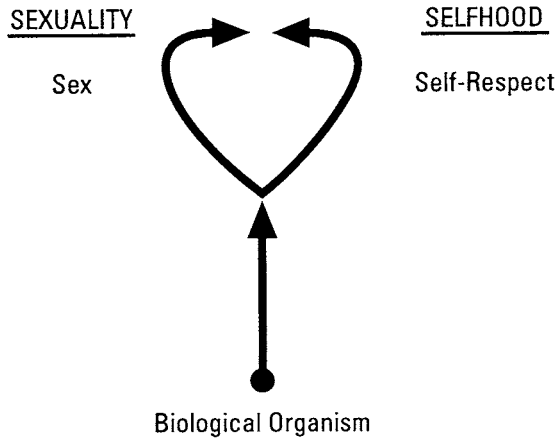
If biological, sociocultural, and psychological polarities characterize sex and self-respect, they must also characterize an understanding of the quest for personal fulfillment. In the light of these polarities, we can see that personal fulfillment is not something we either chose (egocentrically) to pursue, or chose (altruistically) to eschew in favor of some "higher" goal. Neither sex nor self-respect can be understood as simply "egocentric" or "altruistic," since each can be seen in the light of both these dimensions. I point this out because offering a discussion of "the quest for personal fulfillment" may evoke an equivocal response. For one thing, it might be taken to have a selfish ring, reflecting a discreditable, self-centeredness. However, the nature of personal fulfillment, as I see it, is not such that it is amenable to glib manipulation, egocentric or otherwise, nor is it in our hands at all, in the most fundamental of ways.

Personal fulfillment, then, in all its positive or frustrated variants, is an experiential outgrowth of the inevitable and powerful movements in our lives driven by the forces of our biology and our adaptation to our social world. Sex and self-respect are twin aspects of that biologically rooted quest. In addition, personal fulfillment, in the terms in which I understand it, is not a condition in opposition to a meaningful sociality. On the contrary, they are both to be found along the same avenue—through sex and self-respect.

To understand these matters in the broadest perspective we need to think in terms of sexuality and selfhood. "Sex" refers to the sexual act, or to the fact of being male or female, whereas "sexuality" encompasses all that array of matters pertaining thereto, including the particular *way* in which one man or one woman is a man or woman in the world. "Selfhood" is a way of referring to the whole range of states—and estates—involved in being a person. Sexuality and selfhood can be viewed as two great principles of individual organization within whose terms we can find a comprehensive understanding of the person.

Sexuality and selfhood are intimately interrelated, two aspects of the same organism which are never separated. Their mutual development forms an integral whole, in the same way that the root and crown of a tree form a whole. If sexuality were the root, selfhood would be the crown; neither can be damaged without damaging the other. Sexuality and selfhood are also functions of the organism.

Sexuality and selfhood, by their very nature personal, are also expressions of the way in which the individual is embedded in his or her social world. Both personal and social aspects of these functions are expressions of the underlying biological life of the organism. This sequence of polarities can be nicely captured by a diagrammatic schema invented by Wilhelm Reich.¹ Figure 1 shows sexuality and selfhood as functions, or organizing principles, of the same biological organism. Their relationship is considered

Figure 1. Functional Polarities of the Organism

Source of diagram: Wilhelm Reich, *Function of the Orgasm*, Chapter 7.

a functional one because they arise from the same biological root, and whatever functions they represent must be coordinated for the organism's adaptation. Arising from the same biological root, sex and self-respect are initially identical. They then separate as distinct functions or principles of organization, and then they are juxtaposed as antithetical to each other. Reich termed this the identity and antithesis of biological functioning.²

It is not difficult to consider some of the surface possibilities suggested by the identity and antithesis of sex and self-respect. Sex in a situation that undermines the individual's self-respect has consequences, ones that inevitably cause distress. Sex in a situation in which self-respect is enhanced, enhances both, allowing for feeling good on many levels. Without sex, or its possibility, or capacity, self-respect may be determined, leaving the person with a sense of impotence or emptiness. The sense of desiring and knowing one is capable of sex enhances self-respect, even without the actual experience or its possibility. In these ways, sex and self-respect function "identically."

Other examples indicated how they may function antithetically. The claims of self-respect may delay sexual activities, as when a person chooses to have sex only with a chosen partner. The claims of self-respect may help a person renounce an exciting but problematic sexual partner. The claims of self-respect may help one to free oneself from a burdensome sexual role, once assumed to be inherent in masculinity or femininity. Such "claims of self-respect," goading the individual to action, arise not simply from ideas about who one is or should be. They arise most fundamentally from real bodily distress and the need to be at home once again with oneself on a bodily level, with a better feeling in one's very