

Essay for Feminine Mysticism in Art
Edited by Victoria Christian

RECLAIMING GODDESS SEXUALITY
By Linda E. Savage, Ph.D.

“Is Something Wrong With Me?”

Women seek help in sex therapy because they fear that there is something terribly wrong with their sexuality. They have lived so long under the shadow of the male model of woman as pleaser that very few of them have an independent view of their sexual selves. Ironically, women may think that they have too little or too much desire based on what their partners have told them, or what they have learned in their childhood and adolescence. Many women feel they have “lost” their desire for sex because they do not respond in ways that satisfy their partners. Some women feel that there is something wrong with them because they desire more sex than their partners and have been summarily rejected by men for this. Rarely does any woman think that her sexuality is exactly right.

A Modern History of Female Desire

For roughly five to eight thousand years, female sexuality has been defined, discussed, dismissed, maligned, and misrepresented in patriarchal societies. The term *patriarchy* refers to the prevailing male-dominated social and political structure that has been reinforced by legal systems and militant power. It does not in any way refer to all men. In fact, only the dominant males in high status positions truly benefited from the unequal distribution of wealth and access to resources. In these cultures, masculine traits were distorted by the idealized male image of violent and emotionally disconnected warrior heroes.

Under patriarchal law, the rare women who pursued and enjoyed sexual activity in their own way (neither concubine nor wife) were castigated, ostracized, and even killed for it. The word *sex* meant “intercourse,” and it was something men “got” and women “gave,” and the purpose of the whole business for women was simply to bear heirs (preferably male) for the legal passing-on of inheritances. And God help the woman who gave it under the wrong circumstances! When medical texts began to say anything about sexuality, the knowledge imparted about women was ludicrous at best. Early marriage manuals exhorted women to submit to what had been reduced to a wifely duty. Female physiology was grossly misunderstood. According to Elaine Morgan, author of *The Descent of Woman*, “Men with the highest medical qualifications pontificated that the very concept of female orgasm was a fantasy of depraved minds and beyond belief.” This was less than 100 years ago!

Until the 1970s, psychiatrists considered the clitoral orgasm to be “immature,” and assumed that intercourse was the only right way to experience sexual pleasure. Not more than 50 years ago, Kinsey had the groundbreaking notion of actually asking women what they experienced. Since the 1970s, some serious attempts have been made to define

women's sexual responses from more objective data. Masters and Johnson actually studied women responding sexually in a laboratory and proved that all women were capable of orgasms, originating in the clitoris. This ushered in the age of sexual pleasure for women. However, it did not suddenly free women of the internal bonds. In fact it merely added the previously male issue of performance anxiety to women's sexual problems.

Knowledge of the physiology of female sexual functioning does not address the deeper mystery of female sexual desire. Most writing describes how to make orgasms happen, with detailed descriptions of oral and manual touching. These books and articles remind me of recipe cookbooks ignoring the big picture of thousands of years of cultural conditioning. Women's desire all too often remains elusive, to the frustration of the women as well as their partners.

All the effort to "give" women orgasms (as if we did not own them for ourselves) is missing the point. The genital orgasm as the ultimate goal in sexual functioning is still defining sex by a model limited to an essentially male viewpoint. Unless a woman is engaged of her own free will and feeling the desire, unless she is in touch with the power of her feminine way, all the efforts of her partner are for naught.

Men are often the ones to bring their partners to sex therapy. They buy the books and try to persuade women to try this position or learn that technique. These techniques are all empty exercises without the full and active participation of the woman: her body, mind, and soul. Sadly, many men will settle for a sexual encounter that engages a woman's body even if it is through manipulation, illusory promises, mental coercion, or even force. But once they have experienced even one encounter when a woman's whole being is engaged, they seek this transcendent experience like the search for the Holy Grail.

"What is Goddess Sexuality?"

Imagine living in a culture where sex was sacred and not a sin! The cultures that honored the divine feminine, existing for over 30,000 years, knew that women's sexuality was a life-affirming expression of spirit. Women's sexuality and especially their Yonis were sacred. Goddess sexuality reflects the ancient erotic paradigm integrating sexuality and spirituality. The ancient cultures understood that sexual pleasure honored the Goddess, connected us with spirit, and renewed the life force.

A central aspect of ancient celebrations at special times of the year was the enactment of the Great Marriage, which was a sexual union between the High Priestess, who was the earthly representative of the Goddess and her consort. The rite honored the deeper mysteries of sexuality. The Great Marriage ritual was performed in a beautiful private setting, yet the whole community participated in processions, singing, and prayer that supported the success of their magical connection. It was believed that the powerful energy they released ensured the prosperity of the community. What followed was a whole day and sometimes week of great joyous celebrating—feasting, drinking, dancing, singing and open enjoyment of eroticism. At Beltane (May 1st), fires were lit at sundown and after many hours of celebrating, couples would melt away to enjoy a night of erotic

pleasure. In fact, making love in the fields was a way to honor the Goddess and ensure the health of the crops.

Today, when sexual energy is perceived as purely genital sensations, it can be misunderstood as a simple physical release. However, sexual energy moves from the base of the spine and radiates through the whole body-mind system. The spiral of energy travels up and down the body through all the energy centers in a continuous, pulsing current. In essence, we are plugged into a cosmic “electric outlet” through the energy centers.

At the heart center, sexual energy is healing, and connects partners in conscious loving. Keep in mind that our ability to tell the truth about ourselves deepens our capacity for intimacy and intensifies sexual desire. By practicing conscious loving we can develop the pathway to the next level of sexual expression, consciousness expansion. There is infinite potential for transcendental sexual experiences that produce a sense of merging with the source of energy and loss of physical boundaries at the moment of orgasm. These ecstatic moments are often described as “being in the moment of boundless bliss.” It is cosmic orgasm, the direct experience of the self as pure energy, in union with a divine source.

The uniting of sex and spirit is an ancient memory now emerging in our collective consciousness. Today, we can re-affirm our deep instinctual understanding that our sexuality is both a healing energy and a pathway to raising our consciousness. Whether practiced with a partner or solo, we can use the preparation of sacred space, breathing techniques and visualization to bathe our energetic fields and release our desires out into the Universe. Goddess sexuality is the acknowledgement that ecstatic union with the life force is our birthright. It offers us life-long permission to explore and enjoy sexual pleasure.

The Power of Sex

There is an irrefutable power in sexual energy. Although sexual energy can be misused, the energy itself is transforming. When it is experienced by fully conscious, consenting adults, it is empowering and healing. Sexual union is the best way to experience wholeness that humans can know.

I believe that the power of a woman’s sexual desire and responsiveness derives from her internal alignment with her core feminine energy. When a woman clearly understands and creates the conditions that enhance, *for herself*, the experience of her ecstasy, she has the ideal setting for her sexuality to blossom. When a woman can validate her core self and unique approach to her sexuality, magnetic power emerges from within. She feels energized, uplifted, affirmed, and transformed. Her partner will feel it as well. When a woman finds her I AM GODDESS self, she transmutes universal energy and aligns with Life Force. Her powerful sexuality flows through her to her partner. This is the magic. This magnetic force transmutes through her body connecting her with herself, her partner, and life. The resulting alchemical transformation raises energy beyond the physical. The body-mind-spirit is joined with the powerful source of all energy.

The Wisdom of the Goddess

In order to heal feminine desire, women must reclaim the core of the universal feminine variously called: The Great Goddess, The Great Mother, Earth Mother, Mother of All. The Goddess represents the feminine polarity of the Life Force. She is not outside our experience, but an eternal awareness inside us all. Ultimately there is no gender to Spirit. However, by using the image of the feminine, we can break up the judging, sex-negative image of the Divine that has dominated for the last five to eight thousand years.

Political and religious domination by patriarchy has led us down a false path, leading us away from sexual pleasure as a freely chosen, mutually beneficial partnership. In order for women and men to experience the divine healing power of sexual union, both must be aligned with their essential core. Long before it was thought that men owned the reproductive and sexual rights to their mates, women conceived and gave birth and engaged in sexual encounters based on their choice. Sexual desire was perceived as the will of the Great Mother Goddess. Children were considered a gift of the Mother, and their legitimacy was never in question. They were accepted and loved in their own right. Any pregnancy was a miracle, and no societal judgment was placed on the woman for her sexual choices.

The worship of the feminine Divine Force gave women an important role in all aspects of life. During the Golden Age of the Goddess, her High Priestess was the Earthly representative of the Great Mother. She always had a consort with whom she enjoyed her sexuality, which was considered sacred. Any child of that union was especially honored. These Goddess cultures were matrilineal (inheritance traced through the mother) and woman-centered, but they were not ruled by women--they were essentially egalitarian. According to Riane Eisler in *The Chalice and the Blade*, they favored a partnership model of male and female relationships. How they viewed sexual relations between men and women is most important for our understanding of the feminine way.

In the female-positive cultures, all paths were open to women and were honored equally: mother, priestess, healer, craftswoman, farmer, surveyor, scribe, and hunter. The choices depended on their abilities and inclinations. Most women chose several roles, as they do now. They were valued in all three stages of their lives: Maiden, Mother, and Crone. They were not ignored once their reproductive capabilities were over. One can only conclude that female sexual desire was not the problem that it has become in patriarchal culture. I believe that in the old wisdom lie truths that will lead women out of the terrible sexual self-perception they have endured for millennia.

Psychological Domains of the Maiden, Mother and Crone

The ancient cultures that worshipped the Great Mother Goddess recognized three distinct phases of a woman's life: the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone (which means "Wise One"). Women were closely associated with the moon because their menstrual flow aligned with the new, the full, and the dark phases. Their lives bore a similar pattern of division into triads, and so the tides of the moon, the tides of a woman's monthly courses, and the stages of a woman's life are three. Women's life phases are not only chronological stages, but useful divisions of feminine function and task that offer more than rich symbolic meaning. The stages continue to reflect many aspects of female life

experience, as each stage represents a profound psychological transformation. Each of the stages, Maiden, Mother, Crone, is also a domain (field of influence) within the feminine psyche with different types of sexual expression, potentially available to all adult women.

The Maiden within us is the playful child delighting in the wonder of pleasure and sexual exploration. She is longing to be loved. She is the source of our natural curiosity and sensuality. The psychological sets of readiness to awaken sexual energy and permission “to do what feels good for me” in safe settings are necessary for the Maiden to come out to play.

The Mother is the nurturer bestowing loving acceptance and lasting commitment on beloved partners. She is the source within us of our capacity to build communion with another in the act of giving and receiving love. The Mother in us takes responsibility for generating compassionate sexuality beyond self-gratification. She knows our personal, seductive conditions and can surrender to sexual desire.

The Crone is the wise woman within us who can consciously generate healing energy. She is the part of us feeling empowered to act on intentional desire in an honoring setting. The Crone is the adept within, listening to intuition and recognizing divine guidance. If we so choose, she is the part of us that accesses the sixth sense, discerning information from our body wisdom.

A New Model of Female Sexuality

Women’s low sexual desire is largely a reflection of the limits that were imposed by patriarchy combined with their own life histories. Extremely sex-negative messages have been indoctrinated into male and especially female children for the last few thousand years. Women will need to internalize the sex-positive, permission-giving, life-enhancing messages of the Goddess cultures and then create the safe, seductive and honoring settings that work best. With knowledge of ancient mysteries, they can choose to pursue sexual mastery, which in turn leads into the realm of spiritual sexuality.

When a woman is in her I AM GODDESS self, her capacity for creativity increases tenfold. The new view of female sexuality is uniquely feminine, without reference to the male model. I invite you to join with women who are reclaiming their sexuality from this perspective. I encourage you to explore ancient wisdom, and recapture the essence of the feminine sexual perspective that existed before the patriarchal myth that woman was fashioned from Adam’s rib merely to be his mate. Goddess sexuality reclaims the essence of female desire and women’s unique pathways to ecstasy.

Once the feminine way is added into the equation in relationships, the healing, life-giving, transforming, sacred sexual pleasuring can be experienced and can sustain long-term relationships. As communities finally become truly egalitarian between the genders, the ensuing partnership can expand into enriching life on this planet. It is time.

Linda E. Savage, Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist and sex therapist exploring the mysteries of sexual healing for over 25 years. She is the author of *Reclaiming Goddess Sexuality: The Power of the Feminine Way*, a view of women’s sexuality that blends the ancient wisdom of the Goddess cultures with current clinical knowledge.

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