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The Social Context of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa

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THE AIDS EPIDEMIC IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA may well constitute the greatest public health challenge of our time. Its containment is likely to rest ultimately upon social knowledge that is at present vestigial and upon sophisticated social research of a type toward which we have only just begun to grasp. Such social research is likely to reveal a coherent society—indeed, an alternative civilization—very different in its workings, including its patterns of sexual behavior, than outsiders prescribing cures and even offering sympathy and support often realize. It proved important to understand those differences when analyzing fertility trends, and in an effort to do so we employed the term “homo ancestralis” (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987). In the context of AIDS it is even more important to understand sub-Saharan African society and the role of sexual relations within it. This essay aims both to define the larger society and to examine and evaluate the available empirical evidence on sexual behavior.

By mid-1988 there may have been some 250,000 AIDS victims worldwide. More significantly, an estimated 5–10 million people were already infected with its causative factor, the HIV virus, of whom perhaps 30 percent were in sub-Saharan Africa, the home of less than 10 percent of the world’s population (Bongaarts, 1988: 1, interpreting data from the World Health Organization). HIV prevalence among the region’s adults was possibly already one percent, reaching as high as 10 percent in some urban areas of East and Central Africa. Bongaarts’s (1988: 30) projected East and Central African death rate for the year 2000 is, at 26 deaths per thousand population, about double the level that it would have been in the absence of AIDS. Populations

would still be growing substantially, but, with half of all deaths arising from a single epidemic, the only parallels for a region of this size would be Europe during the Black Death of the fourteenth century or India transiently during the height of the post–World War I influenza outbreak.

The current risk factors in the region are clear: living or working in an urban environment, having a large number of heterosexual partners, and suffering from genital lesions (often originating from venereal infection) (Dawson, 1988: 57). It is not known how these risks will change—whether, for instance, the relative urban–rural incidence of the virus will remain so high.

It is clear that lifestyle plays a dominant role in determining individuals' chances of infection, and it seems probable that the level of the disease over the coming decades is more likely to be decided by changing lifestyles than by medical breakthroughs. Those changes will be most successful, and least damaging to the society, if the behavioral factors in the spread of the disease are well understood.

Such understanding may not come about if the needed research is hindered, as appears possible, by a misreading of the situation, ironically arising often from the best of motives aimed at reducing perceived racialism. In their introduction to the recent landmark study, *AIDS in Africa: The Social and Policy Impact*, Miller and Rockwell (1988: xxvi) write “there is no evidence that Africans are more likely to be sexually promiscuous than people from any other continent.” They then give this view a research-policy orientation by adding that “there is a tendency to look for factors that explain promiscuous sex lives, but in this is a serious risk of projecting age-old western stereotypes and prejudices about sexuality onto African cultures.” They base their statements on contributed papers by Brokensha (1988) and Waite (1988) that do not fully support this view, although the latter does write (p. 153): “Most of the stereotypes were based on myths. . . . [T]here was nothing inherent in African practices to support the notion that sexual excesses were widespread.”

This language is, itself, part of a stereotype that may well limit needed research. It is, in fact, the very specific and, in many ways, peculiar Western world view that renders hazardous the discussion of different patterns of sexual behavior by the use of terms like “promiscuous” and “excesses” and that finds cultures guiltless by concluding that they do not significantly differ from Western patterns. The sensitivity that gives rise to such statements is easily understood, for social researchers have often been the foremost in justifying their own culture, and have either identified “deviant” cultural behavior or have approvingly suggested that such deviance was on the decline. Murdock wrote in 1949 (p. 260) that “The imperious drive of sex is capable of impelling individuals, reckless of consequences while under its spell, toward behavior which may imperil or disrupt the cooperative rela-

tionships upon which social life depends." He sought to show that the regulation of nonmarital sexual relations was the path to civilization. Again, in 1964, he wrote of the Yale Human Relations Area File that "The data . . . seem generally consistent with an evolutionary hypothesis to the effect that norms of premarital sexual behavior tend to become progressively more restrictive with an increase in cultural complexity" (Murdock, 1964: 409). Goode concluded his survey of the marriage patterns of sub-Saharan Africa by writing:

[T]he general trend seems unequivocal, since with respect to every major family element the movement is definite. . . . If the new African nations follow the path of many other emerging nations, the next decade will witness an accentuated move away from tribal family patterns and toward a conjugal system. The resurgence of pride in the indigenous heritage will not buttress traditional family patterns, because the effort to be accepted by older nations as "modern" or "civilized" will create continuing social and legal forces in line with "progressive" family sentiments and behavior. (1963: 200–202)

This essay will argue that there is a distinct and internally coherent African system embracing sexuality, marriage, and much else, and that it is no more right or wrong, progressive or unprogressive than the Western system, or, to employ Jack Goody's (1976) term, as we will, *Eurasian society*. Nevertheless, that Eurasian system is pervasive in our thinking and in what religion and colonial administrators have taught in sub-Saharan Africa; it is clearly the precept behind such advice of international organizations as is contained in the 1984 Mexico City Declaration on Population and Development. It is partly incorporated in the ways of thinking of Africa's educated elites and its most Islamized or Christianized populations. The African system is not restricted to its region, and much of it can be found in Melanesia, and some of it in parts of Southeast Asia. It has been pushed back everywhere by the dynamic development and expansion of Eurasia and by the incorporation of the Eurasian system in the world religions that developed in its ancient heartland from the Levant to the Gangetic Plain.

Ironically, the Eurasian system, hitherto propagated by religious and secular administrative missionaries, may now be advocated even more effectively by medical missionaries, prompted by health needs but partly sustained also by a belief that their own system is logically or ethically sounder.

This process was begun in the battle against venereal disease, because the African system is vulnerable to attack by all coital-related disorders. Such social engineering, aimed at reducing female sterility disorders through more restricted sexual networking, was advocated by Podlewski (1966: 21) as a defense in Cameroon against venereal disease, to the indignation of David and Voas (1981: 659):

Can the demographic outlook be changed? Certainly not by the various irrelevant and impracticable infringements of Fulani custom, not to mention human rights. . . . [H]igher fertility could be achieved simply by an energetic and continuing campaign of medical education and treatment.

In contrast, this last advice may not for many years yet be fit to be given for AIDS.

The African system is the most important alternative to the Eurasian one because most of it is largely intact in a contiguous area occupied by one-tenth of the human race—and possibly by one-sixth in another 40 years (United Nations, 1989). It is responsible for maintaining high and constant fertility over the region in a way that no longer has any parallel elsewhere in a whole world region (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987).

The following are the typical characteristics of the African system: great emphasis on the importance of ancestry and descent, usually accompanied by a belief in ancestral spirit intervention in the affairs of the living; a related social system that, in its most complex form, the lineage, places greater importance on intergenerational links than on conjugal ones and that gives great respect and power to the old; an inheritance system whereby property, which is usually communal, remains within the lineage or clan and normally passes between members of the same sex; agriculture characterized by shifting cultivation based on the use of the hoe, typically by women. In keeping with the aim of lineage perpetuation, emphasis is placed on fertility: by society, the ancestral spirits, and even the high gods who are otherwise of little day-to-day importance. Virtue is related more to success in reproduction than to limiting profligacy; and in many societies the initiation ceremonies allowing sexual activity to commence are ritually more important than the celebration of marriage. The marriage bond is typically weak, with spouses retaining strong lineage links, and with a marked spousal separation of economic activities and responsibilities; the marriage payment takes the form of bridewealth paid to the wife's family from the husband's rather than to the couple themselves and never includes land; polygyny exists on a scale not found in the Eurasian system, and consequently the basic family unit is a mother and her children; husbands are usually much older than wives; divorce is fairly common among most ethnic groups; and women, at least in the past, abstained from sexual relations after giving birth for a period that might extend to years. Although there are powerful individuals and positions and in traditional society such powerless people as slaves, and some persons are very much richer than others, the society is not stratified into largely hereditary and endogamous classes or castes.

It is important to note that these aspects of society and individual behavior are features of a *system* and that most of the characteristics listed are logically related to one another, although the direction of causation is

usually debatable. For instance, the weak conjugal bond follows from the strong lineage one, but it also allows the lineage to retain its strength.

The emotional and economic weakness of the conjugal bond is reinforced by polygyny, the great age gap between spouses, and the long postpartum period of sexual abstinence. Furthermore, to take up a point that we return to later, illegitimacy in birth is essentially a concept of Eurasian marital reproduction and not of African lineage reproduction. We also note that this list is one of conspicuous characteristics as viewed from the Eurasian system; there are other characteristics that the two systems have in common and that accordingly almost escape observation. It is also noteworthy that the African system has been under assault for centuries by the guns and religions of the Eurasian system, as well as by its administrative, educational, and media apparatus, and is not wholly intact. Schapera (1971) reported that polygyny was disappearing as early as the 1960s in what is now Botswana, and similar changes have reportedly been under way in parts of Kenya and Uganda. Postpartum sexual abstinence has declined over this century in East Africa. During this same period in East Africa, settled agriculture replaced shifting cultivation over very considerable areas.

While there is general agreement on the differences between the two systems, there is no consensus on what caused or sustains the differences. Yet this is of fundamental importance for understanding each system and evaluating its resistance to change when faced by such major threats as, in the coming decades, the AIDS epidemic may pose.

The major theories all assume that the African system was, in a sense, the original and inevitable world system among preagricultural hunting and food-gathering bands and was suited to the early neolithic period. The central question was why it did not subsequently change as a new system emerged in Eurasia. Saucier (1972) and Boserup (1970) essentially posit rejection theories; those in Africa who benefited from the system succeeded in fending off changes that would disadvantage them. Saucier (1972: 247) identified the old men as those who gained most from the system and who had maintained their position as

[a] kind of community gerontocracy. Through the command of land and cattle the elders control the acquisition of women, and through the puberty rites they maintain their power over the young men. . . . The long postpartum taboo is not always successful in preventing the rebellion of the unmarried or monogamous men. . . . However, the taboo, combined with beliefs concerning abortion, fear of the ancestors, and intercommunity warfare, is certainly useful to the elders in maintaining control.

Boserup (1970: 32–33) identified all men as the privileged group who successfully resisted change, not so much this time to enjoy absolute power but in order to avoid the drudgery of farming:

African cultivators can avoid the heavy burden of keeping and feeding animals because with such a thinly populated continent shifting cultivation can be pursued. . . . The explanation is that in regions with a favourable land/man ratio, the system of shifting cultivation requires less input of labour per unit of output than primitive systems of permanent cultivation. . . .

It is precisely because such labour-extensive farming systems can be used in most of Africa that it is possible for African villagers to leave most of the farming work to women, while men work very short hours in agriculture. . . .

Female farming systems seem most often to disappear when farming systems with ploughing of permanent fields are introduced. . . . In a typical case, this change is the result of increasing population density. . . . [T]he advent of the plough usually entails a radical shift in sex roles in agriculture; men take over the ploughing even in regions where the hoeing had formerly been women's work. At the same time, the amount of weeding to be done by women may decline on land ploughed before sowing and planting. . . .

Obviously, the adoption of a farming system where the main farming equipment is operated only by men entails a tremendous change in the economic and social relationships between the sexes. . . . [T]he distinction between shifting cultivation and plough cultivation [is] a fundamental criterion for the identification of different social and cultural patterns. . . . [T]he male members of tribes who are faced with the problem of changing from shifting cultivation to plough cultivation are not concerned with these long-term effects of their choice. They naturally think mainly in terms of the additional work burden which the ploughing and the care of the draught animals may give them.

Economic man was never more decisive:

Where both the desire for children and the economic considerations are at work, the incentives for polygamy are likely to be so powerful that religious or legal prohibition avails little; (p. 41)

and further,

[W]e can expect to find a high incidence of polygamy, and bride wealth being paid by the future husband or his family. The women are hard working and have only a limited right of support from their husbands, but they often enjoy considerable freedom of movement and some economic independence from the sale of their own crops. (p. 50)

In some tribes with self-supporting women, no social stigma is attached to prostitution and semi-prostitution. (p. 100)

These explanations are not really plausible, and are almost teleological in their belief that all men or all old men would work together everywhere to ensure that the system was not endangered. In the real world no one

would realize that a ceiling had to be kept on population numbers to avoid being propelled into a world of plows and hard-working males, and entrepreneurs who could temporarily become richer by ordering or paying someone to make a plow and use it would certainly have done so. Even the deterrence to the arrival of strangers posed by the Sahara Desert and the malaria and yellow fever of the tropical forests provides insufficient explanation. Sub-Saharan Africa was somehow different. More crucially, the explanations center too much on the African system as the one that has to be explained, rather than on the historically and more generally very peculiar Eurasian system. And, from the viewpoint of this essay, the explanations do not devote sufficient attention to female sexual freedom. Saucier probably regards such freedom as an aspect of female exploitation, while Boserup believes it to follow from economic independence. Schlegel and Barry (1986: 146) have taken this debate further: "When women contribute heavily to subsistence, the socialization of children is affected; where girls are being trained for future high contribution, they are significantly more likely to be taught industriousness and less likely to be taught sexual restraint."

A more convincing explanation was put forward by Jack Goody in a series of articles (Goody, 1969, 1971, 1973a, b; Goody, Irving, and Tahany, 1971; Goody and Tambiah, 1973; Goody and Buckley, 1973) and in a single monograph (1976). Goody identifies the new system that required explanation as developing in the area he termed "Eurasia," with its ancient heartland stretching from the Mediterranean lands to the Gangetic Plain, to which he added China. He lays emphasis on the development of agriculture based on the plow drawn by draft animals (at times following clues, as did Boserup, provided by Bloch, in studies of Europe summarized in English in 1966), but he stresses the ability of this type of farming to produce substantial surpluses over subsistence on the good soils of riverine areas and valley bottoms of the Old World in contrast to the vast lateritic and often upland stretches of sub-Saharan Africa. This surplus was so valuable that it led to numerous stratagems to retain possession of it and, more basically, of the land that yielded it. This was the basis of private and inheritable "real" property and of laws and governments that guaranteed it. Private farms of fixed size and defined boundaries are not easily compatible with large lineages whose members all demand access to common resources. They are better maintained and defended by families organized around a strong and usually indissoluble marriage bond. Such families identify strongly with their landed property and its fate and are concerned that it should not be fragmented by children marrying into families poorer than their own. The consequence was a stratified society, where approved marriages took place within strata of similar wealth, thus yielding both social classes and what Goody calls "homogamous marriage." In order to ensure such marriages, and to prevent undesirable claims for marriage being put forward, as well as the birth of

children who could make undesirable claims on the inheritance, premarital sexual relations were, as far as possible and particularly for females, prohibited. Living standards were maintained by the husband's parents ultimately providing inherited property, often land, and the wife's parents matching dowry, sometimes land, in a system that Goody terms "diverging devolution."

In contrast, Africa's poor soils—a theme of Allan (1965)—provided no inducement for such a development. Plows were of little value, and, over great areas, the tsetse fly prohibited the use of draft animals. Control of agricultural production really meant control over people, thus centering concern on reproduction rather than on land inheritance. Even this did not encourage control over armies of agricultural laborers because farming conditions were so poor that each additional worker produced little more than his or her own subsistence. The argument is largely convincing, although it does not establish why large pacified states could not have had an oligarchy of rich landowning men who might have doubled the surplus by putting proletarian men to work beside their wives.

What needs emphasis—and Goody goes only some of the way because the issue at hand, sexuality, is not his prime focus and possibly also because he would not fully agree with the description of Eurasia as peculiar—is just what a strange society the Eurasian changes produced. It was a society stratified into social classes and obsessed with the moral virtues associated with property, especially land, and with all kinds of social minutiae differentiating these classes and held to show superior virtue and refinement with higher ranking in the hierarchy. Most of these characteristics were usually regarded as being displayed largely unconsciously because they were inherent, deriving from either physical inheritance or from generations of socialization. Interlopers, by marriage or other means, could not really acquire these inherent characteristics. Such interloping by marriage, carrying with it the danger of polluting the children's physical and moral inheritance, was to be prevented at all costs. This was the origin of the second obsession, that with a proper and stable marriage to a person of the same social class, and its ensuring by controlling female premarital and extramarital sexuality. Sexual behavior, especially female sexual behavior, moved to center stage in morality and theology. Female sexual purity was maintained by degrees of seclusion and by males forgoing potentially useful female assistance in many areas in order to maintain it. This socially contrived situation of women gave rise to poetry and literature that sought to explain it in universalistic terms. The morality and its esthetic expression linked sexual relations with only the noblest and deepest emotion and abhorred sexuality that had contrived, and especially commercial, components. Payment or material returns for work was noble—the same for sexual services was execrable. Millennia later this system was to provide some protection against AIDS, but in the meantime

it confined much of Eurasian society to a permanently inferior condition and maintained women in a rigidly confined situation. Much of the history of the West has been a struggle to loosen these bonds. The system was so stable, as are all successful systems, because it produced a superstructure of social beliefs and reinforcing religion which was so complete that even now Western social analysts find it difficult to see Africa from any other viewpoint. Africans do see their society as different with regard to the absence of social classes (cf. Senghor, 1964: 94–95) and the position of women. In literature, Cheikh Anta Diop sees African culture “characterized by optimism, peaceable cheer, and a humane regard for womanhood as against the joyless patriarchy of the Indo-European world” (Okpewho, 1987: 331). Some of the fertility implications of this alternative system and its institutions have been spelled out by Frank and McNicoll (1987) with specific regard to Kenya.

Our interest here is how the Eurasian system abstracted from an acquisitive ordering of property inheritance a philosophy of sexual control over females that determines to a considerable degree the life of most of the world’s people as well as scholarly assessments of African society. Goody (1971: 590) made the point that Africans do not discourage marriages between different status groups (in contrast to ethnic groups) as compared with Eurasia, where the social classes, or, in India, castes, were identified as having different manners, speech, dress, and even cuisines, many of these propensities being held to be based on inherent qualities, so that intermarriage was highly undesirable. The need to ensure a suitable marriage for the family’s females led to the safeguarding of the family against the laying of claims predicated on prior sexual knowledge by demanding of them premarital virginity. This measure took on a life of its own and became the most important index not only of a girl’s virtue and value in the marriage market but of her whole family’s virtue or honor and the marriageability of all females in the family. The family assessments based on their females’ sexual abstinence that we found in our south Indian research (Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell, 1988: 92) are echoed not only in the Mediterranean but even in Ireland. Among the rural Irish, Arensberg and Kimball (1968: 197) found that “the comments and attitudes of the small farmers toward sexual behavior cannot be divorced from their appreciation of status in family and community,” and that a female’s premarital sexual misconduct “makes an end of her . . . potential motherhood of a family line, on the one hand, and potential transmission of an advantageous alliance on the other” (p. 210). Campbell (1964: 13) wrote of a Greek mountain community, “Honour is directly concerned in a limited range of situations; typically these emerge after physical assault or verbal insult, or following a sexual assault on the women of the family, or their own misconduct. Objectively, therefore, honour is an aspect of the integrity and social worth of a family as this is judged by the community.” Of Spain, Baroja (1965: 89) reported that “*Prestige*, in fact,

is connected with an idea of honour which is not individual but collective," and Pitt-Rivers (1977: 78) wrote: "The preoccupation with the sexual purity of women and its protection relates to the belief in the transmission of moral qualities through physical inheritance. Lack of chastity in women places in jeopardy the family honour accumulated by forebears." Douglas, writing in *Purity and Danger* (1976: 126), generalized from an examination of India more broadly: "wives are the door of entry to the group. . . . Through the adultery of the wife impure blood is introduced to the lineage."

This sexual morality was reinforced by all Old World religions so that sexual abstinence outside the conjugal union, especially in the case of females, became a prime moral value, often the central moral value, and was exportable with Christianity and Islam to regions not based on millennia of settled agriculture—to northern Europe and the New World. The shackles on female sexuality have never been quite so firmly anchored in these latter societies, and they became weaker still with twentieth century secularization and urbanization. It is no accident that when parallels are sought for African adolescent sexuality, the comparable statistics come from contemporary American cities (cf. Cherlin and Riley, 1986: 59).

This somewhat discursive approach has been necessary to emphasize just how difficult the outside world finds it to understand patterns of African sexuality in a sexually neutral way, even after the struggle over the last 100 years to desanctify chastity in the West. Africans do not believe that outsiders have been able to free themselves from their very strange society and often prefer to say to each other that the "African way" should not be discussed with non-Africans. This attitude may be fraught with grave dangers in the context of a developing AIDS epidemic.

Sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa

We have given our support to Goody's theory, as described above, and have gone further in stressing what follows with respect to attitudes toward sexuality. Yet from the viewpoint of persons steeped in the attitudes of Eurasian society, the conclusions about Africa seem so improbable that it has been necessary to verify the theory by drawing on as much African social data in this area as possible.

The evidence is that Africans neither placed aspects of sexual behavior at the center of their moral and social systems nor sanctified chastity, and that limited changes in that direction began only with the arrival of foreign religions, administrations, and educational systems. The clash of cultures has been so fundamental that the scattered evidence which follows represents a significant fraction of all the research that has been reported (cf. Brokensha, 1988: 167–168). The paucity of evidence is partly attributable to the discomfort some anthropologists feel in delving too deeply into sexual matters.

Furthermore, there are no comparable quantitative surveys—nor for much of the material can there be. Nevertheless, in the context of AIDS, a balanced assessment of the nature and extent of African sexuality is vital, and there is no other way than the rather laborious one adopted here, namely listing and evaluating the available anthropological evidence and judging the weight of that evidence.

Specific general surveys are nonexistent. Mair (1953: 3), summarizing the sexual aspects of her overview of research on marriage and social change, wrote: "The key to the African attitude . . . is that the religious values associated with sex are concentrated on procreation and not on sexual activity as such. . . . Sexual abstinence is not regarded as a virtue in itself." Little (1973: 80), after concentrating on women in the towns, concluded that Africa has a different view of sexual relations. Paulme (1963a: 3) summarized the contributions to her collection of studies of tropical African women: "Almost everywhere a large measure of premarital sexual freedom is permitted to girls—provided they use it with discretion." Almost half a century earlier, Smith and Dale (1920, vol. 2: 35–36) had reported of the Ila-speaking people of what is now rural Zambia that sex was thought of much as eating and drinking, pointing out that: "To write of the Ba-Ila and omit all reference to sex would be like writing of the sky and leaving out the sun; for sex is the most pervasive element of their life. It is the atmosphere into which children are brought."

In our in-depth studies of young women in Ibadan City, Nigeria, during 1973 (P. Caldwell and J. Caldwell, 1987: 240), we noted that they had a variety of emotional problems about beginning or not beginning sexual relations, but even the younger girls did not raise religious or moral issues when discussing the loss of their virginity, and they did not anticipate that their mothers or other relatives would do so. Some, in fact, began sexual relations in irritation that their mothers assumed that they, at the age of 15 or 16 years, had already done so. Epstein (1981: 325), reporting on his study of the Zambian Copper Belt in the 1950s, wrote, "In contrast to Western society . . . attitudes towards the sexual act are simple and straight-forward, without the tremendous solemnity that so often surrounds it in Euro-North American society." He went on to note (pp. 327–328) that there was no puritanical sense of guilt about sex but rather the assumption that it was "a legitimate source of pleasure"—although also an elemental force that could at times be dangerous. Sex may be regarded as natural, but, like prized pleasures in other societies, it is also regarded as being very important. Kisekka (1973: 153) reports of the Baganda men that "many say they would commit suicide if they became impotent," and a similar horror of impotence has been reported in Freetown, Sierra Leone, by Harrell-Bond (1975: 273–274).

Those few anthropologists who report sexual attitudes and practices tend to support this description of little guilt, substantial permissiveness, and

scant danger of punishments that would wreck lives or substantially change them. In East Africa this is true in the descriptions by Beidelman (1973: 262–265) of the Kaguru of Central Tanzania; by Kettel and Kettel (1973: 421–422) of the Tugen of the Western Kenyan Highlands; by Laughlin and Laughlin (1973: 357) of the So of East Uganda; and by Nadel (1947: 288) of the Nuba of the Sudan. Kisekka (1973: 149–152) argues a greater pressure among Uganda's Baganda for unmarried girls to remain chaste, but this is certainly not the picture of the Baganda presented by Southwold (1973: 165–166). The problem is not merely one of different anthropologists but also one of comparing a known present with a possibly idealized past. Southwold (p. 165) reported:

There is a theoretical value attached to premarital chastity of girls and a real value for the more devout Christians. But most people reckon there is no such thing as a virgin. The verb *kwonoona* (to spoil) is used for seducing an unmarried girl, but most people do not seem to take it literally. The only females permanently celibate are Catholic nuns, of whom there are of course very few.

Parkin (1978: 154–155, 160–163) reports a puritanical and almost macho attitude toward adultery by their wives on the part of Luo men in Nairobi, but Epstein (1981: 320–322) expresses surprise that they should differ so much from the situation he found in Zambia and that Little (1973) reported generally in West Africa. Similarly, Mair (1969: 118–121) contrasts the severe attitude reported by Nadel (1942: 353) among the rural Nupe with that of most West African societies.

The lack of guilt about sexual relations does not imply that everyone can handle sexual situations easily: the letters to African magazines make this clear, although they also underscore a matter-of-factness about sex. Nor does it imply a lack of emotional involvement: Okpewho (1987: 337) writes, "Love as a gut feeling is certainly a central factor in the relationship between the African couple—traditional and otherwise—as portrayed in modern African literature." Sex may imply love, but real love also implies sex: an argument that young Yoruba girls in Ibadan in 1973 found uncontestable when put by their boyfriends who demanded proof of their affection. It also does not imply elaborate sexual activities, which admittedly might be expected to be found more as a reaction to puritanical repression. Reports are consistent (cf. Laughlin and Laughlin, 1973: 355; Jacobs, 1973: 404) that most sexual relations are confined to the sexual act, with little foreplay or titillation. Indeed, Epstein (1981: 86–88) found that the mildest deviations from this norm were regarded as witchcraft.

The lack of a strong religious and moral focus on the sexual act does not mean that such elements do not exist in the broader area of sexual relations. Reproduction has a centrality to African religion that is not found in the major Eurasian tradition (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1985, 1987), and its overwhelming emphasis helps to keep the focus off sex. Fortes (1978:

17) identified the important cultural question as not "Are you married?" but "Do you have children?" Relationships resulting from sexual attachments are important, whether arising from marriage or not. Vellenga (1983: 145) reported that the Akan of Ghana had at least 24 names for different types of sexual relations: "These varied according to the amount of kin involvement in and knowledge of the relationship, the number of material exchanges which had taken place between families and the class relations between partners."

The avoidance of incest is important, although in terms of relationships within the clan there is a gradation of increasing seriousness from sexual relations to pregnancy and, most horrifying, to marriage. Without great importance placed on marriage as the threshold of sexual activity (although great importance is placed upon it as allying families and clans), an element of the sacred is found in the consequent earlier rites of initiation, puberty, or nubility which do provide that threshold—although here, again, the strength of the prohibitions against those activities which can occur prior to these rites increases in ascending order from sexual activity to pregnancy to marriage. Initiation ceremonies, like marriage, were regarded by many young people as legitimizing sexual activity (Mair, 1969: 118–121).

The touchstone of the contrast between Eurasia and Africa is not male but female sexuality. A pragmatic attitude exists in Africa toward the latter, with a fair degree of permissiveness toward premarital relations that are not too blatantly public, and a degree of acceptance that surreptitious extramarital relations are not the high point of sin and usually should not be severely punished. Schapera (1971: 38) has reported for Southern Africa that the chaste were derided, but also the too openly promiscuous, and Ndeti (1973: 110) has observed for East Africa that among the Kamba of Kenya, "A sexually fit person was expected to dance and 'play sex.'" A similar picture emerges for East Africa in writings by Evans-Pritchard (1951: 51–53, 120) on the Nuer and (1974: *passim*) on the Azande of southwest Sudan; by Lamphear (1973: 370) on the Jie of northeast Uganda; Middleton (1973: 292–295) on the Lugbara of northwest Uganda; Southwold (1973: 165–170) on the Baganda; Beidelman (1971: 60–62) on the Kaguru of central Tanzania; Epstein (1981: 314–339) on the Zambian Copper Belt; and Schuster (1979: 131–133) on Lusaka. A lesser degree of permissiveness appears to be reported by Reining (1973: 217–219) of the Haya of northwest Tanzania; Gulliver (1973: 373–377) of the Turkana of northwest Kenya; and Parkin (1978: 154–155) of the Luo, although in the last-mentioned case Ocholla-Ayayo (1976: 142) describes the prohibition on extramarital relations to women with children as having been stronger in the past. In West and Middle Africa reports of relaxed attitudes with regard to sexual relations are found among most writers except Nadel (1942: 15) on the rural Nupe and Schildkrout (1983: 109–110) on Muslim Hausa society in the savannah. Gessain (1963: 24–30) detailed a life of complete premarital sexual freedom

among the matrilineal Coniagui of Guinea. Romaniuk (1968: 221–222), however, maintained that in Zaire there were very substantial differences in that regard between ethnic groups. The ethnic map is far from complete, but two points stand out. First, sexual tolerance is not solely a recent phenomenon of the cities but has ancient rural roots. Second, this appears to be a regional cultural phenomenon of sub-Saharan Africa in that there is evidence of marked similarities between East, West, and Southern Africa. Certain ethnic groups, all of them patrilineal, in East Africa and in the far south of the continent appear to have made stronger attempts to control the premarital sexual relations of their girls and to proscribe pregnancies, so as not to disturb ancient agreements for providing other clans with wives. Nevertheless, this did not appear to have eliminated all surreptitious sexual relations within the clan, and enforcement was attempted more by physical threat than by religious exhortation. Similar specific qualifications can be made with regard to female adultery.

A contrast may exist between the cultural regions in the extent to which women enjoy sex, especially within marriage, but the evidence is so scattered that any certainty is impossible. The point is important because it may bear some connection to the frequency of relations in sexual networks and to the speed of transmission of sexually related diseases. For East Africa there are a number of descriptions of female enjoyment of sex within marriage and the assumption of their husbands that this must be so and that even traditional husbands must ensure this, descriptions that seem to have no parallel in West Africa. One problem is that most of the evidence comes from a single collection (Molnos, 1973). In that collection Southwold (1973: 167) reported that Baganda women thought sex very important and were inclined to judge a marriage by its quality, and Kisekka (1973: 151) agreed with this; Middleton (1973: 295) said that Lugbara wives of northwest Uganda expected a high level of sex in marriage; Mayer (1973: 131) wrote of the Gusii of Western Kenya, "I do not remember any remarks about wives being too cold or frigid, but often about their being 'too hot.'" There is a belief that they are controlled by "that part of their anatomy"; Hautvast-Mertens (1973: 256) reported that women, even wives, were praised for their sexual skill, as were men by women. In our research we have found no parallel reports on West Africa and did not collect such evidence in field work in either Ghana or Nigeria. On the latter, Sudarkasa (1973: 130–131) reported that there was not much female adultery among the Yoruba because, the women say, they do not like sex as much as men and they only have sex within marriage to satisfy their husbands. After years of postpartum sexual abstinence, 83 percent of Yoruba wives in our 1974–75 African Family Study (P. Caldwell and J. Caldwell, 1981: 87) reported that they did not miss sex at all, and a further 9 percent that they did not miss it much. Pellow (1977: 161) reported of middle-class Accra that women regarded marital sex as a duty rather than a pleasure. Fortes (1949: 101) placed the main Tallensi

emphasis on marital sex as being for procreation. An East–West division is possible, given the greater emphasis in West Africa on women living in a world apart from men and devoting themselves to such activities as trading. Yet the dichotomy may not be so simple, for Raum (1973: 34) wrote of the Chaga of northeast Tanzania that the proper wife “performs her sexual role with coolness,” while Parkin and Parkin (1983: 277–278) believed that the sexual enjoyment within marriage of the Giriama of the Kenyan coast might be limited.

The evidence largely bears out the theory that neither female premarital chastity nor male sexual abstinence at any time was traditionally supported by religious sanctions except insofar as pre-initiation or incest prohibitions were transgressed. Female adultery is a more complex matter, and there are widespread, but not universal, sanctions of various degrees against it (cf. Mair, 1969: 4). The situation of unmarried girls has been modified in some savannah West African societies by long-time Islamic influences, but by no means everywhere as the freedom of Fulani girls in Niger attests (Dupire, 1963: 47ff.). Unmarried girls may be no more sexually active than are girls in contemporary American cities, as Cherlin and Riley (1986: 59) have argued, but in terms of other Third World regions this is a very high level indeed. Regional variations exist, but these are as likely to originate with the anthropologist as with the society and to depend largely on whether behavioral models or practices are being reported. Douglas (1976: 137) pointed out that the Bemba of Zambia hold strongly that female adultery is polluting and that the pollution will also spread to the husband—beliefs that they will detail to the social scientist; yet Richards (1956: 36) concluded from her classic study undertaken over half a century ago that “no Bemba supposes that a husband will be kept from adultery by this means.” Some societies do strongly discourage premarital births and promote bridal virginity (cf. Cohen, 1967: 36–37 on the Kanuri of northeast Nigeria), while other studies report that value is placed upon such chastity and then support that claim by showing some pride among relatives on both sides over the chastity or a small symbolic rise in the bridewealth (cf. Azu, 1974: 32–33, on the Ga of Ghana). The situation with regard to men everywhere is much as David and Voas (1981: 658) put it for the settled Fulani of North Cameroon: “There is no expectation that young men remain celibate before marriage; nor is any great value placed upon the fidelity of married men, particularly when away from home.”

In what follows, we shall first consider aspects of African society that promote or limit sexuality, both in traditional and transitional society, and then examine data on the incidence of sexual activity.

Aspects of society influencing sexuality

Social concern with premarital or extramarital sexual relations endangering marriage is unlikely to be strong if marriage does not establish the basic unit

of society. This is, in fact, the case with the African descent lineage. Fortes (1949: 13–14) argued of West Africa that the real bonds are within the lineage, and not across marriage lines. Bleek (1987: 141) wrote of Ghana: “Whatever people say about their preference for stable marriage, in practice lineage stability comes before marriage stability. Security is found in the lineage rather than in marriage, and it would be foolish to invest too much in marriage.” Lineages, far from feeling threatened by additional children, even those of uncertain paternity, are more likely to feel strengthened. Jack Goody (1973a: 14–15) reported that the lineages of the Lo Wiili of Ghana often wanted children so much that they encouraged their girls to have them before marriage so that the lineage could keep them. Not all sub-Saharan African societies, especially in the East, are fully lineage-structured. Indeed, Guyer (1981: 91–97) argued that the descent lineage even in West Africa was partly a theoretical construct needed to answer questions about political structure and that family authority does not usually proceed beyond the compound led by its ancient patriarch. She did not dispute the “importance of ideologies of descent, the possibility of descent corporations and the influence of [agnatic] kinship on day-to-day behavior.” These are, from the stance of the present essay, the important social characteristics, and, to this extent, they are found across the sub-Saharan region. They explain why in most of the region neither nonmarital birth nor dissolution of marriage is greatly feared.

Traditionally in sub-Saharan Africa, marriages were arranged and bridewealth was paid, although this showed less that the marriage was taken very seriously than that family and lineage alliances were, as was the need to ensure the related avoidance of incest. The importance of family and lineage alliances is illustrated by the fact that the payment of bridewealth was between families and often subsequently permitted another marriage to take place. Even so, bridewealth varied enormously, and marriage ceremonies were usually not regarded as solemnly as were initiation or funerary rites. By the 1960s, arranged marriage was beginning to disappear even in remote rural areas: down to 28 percent among the Gonja of northern Ghana (E. Goody, 1973: 71) and to near-disappearance among the Gisu of the Kenya–Uganda border country (La Fontaine, 1972: 93). Marriage itself had not always been easy to define, not even by marriage payments, which could be deferred or paid in installments; but with an increasing proportion of noncustomary marriages, many with no rites, the difficulties increased (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1988: 1; Bleek, 1978: 113 and 119). “Free” marriages have certainly been increasing (Southwold, 1973: 169; Okpewho, 1987: *passim*). Among the matrilineal Akan of Ghana, spouses traditionally lived apart and many still do so (Fortes, 1954: 285, *fn*; Akuffo, 1987: 156). In these circumstances, “Ashanti marriage involves only a limited reordering of social relationships. . . . The atmosphere is more that of a contract being

concluded than an important stage in the life-cycle being celebrated" (Abu, 1983: 157). In these situations divorce and separation are frequent and are not usually regarded as tragedies even if caused by extramarital relationships. In fact, there usually are other causes, for as Colson (1958: 166) reported of the Plateau Tonga of Zambia, although divorce is fairly common, they "do not seem to consider that a husband and wife are sufficiently a unit for the adultery of either one to injure the other, and this may account for how little scandal attaches to it. Significantly, the ancestral spirits are not concerned."

Mair (1953: 4) concluded from her survey of ethnographies that "the idea that marriage should be indissoluble except by death is rarely found." Fortes (1949: 85) reported of the Tallensi of Ghana that "the idea of marriage as a lifelong and irrevocable bond does not exist among the Tallensi," and David and Voas (1981: 655–656) said of the Fulani of Cameroon that marriages were made to establish links and no one expected them to last. Indeed, among the Tallensi (Fortes, 1949: 84–85), men 30–40 years old usually had experienced five or six divorces, and most women had had more than one husband; among the Fulani (David and Voas, 1981: 652), 18 percent of marriages had been dissolved within one year and 35 percent within two. Bleek (1987: 140) reported of Ghana's Akan that divorce "is easy and frequent; it is a normal occurrence which is likely to befall anyone at least once, probably twice." The 1945 Ashanti survey had discovered that Ashanti women averaged two marriages by 40 years of age, while older women were closer to 2.5 (Fortes, 1954: 283). In East Africa, Abrahams (1981: 101) found among the Nyamwezi of Tanzania that 66 percent of 30–39-year-old men had been divorced and 92 percent of those over 60 years. Gomm (1972: 95) concluded that among the Digo of coastal Kenya, "There does seem to have been an increase in marital instability over the last fifty years but divorce, separation and remarriage have always been common and this gives the lie to the elders' romanticising about the good old days when wives were wives and stayed that way."

The most distinctive feature of sub-Saharan African marriage, however, is polygyny, which is made possible by the lack of emphasis on the need for a strong conjugal bond, and which, in turn, does much to prevent such a strong bond from emerging even in contemporary society. In polygynous societies in Eurasia, the proportion of marriages with multiple wives is usually no more than 3 to 4 percent, evidencing either the husband's unusual wealth or position or the infecundity of the first wife. In sub-Saharan Africa the levels are far higher, reaching at any one time 30–50 percent as reported by the World Fertility Survey everywhere except in Lesotho, where the level was only 9 percent; 46 percent in 1973 in the city of Ibadan (according to the *Changing African Family Project*, 1974: 8); and 50 percent in 1945 in Ashanti (according to the Ashanti Study—Fortes, 1954: 286). Kenya, at 30

percent, was lower than West African countries, but only 5 percentage points under Benin and Ghana, the latter reduced by lower polygyny rates among the matrilineal Akan. Given these levels, a very high proportion of women are likely to be in a polygynous marriage at some stage during their lives, and 100 percent must anticipate the possibility and be emotionally and economically prepared for it. Thus the economic unit is the woman and her children, and in contemporary society she is usually sufficiently economically independent that the dissolution of a marriage is not a financial disaster. In rural society each additional unit provided extra economic strength to the husband, and was one encouragement for polygyny (Little, 1951: 140ff.; Boserup, 1970: 37ff.; Gomm, 1972: 102). Such high levels of polygyny are made possible by great pressure on widowed or divorced women to remarry quickly and by very substantial age gaps between spouses: typically ten years in the case of a man's first wife and decades with his youngest. This means that men frequently do not marry until their late 20s or even older, and this long premarital period is usually characterized by sexual adventures that can set a lifetime pattern. It also means that the younger wives of older men with several wives are particularly likely to stray. In parts of East, Southern, and Middle Africa there is some evidence of a decline in polygyny, but this does not appear to be the case in West Africa. In Ghana, in both the 1960 and 1970 censuses the proportion of women in polygynous marriages declined as their educational levels rose—clear evidence, one would think, of the passing of polygyny. But, in fact, in spite of rising educational levels between the censuses, the overall incidence of polygyny remained the same by actually rising in each educational category over the decade (Aryee and Gaisie, 1981: 293). Similarly, our research in Ghana in 1963 showed lower levels of polygyny in the larger urban areas, but the explanation was the problems of urban residence for large polygynous families together with lesser economic returns from the wife—children units in the towns, and it turned out that the men with the most wives of all were those who had returned to the country after long periods in the town (Caldwell, 1969: 77–78). One of the reasons for the growth of the institution of “outside wives” or mistresses in the cities is probably the lower levels there of polygyny.

A related aspect of society, especially in West Africa, is the separation of the world of women from that of men, so that women are distant in terms of emotion and contact not only from their husbands but also from the men of their own lineage. Omari (1960: 200) wrote of Ghana, “Throughout her married life a wife never identifies herself with her husband in his aspirations and interests.” Paulme (1963a: 13) summarized the studies of the situation across the region: “men put up with the presence of their wives but continue to regard them as strangers.” Marshall (1970: 181) described her research among Nigeria's Yoruba as being of two different societies, men and women, that rarely intersect. Pellow (1977: 161) in middle-class Accra found the

same separation. We have drawn on a range of researchers to show in traditional society how deep was the concept of a fundamental separation of the sexes (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1985: 12), and Lesthaeghe (1988) has related this marked division in West Africa to its social and political "dual sex system" characterized by separate women's traditional political organizations and even by queens of women. Nothing so distinctive is reported elsewhere, although separate spousal budgets (cf. Richards, 1939: 133; Obbo, 1987: 264) must tend that way, and Gomm (1972: 101) speaks of different male and female ways of looking at the world in coastal Kenya. Such separation renders extramarital sexual relations easier for both men and women, and also limits the damage if these relations are discovered.

In order to preserve its peculiar system Eurasia has sanctified female chastity, sharply defined licit sexual relationships, and made payment in any form for individual sexual acts anathema—as distinct, for instance, from the property or support arrangements that may accompany marriage. In no area is the misunderstanding or clash between cultures greater, yet an understanding of the traditional African viewpoint, which regarded sex as a worldly activity like work or eating and drinking, is essential for an understanding of the dimensions of African sexual "networking" (cf. Little, 1973: 81–82). Transactions relating to sexual activity have been looked upon in Africa as equally normal as those relating to work, and it is their absence rather than their presence that is likely to arouse surprise or even disgust. Pellow (1977: 162) concluded from her study of Accra that women bartered sex for material gain both outside and inside marriage, the latter just being less obvious. Of the same city, Dinan (1983: 353) wrote:

Traditionally . . . the sexual act was regarded as a service and sexual ethics seem to have operated according to the same ethical principles that regulated other services: they were based on reciprocity. In the traditional courtship system a man exchanged valued gifts in return for sexual services. In marriage the reciprocity involved the exchange of the woman's sexual/procreative services in return for maintenance.

The level of maintenance was often defined by individual sexual acts, and Barley (1983: 77–78) reported that it was this that horrified foreign missionaries.

Transactions start with adolescent sex. Evans-Pritchard (1974: 113, *fn*), referring to his fieldwork in the 1920s among the isolated Azande, wrote: "A girl would not feel humiliated by its being known that she had accepted money or some other gift [for sex], but she would be if it were known that she had not been offered any." E. Goody (1973: 65) wrote of the adolescent Gonja girl in northern Ghana in the 1960s: "If she continues to receive his gifts (perhaps a shilling or two, a towel or a head scarf), the boy will un-

derstand that she is willing to sleep with him." Bleek (1976: 108) quoted an Akan boy further south in the 1970s, "If I stopped giving them small presents, they would not come back."

Such gifts can provide the necessary financial support for schooling or training, although they may also be the necessary price for good marks or reports (Schapera, 1971: 240). Acquah (1958: 72) reported of the 1953–56 Accra Survey that: "Some schoolgirls have such relationships in order to pay their school fees, and some nurses, teachers and telephonists and other female employees find in casual sexual relations another source of income."

In the 1980s Akuffo (1987: 159–161) examined girls' schooling in a small town of southern Ghana and found that both market work and sexual relations were needed to pay school fees. Among girls over 15 years of age, 93 percent had boyfriends who were in employment and most said that they could not otherwise have stayed at school; one-third of them reported that their mothers had encouraged these relationships, saying that they would have to learn to provide for themselves.

The transactional element is widely present within marriage as well. Schuster (1979: 133) wrote of Lusaka, taking a curiously evaluative stance, "The pattern of exploitation, self-interest, and lack of trust exists from the first moment a couple decide to marry." Causation can flow in the opposite direction as Hagan's (1983: 200) description of Winneba in Ghana shows: "If a fisherman decides his wife is inefficient in marketing his fish, he will market some through another woman, and, if she is efficient, marry her." However, the needed or desired extra support is likely to lie outside marriage. Hagan (1983: 197) also reported that, if the fisherman's wife's business turned out badly during his absence, she had the options of relying on her mother and sisters, borrowing, or committing adultery. In East Africa, Obbo (1987: 265) found that "ordinary women" (i.e., other than the elite) adopt sexual behavior that will maximize economic benefits, and Gomm (1972: 104) reported of the Digo of Kenya's coast, "The best opportunity a married woman has for obtaining cash independently from her husband is by committing adultery." The latter point is not necessarily true of West Africa because of the income obtainable from marketing. Sexual economics can also be viewed from the opposite perspective: Albert (1963: 193) reported of Burundi that women resent their husbands' straying because of the value of presents given to the other woman. There is also another transactional perspective, that of older husbands with straying younger wives who appreciate the income earned from fining their boyfriends (cf. Parkin, 1988 on Kenya; Little, 1951 on Sierra Leone; and D. Lauro, personal communication, 1976 on Liberia). The attitude of adult single women, especially in the towns, is the same as that of their younger contemporaries. In Ghana, Bleek (1987: 141) reported that his findings were the same as those of Pellow (1977) in Accra, namely that "no self-respecting woman would remain in a 'friendship' without material recompense"—a view not dissimilar to the Eurasian attitude toward

work. Pellow (1977: 210), nevertheless, pointed out that Accra women often do not trust their boyfriends and believe that several are needed as financial insurance.

Change in these patterns of behavior is certainly occurring, but its overall direction is difficult to assess and has hardly been researched. Eurasian religions have not wrought as much change as their missionaries would have anticipated. Arens's (1973: 442–444) research on the Mto Wa Mbu of northern Tanzania, 92 percent of whom are either Muslim or Christian, showed that Christian girls are more likely to have premarital sex and that nearly all the bar girls are Christians. Schapera (1971: 241) reported on Botswana that even "the most regular church-goers among the younger people do not regard it as wrong to indulge in sexual relations, providing that they can avoid conception," and Southwold (1973: 167) reported of the Baganda that those who have really internalized Christian values and are devout are somewhat more chaste but not puritanical.

The most important source of change is probably urbanization, which is rapid everywhere in the region, although still less than 30 percent of the population live in towns. Urbanization is associated with lower levels of polygyny and of customary marriage relative to free marriage. In traditional rural society the weak economic, and often emotional, conjugal bond was not of prime significance because the conjugal family, whether monogamous or polygynous, was embedded in the larger family residing in a compound or adjacent huts usually ruled over by an aging patriarch. In the town the husband is likely to be elsewhere working or seeking companionship. In Ibadan we found most households centering around women (usually, but not always, the children's mothers, aunts, and grandmothers and sometimes mothers' co-wives), who provided much of the care and usually most economic support. They were busy and, although everyone had a place, many of the adolescent girls did not feel particularly close to anyone. The most common reason they gave for agreeing to their boyfriends' demands for sex is that they wanted someone to love them (P. Caldwell and J. Caldwell, 1987: 239–241). Schuster (1979: 44) found the same situation in Lusaka. Parkin and Nyamwaya (1987: 14) in their survey of contributors' papers on African marriage believed that matrifocality might well be increasing in the region's towns. More complex residential arrangements may be increasing as well. Akuffo (1987: 157) found among the matrilineal Ghanaian Akan that, of 125 teenage girl dropouts from school, 32 percent were living with their mothers only, 8 percent with fathers only, 20 percent with both, 12 percent with other relatives, 24 percent with nonrelatives (usually boyfriends), and 4 percent alone.

The incidence of sexuality

We have discussed at some length the lack of moral or institutional bars to manifestations of sexuality of the strength found in Eurasia. The question

remains whether we can in any way determine the incidence of sexuality or even quantify it. We shall start with premarital sexual relations, which are less covert than extramarital relations, although the latter are not hidden to the same extent as are any consequent marital induced abortions (cf. Caldwell and Caldwell, 1988: 3ff.).

In collections of regional surveys, Paulme (1963a: 3) concluded that in most African societies female premarital sexual freedom was limited mainly by the requirement of discretion. Southall (1961: 52) largely agreed, although noting that there were variations in the exact measure. It is so universally assumed that all boys want sexual adventures and that little or no restraint is placed upon them that few researchers even mention the matter. The point is made explicitly by Nadel (1942: 153) with regard to the Nupe, by David and Voas (1981: 658–659) about the settled Fulani of Cameroon, and by Southwold (1973: 169) of the Baganda. Mushanga (1973: 182) says that among the Nkole of Uganda a boy not having frequent sex would be jeered at and called impotent, and Mayer (1973: 132) reports of the Gusii that male “celibacy is not the ideal at any stage.”

Most West African studies speak of the sexual freedom of girls, at least after initiation or nubility ceremonies, with little worry in the traditional society about pregnancy. Examples are Fortes (1964: 209) on the Ashanti, Dupire (1963: 47ff.) on the Fulani of the Niger, and Gessain (1963: 24–30) on the Coniagui of Guinea. Other investigators say that sexuality is not discouraged, but a certain discretion is expected, as, for instance, Bleek (1976: 104) on the Akan, and Pellow (1977: 175) on Accra. E. Goody (1973: 68) wrote of the Gonja of northern Ghana that “Not all courtship leads to marriage, and the lover relationship is enjoyed for its own right.” Leith-Ross (1939: 127), who wrote in a somewhat judgmental way, claimed that Ibo girls in the 1930s regarded sexual experiences as being identical with “a good time” but that this was a relatively new phenomenon. The exceptions are Nadel’s (1942: 155) claim about the villages where he did not do intensive fieldwork and Schildkrout’s (1983: 109–110) study of Muslim Hausa women in Nigeria’s savannah north.

The interesting debate centers on the ascription of value to virginity, the extent to which the value being ascribed is only one of scarcity rather than a guide for general behavior, and the reasons for this valuation. Dorjahn (1958: 855) reported that among the Temne of Sierra Leone, elderly polygynists often paid higher bridewealth for virgins, although, to attain their end, they usually had to choose from very young girls. Isaac (1980: 304) reported the same finding among the Mende of the same country, as did Azu (1974: 32–33) about the Ga of Accra. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, both Olusanya (1969: 15) and Karanja (1987: 249) described virginity as a value that had been held and was changing. Indeed, Karanja (1987: 250) claimed that “today, premarital virginity is no longer thought to be desirable”

and that many potential husbands wanted proof of fertility. We found little emphasis on the need for either virginity or the proof of fertility in Ibadan in the early 1970s.

Ward (1938: 29) reported of the Yoruba in the 1930s that sometimes a new husband who finds that his wife is not a virgin complains to everyone and asks who was responsible, but this should be seen also in the context of Ward's statement (p. 32) that most nubile girls have sex and "These girls see nothing wrong in all of this; sometimes they make fun of one of their number if she does not do as they." The reasons for even this limited demand for virgin brides are almost certainly not parallel to those advanced in Eurasia. Some elderly polygynists probably fear being treated as figures of fun if their new wives continue pre-existing relationships. Karanja (1987: 249) links virginity to matters that may have become more important with the spread of venereal disease and sterility and that may assume importance again in an age of AIDS: "A woman's premarital virginity was said to be important to her fertility. It was seen as a sign of purity which forced a man to treat his wife with care, since she could always remind him that she was not a loose woman when he married her."

The picture of most groups not intervening to limit girls' premarital sexual freedom, but some requiring a degree of circumspection, hardly differs in East Africa from the situation in West Africa and is attested in the work of Evans-Pritchard (1951: 51; 1968: 116) on the Nuer and (1974: 183) on the Azande; by Mushanga (1973: 181) on the Nkole of Uganda; by Gomm (1972: 104–108), Mayer (1973: 129–130), Gulliver (1973: 373–377), Ueda (1973: 115), and Kettel and Kettel (1973: 421) on the Digo, Gusii, Turkana, Kamba, and Tugen of Kenya; by Beidelman (1973: 265), Smith and Dale (1920, vol. 2: 35–36), and Epstein (1981: 320–321) on the Ila and Bemba of Zambia. Epstein (1981: 320–321) believes that new husbands on the Copper Belt prefer as wives the sophisticated girls with sexual experience, and Ueda (1973: 115) reports of Kenya's Akamba that parents refrain from sexual relations when they hear their daughters steal out at night so as not to cause in the daughters the sickness or sterility that can arise from different generations having relations at the same time. Kabwegyere and Mbula (1979: 29) also report of the Akamba that "The Christian preparation for marriage was nothing other than chastity before marriage. . . . [I]n Kamba society the boy and girl must have had practical experience of sex before marriage, as part of the preparation for the social union."

Parkin (1973: 334) maintains that Luo girls in Kenya were traditionally expected to remain chaste although this is no longer the case. Reining (1973: 217–218) argues that it is still the case among the Haya of northwest Tanzania, although it should be noted that she partly depends on pregnancy as a measure (discussed further below); and it should also be noted, not necessarily as a contradiction, that the Haya provide an unusual proportion

of Nairobi's prostitutes. Jacobs (1973: 402) says of the pastoral Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania that "Prior to marriage women are expected [to be] (and indeed most frequently are) 'chaste.'" Gomm (1972: 108) and Beidelman (1973: 265) both report of the Digo of Kenya and the Kaguru of Tanzania some recent upswing in pride at a bride's virginity because of Islamic and Christian acculturation, respectively.

There are, however, major contrasts between East and West African premarital sexuality that certainly have implications for fertility control and may have implications for the rate of spread of AIDS. Typically in East Africa, in contrast to West Africa, researchers report permissiveness with regard to premarital sexual relations but not with regard to premarital pregnancy or birth (Middleton, 1973: 292 on the Lugbara of Uganda; Mbiti, 1973: 102 and Njeru, 1973: 68 on the Kamba and Egoji of Kenya; Raum, 1973: 35 on the Chaga of Tanzania). Again typically, such premarital sexual activity is made easier by the movement at puberty of the young people to boys' and girls' huts away from their parents, the girls often being looked after by an elderly woman (cf. in Uganda, Lamphear, 1973: 370 on the Jie; Middleton, 1973: 292 on the Lugbara; and Laughlin and Laughlin, 1973: 353 on the So; in the Uganda-Kenya border country, Karp and Karp, 1973: 392 on the Iteso; in Kenya, Blount, 1973: 325, and Huntingford, 1973: 410 on the Nandi; Lukalo, 1973: 141 on the Maragoli; Southall, 1973: 341 on the Luo; and in Tanzania, Lang and Lang, 1973: 224 on the Sukuma). The primary purpose of this move may be to stop them from becoming aware of their parents' sexual activities (Laughlin and Laughlin, 1973: 353). Sexual play without pregnancy has traditionally been achieved by incomplete penetration (in Kenya, Kershaw, 1973: 49 and Ocholla-Ayayo, 1976: 134 on the Luo; and at an earlier period among the Azande of Sudan, Evans-Pritchard, 1974: 20) or coitus intercrura (Southall, 1973: 341 on the Luo). There is little evidence of such practices in West Africa. Bleek (1976: 342) refers to evidence of conflict between permissiveness over premarital sex but not pregnancy in some savannah societies, but he could not find it in Ghana. However, Malinowski (1929: 53ff.) reported permissiveness rendered easier by separate adolescent accommodation in Melanesia. The East and Southern African pressure against premarital pregnancy is primarily so as not to endanger the possibility of a good marriage (Lukalo, 1973: 143; Schapera, 1971: 41), suggesting either that this is a recent phenomenon arising from the spread of Christianity and Islam or that societies with a more reduced form of the lineage do not place such a high premium on the reproduction of the lineage. It might be noted that Southwold (1973: 165) says that premarital pregnancy increases a Baganda girl's chance of marriage. It is possible that the institution of adolescent incomplete sexual intercourse in East Africa led in this century to the employment of withdrawal within marriage to avoid pregnancy when the postpartum sexual abstinence period became shorter.

The evidence with regard to single women with children is similar. There is a concept of illegitimacy in East Africa and consequent disadvantage at least to the mothers in most societies (La Fontaine, 1972: 102; Mwambia, 1973: 61; Ndeti, 1973: 108). Sometimes the emphasis is on the need to marry the pregnant girl and the alternative exaction of fines (Harris, 1972: 61; Middleton, 1965: 54–55; Kettel and Kettel, 1973: 421), or, as in Burundi, on the problems of placing the illegitimate children (Albert, 1963: 193). Parkin (1973: 338) reports that premarital pregnancy is no longer disapproved of by the Luo. In West Africa—at least south of the savannah—it appears that the concept of illegitimacy has traditionally been unknown, as reported by Mair in her general survey (1969: 149–151) and in specific studies by Fortes (1949: 101) of the Tallensi (who, at the most, expressed some scorn for unmarried mothers) and by Goody (1973a: 14–15) of the Lo Wili. In contrast, in far northeast Nigeria, Cohen (1967: 36–37) found, among the Kanuri, that “The pariah state of illegitimate children is easily seen in the widespread belief that they can only marry others like themselves or people of slave status.”

Before considering more detailed evidence, some general points should be made with regard to interpretation. In spite of the fact that there is considerable pride in much of the West that it has in recent decades desanctified chastity and succeeded in regarding sexual activities in a more objective way, some African scholars are troubled by the claim that Africa had always attained that goal. One reason is the fact that the West has, in the past, disapproved of sexual freedom, even if it did not always practice what it preached. Another is that the highly Christianized or Islamized elites often translate traditional social preferences, such as a virginal bride, into a stronger proscription of premarital sexual relations. It is partly the lack of strong religious sanctions toward chastity that makes many African men fear that their wives or daughters might stray. These fears have often led to strong opposition to publicity for contraceptives, or to family planning clinics supplying contraceptives to unmarried girls. The scholars point to greater female sexual activity in urban areas as a sign that it is urban life, and indeed Western influences in the town, that have corrupted the old ways. The greater sexual activity in the towns is a fact, but it is also a fact that it has been achieved much more easily and involves a greater proportion of the female population than in the cities of South Asia, the Middle East, or the Mediterranean precisely because sexual activity has always been judged in a more matter-of-fact way than in these areas. Sex in much of sub-Saharan Africa has, in fact, always been regarded not merely objectively but also positively as something that was normal and good for the health, and which, if not experienced, might well result in ill health.

The exact degree of change between traditional and contemporary society is difficult to determine even by comparing the reports of anthro-

pologists working half a century ago with contemporary descriptions. The work of the early anthropologists is sufficient to dispel the notion that rural women of that time necessarily confined themselves only to sexual relations within marriage. However, it is not sufficient to determine the nature of traditional society, because these reports invariably stressed that change was occurring. The conclusion that change at those times had recently been rapid, like the contemporary conclusion that the present generation behaves in a markedly different way from past generations, may be wrong. Such an error might be the result of a breakdown in the oral tradition caused by such strong male discouragement of females relating their sexual activities that often no one hears of these activities except a small circle of their peers who have been informed surreptitiously. Sexual activities, even within marriage, are rarely discussed either between spouses or between the generations. Accordingly, most Africans assume no premarital sexual activity on the part of their mothers or grandmothers. Thus, contemporary young women in the eastern Nigerian town of Owerri readily recognize the description of female sexual activity in that area written by Sylvia Leith-Ross (1939) as fitting present-day society but are taken aback to be told that the record was of their grandmothers' time more than half a century ago.

Nevertheless, in Accra in the early 1960s, we found that among the elite few wives had borne children before marriage (Caldwell, 1968: 185), although this may have been little more than the selection effect of those who had been able to complete their schooling. In Ibadan in 1973, we ascertained that 25 percent of single women who had undergone an induced abortion did so because of the problems incurred by having children, admittedly in contrast to 60 percent doing so in order to continue schooling or training (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1988: 10–11). Across the entire continent the fear of premarital pregnancy is now centered on the disruption caused by pregnancy to girls or young women in education and training courses for teachers or nurses and the resulting loss of families' investments in daughters and the destruction of the girls' hopes of a life very different from that of the village or the urban poor (Schapera, 1971: 240; Southwold, 1973: 165; Schuster, 1979: 44–47). It is a community concern; Vellenga (1974: 90) shows that in rural Ghana the basis for imposing fines on men for causing pregnancy shifted in 40 years almost entirely from adultery to relations with schoolgirls. Everywhere in the region schoolgirl pregnancy is the major cause of induced abortion (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1988: 10–11). Ironically, such problems are often related to the need for girls to have sufficient support to continue meeting the fees and other costs of attending school being met by relations with older men or with teachers (Busia, 1950: 60; Colson, 1958: 289; Schapera, 1971: 240; Akuffo, 1987: 160; Brokensha, 1988: 170).

In terms of quantitative data there is as yet far less evidence available for African than for Western societies for the frequency of premarital sexual

relations and the numbers of partners involved. Often, largely inappropriate measures of births outside marriage must be employed. With regard to single males, Laughlin and Laughlin (1973: 357), presumably referring to different females, stated of the Ugandan So: "A man is allowed to have as many premarital sexual contacts as he desires; however, the upward limit among our informants was six, with the more frequent number being one or two." Schapera (1971: 207) concluded from family genealogies he took in Botswana:

Of forty-four single women, old enough to be married, . . . fifteen had one or more living children each [in spite of the practice of incomplete sex and withdrawal] and eight others had procured abortions. But I cannot say how many lovers each of these women had had, although, according to village gossip as well as the various instances I know myself, few unmarried girls content themselves with only one.

In the Western Area of Sierra Leone in the 1960s, 30 percent of all births occurred outside marriage (Harrell-Bond, 1975: 127–128). Of the schoolgirls over 15 years of age whom Akuffo (1987: 159–160) studied in Ghana, 93 percent had continuing sexual relations with a boyfriend. Survey research in Ibadan city, Nigeria, on unmarried young persons 14–25 years of age (Ladipo et al., 1983; Nichols et al., 1986: 103), employing somewhat imperfect sampling methods (cf. P. Caldwell and J. Caldwell, 1987: 242), found that 79 percent of males had experienced sexual relations, 60 percent within the previous month, in contrast to 55 percent of females, 40 percent within the last month. The incidence was higher among nonstudents: 92 percent among males, with 76 percent during the last month, and 92 percent among females, with 70 percent during the last month. This higher rate was partly a product of age but it also demonstrates that the widespread discussion of schoolgirl sexual activity is due less to its greater incidence than to the greater potential problems it poses. The Nigerian Segment of the Changing African Family Project showed that one-third of contraceptors had begun contraception while single, over half of them learning of contraception while at school (*Changing African Family Project*, 1974: 34; P. Caldwell and J. Caldwell, 1987: 238). Cherlin and Riley (1986: 59 and 70) point out that these levels are no higher than those currently found in American metropolitan areas, but, as shown by the World Fertility Survey, they resulted, in societies with low levels of contraceptive practice, in premarital births to 26 percent of Kenyan, 23 percent of Cameroonian, and 8 percent of Ghanaian 18–19-year-old females. World Fertility Survey data on age at first sexual intercourse for women in four West African countries indicated median ages of 15 years for the Yoruba of Nigeria's Ondo State, 16 years in the Ivory Coast and Cameroon, and 17 years in Benin. The Survey's figures for pre-

maritally conceived first births show no East–West divide in spite of the anthropological testimony: 34 percent in Kenya, 31 percent in Benin, 29 percent in the Ivory Coast, 28 percent in Cameroon, 23 percent in Ondo State, 16 percent in Ghana, 10 percent in Lesotho, and 8 percent in Senegal. But, inasmuch as many African societies take living together to form a type of customary marriage, these figures may not be very meaningful.

Even in Africa, firm measures of extramarital sexual activity, especially for females, are difficult to obtain, not because most of contemporary society regards them as contravening morality and religion but because they strike at husbands' rights. Male extramarital relations are so taken for granted that few researchers even bother to note that they are almost universal, although African women researchers sometimes do so (Azu, 1974: 104; Obbo, 1987: 265). Indeed, such relations are expected of the normal man (Njeru, 1973: 75), and it is charged in some societies that most men do not try to prevent conception (Southwold, 1973: 170). Douglas (1976: 131), analyzing Evans-Pritchard's information on the Nuer, commented on male solidarity and peer group pressure: "Men seem to identify with adulterers more than with aggrieved husbands. Their feelings of moral disapproval are not very much engaged on behalf of matrimony. . . ." In fact, in relations with single women, the concept of adultery hardly exists in a polygynous society inasmuch as a man may merely be seeking another wife (Bleek, 1976: 106); this fact was legally recognized in the Gold Coast (Baker and Bird, 1959: 109) and is assumed elsewhere as indicated by lack of sanctions (Karp and Karp, 1973: 394). At least in West Africa, women seldom protest about their husbands' extramarital relations (Ward, 1938: 152; P. Caldwell and J. Caldwell, 1981: 88).

Female adultery is common in most African societies, but Mair (1953: 3) is undoubtedly correct in concluding that it is regarded as being less licit than adultery by males. Two conclusions from Zambia's Copper Belt probably have widespread validity: "although extramarital relations [by wives] were the norm, they were not emotionally accepted" by husbands (Powdermaker, 1962: 166); and "women were generally held to be complaisant by nature, a claim which they sometimes offered in justifying their sexual misconduct" (Epstein, 1981: 326). The conclusion that female extramarital sexual activity is common but usually more circumspect than that of males, perhaps largely because of fear of punishment by an angry husband, is widely reported in East Africa (Evans-Pritchard, 1951: 120; Albert, 1963: 193; Laurentin, 1963: 133; Hautvast-Mertens, 1973: 257; Gomm, 1972: 104; Curley, 1973: 306; Beidelman, 1973: 265; Mayer, 1973: 131; Southwold, 1973: 166; Epstein, 1981: 321–322; Obbo, 1987: 265–266), and in West Africa (Ward, 1938: 140ff.; Azu, 1974: 104; Bleek, 1976: 105; Fortes, 1949: 22; Hagan, 1983: 197). In contrast, strong disapproval by the husband or the society and fear by the wife of the consequences are reported for the Luo (Blount, 1973:

325; Ocholla-Ayayo, 1976: 142; Parkin, 1978: 154–155) and some other groups (Mushanga, 1973: 181; Laughlin and Laughlin, 1973: 355; Lukalo, 1973: 147; Mbiti, 1973: 103; Reining, 1973: 219), although some of these evaluations can be disputed. In West Africa, Nukunya (1969: 68) reports lower levels of adultery among the Ewe, and Gessain (1963: 32) among the Coniagui, while Sudarkasa (1973: 130–131) claims lesser motivation to engage in adultery among Yoruba wives. Sometimes sisters act as go-betweens (Evans-Pritchard, 1974: 109–110), and female adultery may be institutionalized, as among the Ila of Zambia (Smith and Dale, 1920, vol. 2: 67–69). Sexual relations may be licit when they involve men from the husband's age set (Huntingford, 1973: 409) or may occur between distant members of the same clan whose marriage would have been impossible (Fortes, 1949: 110). It is widely believed that the young wives of old polygynous men are particularly likely to seek sexual solace elsewhere (Evans-Pritchard, 1974: 194; Nadel, 1942: 152; Douglas, 1963: 76; Karp and Karp, 1973: 393; Vellenga, 1983: 146). Sometimes their husbands, at least tacitly, approve in return for children or community-imposed fines (Parkin, 1988), field labor (Little, 1951: 152), or money during crises (Huntingford, 1973: 409); or, in the past, allowed such practices for the sexual entertainment of visiting friends (Cardinall, 1920: 75–76; Ward, 1938: 140ff).

In some groups—all recorded in East Africa—society condones the adultery of a woman whose husband is away for long periods, partly because such absences would otherwise deprive her of the right to reproduce (Kettel and Kettel, 1973: 419; Parkin and Parkin, 1983: 277); indeed the husband may accept a child produced in this manner providing the progenitor was of his age set (Kershaw, 1983: 51) or, among the Maasai, may even reward the progenitor (Jacobs, 1973: 403). Nevertheless, husbands usually disapprove and they or the gods may well inflict punishment. In most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, there was traditionally a belief that adulterous women could die in childbirth or shortly afterward, or that this could sometimes be avoided by confession or by naming the man involved (Cardinall, 1920: 80; Mair, 1969: 4; Douglas, 1963: 126; Nukunya, 1969: 70–71; Epstein, 1981: 328). Elsewhere it was the child who died (Parkin, 1973: 333) unless the indignant ancestral spirits were mollified by ritual (Deluz, 1987: 117). Nowadays, the most a woman has to fear is a beating by her husband (Ward, 1938: 140ff.; E. Goody, 1973: 114; Pellow, 1977: 163; Middleton, 1965: 56; Southwold, 1973: 166; Mbiti, 1973: 103; Epstein, 1981: 315). Her lover may sometimes also face a beating or worse (Evans-Pritchard, 1974: 130; Kettel and Kettel, 1973: 422), but he is more likely to face a fine (Meek, 1925: 275–276, 1937: 220; Little, 1951: 142; E. Goody, 1972: 32; Vellenga, 1983: 146; Evans-Pritchard, 1968: 165–166; Middleton, 1965: 54–55; Mbiti, 1973: 103; Beidelman, 1973: 265; Lang and Lang, 1973: 228; Gulliver, 1973: 377). The heaviest punishments for male adultery have little to do

with the disapproval of sexual activity but more to do with enforcing the rights of old and powerful men against the insolence of young men who have insulted them by touching their wives. Most research agrees that divorce has not been a common solution for adultery, except where it was flagrantly provocative and repeated. It also agrees that the fear of otherworldly punishment is disappearing and that fines were always imposed sporadically and are decreasingly common.

There appears to be no research in all of sub-Saharan Africa that attempts to measure the incidence of extramarital sexual relations except to note that most married men fairly frequently have such relations. Clearly this assessment is true with regard to women in some societies but less so in others, with the implication that a minority of women have more frequent sexual relations than most men and hence may be likely both to contract sexually transmitted diseases and to transmit them. In our research in Ibadan (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1988: 11) only 20 percent of marital induced abortions were the result of extramarital pregnancies, but we failed to discover all marital abortions and a husband was unlikely to realize that he was not the father or, in any case, to reject the child.

African society recognizes as a distinct phenomenon the longer term girlfriends, mistresses, "outside wives," *deuxième bureaux*, *femmes libres*, or champions (on Zambia's Copper Belt) who partly serve in urban areas as alternatives to polygynously married wives. Their study, especially among the middle class, has become a minor growth industry in cities such as Freetown (Harrell-Bond, 1975), Accra (Pellow, 1977; Dinan, 1983), Lagos (Karanja, 1987), Lusaka (Schuster, 1979), the Copper Belt (Powdermaker, 1962; Epstein, 1981), and Kampala, Nairobi, and Dar-es-Salaam (Southall, 1961; Obbo, 1987) as well as in more general descriptions of urban life (Little, 1973). Most of these studies seem to assume that such relationships are important only among the more urbanized, better-off, and educated. Indeed that is where they are most conspicuous, but there is evidence for their existence in a less glamorous form, and probably on a smaller scale, among the poor of Kampala (Mandeville, 1979) and Nairobi (Nelson, 1978), and in rural Sierra Leone (Isaac, 1980), Botswana (Schapera, 1971), and the Kenyan coast (Gomm, 1972), as well as 50 years ago in what was then the small town of Owerri in Nigeria (Leith-Ross, 1939). In 1973 we found the frequency of less formal unions equally represented at all social levels in Ibadan. In the sense that free marriage achieved by cohabitation is recognized by most African societies, these unions are almost licit, but there is no marriage ceremony or bridewealth and the men do not usually have an indisputable claim on the children, although most of the children's mothers seek recognition and help with child support. The duration of these unions is often short, however, and they may be hidden from wives, who usually resent them if only because they are a drain on family resources.

The outside wives of the middle class are usually young, relatively well-educated women, able to converse in English or French, in white-collar employment, well-dressed in a nontraditional way, and given to enjoying the "good life." They retain the right to break up the relationship and may say that love is possible only in such unions. Certainly if they marry the men, they are likely to find themselves left at home immediately to bear and raise children while their husbands go to nightclubs with new outside wives. They know their rights, which include payment for clothes, usually rent, often some food, and some spending money. For many educated young women this is the only way of having a relationship with a high-status or powerful man and of gaining an entrée to society. It is also often only one part of a strategy for advancement, success, and high income in the world of government and business; and it is not onesided, because, as Schuster (1979: 69–70, 116–117) reports of Lusaka, there is a good deal of expectation of sex by bosses in offices and businesses. Even among the poor of Kampala, Mandeville (1979: 42–43) found that many women in these relationships believed that they would ultimately do better economically than if they were married (although Mandeville doubted whether her data supported their hopes).

There is little reliable evidence on the incidence, duration, or number of parallel relationships. In fact, Karanja (1987: 248) claims that "it would not have been possible to collect the sort of data I have on 'outside wives' from a questionnaire, structured or unstructured," and implies that no sampling frame could have been employed to provide quantified estimates. In Ibadan, Nigeria in 1973, we found 10 percent of women were in unions that had received no formal recognition from families, with greater frequency among young women who might yet marry more formally, while middle-aged de facto wives were more likely to have been divorced or separated (*Changing African Family Project*, 1974). Powdermaker (1962) refers to such relationships on Zambia's Copper Belt as lasting some months, but the West African studies, and our in-depth interviews in Ibadan, suggest greater stability. Obbo (1987: 264) claims that such stability is deliberately sought by the elite males of East Africa's cities because of fear of contracting disease from bar girls.

An important question is the connection between the long period of postpartum female sexual abstinence once found across sub-Saharan Africa, which remains widespread, and husbands' extramarital relations. Although in East Africa a dramatic shortening has occurred in this century, periods of postpartum abstinence exceeding one year are still typical in West Africa south of the savannah, Middle Africa, and southern Africa (Schoenmaeckers et al., 1981: 35). In some cases the period may be much longer: the average duration for Nigeria's highly urbanized and relatively well-educated Yoruba was traditionally three to four years and was still 27 months in the 1970s

in Ekiti villages and 24 months in Ibadan villages (Orubuloye, 1977; 1981: 230), 22 months in Ibadan City (J. Caldwell and P. Caldwell, 1981: 183; Caldwell and Caldwell, 1977), and 13 months in Lagos City (Lesthaeghe et al., 1981: 151). In Ibadan in 1973, wives were available for sexual relations for little more than one-third of the time (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1977: 215), with the wife being available for 29 percent of the time in monogamous marriages and at least one wife available for 50 percent of the time in polygynous marriages (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1983: 16). Polygyny certainly was not an adequate solution. In some societies women return to their families of origin during the postpartum period, as among the Ewe of Togo and Ghana (Kumekpor, 1975: 725) or the Gonja of northern Ghana (E. Goody, 1973: 114). This contrasts with the Yoruba, where, in spite of the long postpartum interval, fewer than 8 percent of the surveyed Ibadan population returned home (*Changing African Family Project*, 1974). It is assumed that husbands will continue to have sex during this period when a wife is not available (Dorjahn, 1958: 856; P. Caldwell and J. Caldwell, 1981: 88; Bleek, 1987: 141–142).

One would assume that postpartum abstinence increased the likelihood and frequency of men's extramarital relations. There is little direct evidence. Few of the researchers drawn upon in this essay explained the husbands' extramarital relations solely in this context and most not in this context at all. Yet some women in Ibadan, admittedly concentrated among the elite, must have seen a connection, because a common reason given by them for agreeing to shorten the period of postpartum abstinence was so the husband would not seek outside women so frequently; they mostly feared that new relationships would result in additional wives or outside wives (P. Caldwell and J. Caldwell, 1987: 243–245). Nearly half the elite women and one-fifth of other wives claimed their husbands missed having sexual relations with them (Nigerian Family Study, 1975). These views receive support from the continued reduction over time of the abstinence period (J. Caldwell and P. Caldwell, 1981: 181–190) especially where contraception, as in Ibadan, has been available or, as in East Africa, alternative methods of child spacing. Indeed in much of East Africa the abstinence period has been declining for generations. This has apparently been made possible by the translation of premarital partial penetration into the use of withdrawal once married, but it seems also to evidence a desire for the resumption of marital sexual relations that suggests that the conjugal emotional bond is becoming stronger.

Sexual networks

Questions of central importance with regard to the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are not merely the extent of multiple sexual partners but the identity of the persons involved. The heterosexual spread

of such diseases is presumably likely to be fastest when relatively few women have contacts with large numbers of men.

Little is known about past networks of sexual contacts in sub-Saharan Africa, although there is some evidence with regard to substitution for wives during postpartum sexual abstinence. In at least some societies this was institutionalized, with a man having long-term specific relations with the woman who acted as substitute. Mwambia (1973: 61) reports that among the Meru of Central Kenya this institutionalization was carried to the point where, even when his wife was sexually available, a man never danced with her at festivities but always with this other woman. This situation is similar to that described by Bleek (1976: 105–106; 1987: 141–142) in which the other woman is called a *mpena*; and, according to one of Bleek's informants, "a man cannot live without a *mpena*." Dorjahn (1958: 856) says that Temne wives prefer not to know the identity of the other woman but feel strongly that there should be only one so as to prevent the spread of disease. Nothing is found in the literature about the marital status of such women. The problem was solved in some groups by access to the wives of age mates (Mwambia, 1973: 61) or to female relatives or clan members, distantly enough related for sexual relations but still close enough to prevent marriage. Indeed women of this category might come to the household to help with the birth and its aftermath. Schuster (1979: 76–77) points out that young women coming to stay with relatives are frequently pressed for sexual relations by members of the household.

These patterns may be changing. The 1974–75 Nigerian Family Study (1975) of postpartum sexual abstinence in Ibadan City and rural areas showed that many wives believed their husbands had multiple girlfriends or visited bar girls or prostitutes. Some indeed had greater worries about their husbands establishing longer term relations with one woman.

This pattern may be the result of increasing urbanization, since towns are service centers with bars, night clubs, and other entertainment. Little (1973: 76–101) points out that African novelists portray towns as being unusually sexually permissive. Schuster (1979: 87–89) says that in Lusaka most entertainment takes place at parties or in nightclubs and bars, and sex is always just around the corner: "it is this nightlife which makes Lusaka come alive,"—but it is also not quite respectable, invoking associations with drinking, dancing, and sexual tensions. At a poorer level trading in the town can be combined with selling sex, as Nadel (1942: 152) reported in Bida and as Gomm (1972: 103) described on the Kenyan coast. Freedom abounds in the town in contrast to the gerontocratic controls of the village, and women there are increasingly likely to demand equal rights with men (Southall, 1961: 53). There is certainly a selective movement to town of women who want something other than the rural customary marriage (Baker and Bird, 1959: 102; Nelson, 1979: 88). The shortage of women in many towns gives

them bargaining advantages in a situation where most are determined to get ahead, and sex plays a significant role in attaining these ends (cf. Little, 1973: 80; Lang and Lang, 1973: 228). East and Southern African towns differ from those of West Africa in that women in the former have traditionally not been traders and hence have a restricted range of ways of earning income. Nelson (1979: 81), reporting research in Mathare Valley, a Nairobi immigrant squatter slum, says that women there had no employment options other than as servants, bar girls, or illicit beer brewers. The last of these, the occupation of 75 percent of female household heads, meant also selling the beer in what was known as an "entertainment center" with a connotation of both drinking and sex. Among the Maasai, Llewelyn-Davies (1979: 213–214) reports women had no licit way of earning money at all.

Much of the debate about AIDS now centers on the role of prostitution, although it is clear that the term is often being used in a very ethnocentric and religiocentric way. If a prostitute is a female who sells sex commercially, charging standard rates on the spot on each occasion, dealing for the most part with strangers and making no emotional commitment, and often operating from group commercial premises or a brothel that is primarily used for this purpose, then many of the women tested at clinics treating sexually transmitted diseases and described as "prostitutes" in reports are probably not being accurately named. Indeed, the description probably applies to only a very small part of sexual relations in Africa, even those relations with a transactional component.

Fortes (1978: 22) argued that prostitution in West Africa is age-old because sex has always been treated in a commonsense, and consequently frequently in a commercial, way. In our sense he means that there has always been a transactional element. One reason was that divorcées and widows returned to their brothers' homes or fathers' compounds and continued to have children (cf. Richards, 1939: 115; Beidelman, 1971: 62) and would have been mean-spirited to their relatives if they had not at the same time and in the same way sought material assistance through sex for their upkeep. Often the practice was institutionalized, for "their kin will expect those with sexual access to them to pay 'fines' and other payments if conception occurs" (Beidelman, 1973: 265). Some researchers identify periods when a greater commercial or impersonal element entered into these relationships, as does Colson (1958: 293) with reference to the construction of the railway through Zambia in 1906, Evans-Pritchard (1974: 142) in 1926–30 among the Azande, and Leith-Ross (1939: 220) with the growing commercialization and changing customs in Owerri in the 1930s.

Researchers, admittedly predominantly in West Africa (Pellow, 1977: 209; Little, 1973: 85; Bleek, 1987: 141), although also in East Africa (Gomm, 1972: 100), stress the extreme difficulty in identifying a precise form of behavior as prostitution. Bleek (1976: 107–108) says that this aspect of his

research failed because “the few observations which were made of lineage members who practise prostitution at Ayere or Accra strongly suggest that many of these relationships are not purely commercial. It is exactly this point which defies an easy distinction between prostitution and the lover relationship.”

Both Powdermaker (1962: 163) and Epstein (1981: 311–312) made similar observations about their work on Zambia’s Copper Belt, an area that might be supposed more than most to be a venue for indisputable prostitution, although Epstein also reported a relatively small number of “straight prostitutes,” mostly Kasai women from Zaire who had come for this purpose. In the absence of brothels, Nadel (1942: 152) described “semi-professional” relationships. Both Acquah (1958: 73–74) and Pellow (1977: 209) point out that Accra prostitutes preferred to be paid on a monthly or longer term basis so as to blur the distinction between themselves and mistresses. Just how blurred the distinctions can become is demonstrated for coastal Kenya by Gomm (1972: 98), who shows that even the traditional marriage structure can be maintained by Digo women going from one temporary marriage to another, usually to migrants, with cash payments for both sexual and domestic services, and yet with successive payments and recovery of bride-wealth.

Nevertheless, Ward (1938: 150) described in Nigeria something very like institutionalized prostitution (although perhaps no more so than the situation in the Ghanaian town that Bleek found so perplexing) in Yoruba villages (probably as big as towns elsewhere in the region), and Pittin (1983: 292–293) described in Hausaland “houses of women” who supported themselves largely by supplying sex. In Ghana, Peil (1981: 90–92) reported on houses in the migrant townships surrounding Accra-Tema that had several prostitutes. Nevertheless, the women in both Pittin’s and Peil’s houses were mostly rural-urban migrants. Inasmuch as Pittin reported that her women would marry again and Peil that her houses continued the same function two years later but with none of the same women, the identification was hardly of women who could be adequately described as professional prostitutes. Similarly, Dawson (1988: 63) reports that 40 percent of women described as prostitutes in Mombasa had lived there for less than one year. It is, of course, possible that such occupational and geographical mobility does much to spread sexually transmitted diseases. Ward’s description of institutionalized prostitution in rural Yorubaland is not unique, for it is clearly what Evans-Pritchard (1974: 142) was referring to among the Azande and what Laughlin and Laughlin (1973: 357) describe among the So of east Uganda.

To a large extent real prostitution with brief commercial relations is brought into existence by the demand and the nature of the clientele, and those who demand such services in Africa have been described as migrant

laborers, short-term miners, truck drivers, cattle herders, itinerant traders, soldiers, in some locations tourists, and men in urban or mining areas who are unaccompanied by wives or where the immigration of women or others without jobs has been restricted (Southall, 1961: 56–57; David and Voas, 1981: 658–659; Dawson, 1988: 58–63; Larson, 1989). Clearly this describes the major towns of East and Southern Africa more than West Africa; it can also describe some coastal rural areas, as in Kenya (Gomm, 1972: 100): “There is a well organized system of rural prostitution run by hotel owners and bus crews and bus-loads of women are delivered to any large celebration or to areas where there are congregations of itinerant workers.”

Prostitution in Eurasia has usually led to women being made moral and social outcasts, and it is the absoluteness of this division between prostitutes and other women that has rendered impossible the gradations in the commercial component of sex that are found in Africa. We found in 1962 that Ghanaian rural families were apprehensive of what their single daughters would do if they went to Accra (Caldwell, 1969: 106), but we identified no one who rejected their daughters’ remittances or who refused to accept them back. The 1953–56 Accra survey found that Accra prostitutes had no great problem with their relatives back in the village (Acquah, 1958: 74). Bleek (1976: 109) reported of six prostitutes in the town he studied:

Most of the time they live in Accra, but they frequently come to Ayere and may stay on for several months. They are known in the town as the “Accra girls” and during funerals they try to convince their townsmen of their successes in city life by parading through the town in their best dresses. Most people look somewhat askance at them but they are not outcasts.

However, it should be noted that Leith-Ross (1939: 127) regarded such tolerance among Nigeria’s Ibos in the 1930s as a recent development.

Who, then, are the prostitutes and “semi-prostitutes”? The answer is remarkably similar all across the continent: they are predominantly divorced or separated women (East Africa: Southall and Gutkind, 1957: 72; Colson, 1958: 293; Gomm, 1972: 100; Potash, 1978: 389–391; Brokensha, 1988: 168; West Africa: Ward, 1938: 151; Nadel, 1942: 153; Reyna, 1975: 65; David and Voas, 1981: 658; Pittin, 1983). In fact, separated women tend to be regarded as prostitutes, as among the Luo of Kenya (Potash, 1978: 389–391) or the Barma of Chad (Reyna, 1975: 65), and they may, by this assumption, be forced into prostitution, as among Nigeria’s Hausa (Pittin, 1983: 292–293). Ward (1938: 151) described this relationship among the Yoruba by explaining separation primarily by the women’s sexual conduct during the marriage, and Gomm (1972: 100) says that among the Coastal Digo of Kenya, “A minority of women opt out of marriage permanently to live independently or with women friends outside their home community, accepting lovers who pay for their services in cash.” Other separated women

owe their status to infertility, which is a frequent reason for being driven from marriage and for being unable to remarry (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1985: 14–22; Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987: 417–418). Nadel (1942: 153) identified such women as a major source of prostitutes: “Adultery and unchastity count less in her than other women. [The] paramount stigma [is] barrenness itself.” Colson (1958: 293), discussing the source of prostitutes along the Rhodesian railroad in 1906, added widows, although the basis for this claim is not clear. A girl, married in that period of very high mortality at 16 years of age to a man ten years older, probably had one chance in six of being widowed within a decade and almost one in three within fifteen years. Nevertheless, widows of this age were everywhere likely to be quickly remarried if only by levirate. In addition, Ward (1938: 151) claims that, among the Yoruba, prostitutes included a significant number of young single women, while Powdermaker (1962: 163) says that on the Copper Belt they constituted the majority. This is supported by the only recorded census that identified prostitution as an occupation—that carried out in three townships around Accra-Tema by Peil (1981: 90–92)—which found that “most of the prostitutes said they were single, and most of the rest said they were divorced, but two were living with their husbands.” To the separated, David and Voas (1981: 658) added, although “to a lesser extent, wives visiting friends and relatives away from husbands and home” (precisely the fear harbored by husbands reported by E. Goody, 1973: 114, during women’s long postpartum absences); and Little (1973: 85) added women between jobs when no longer receiving other income. Only Peil’s census sought characteristics of prostitutes other than marital status, and she found half of them to be under 25 years of age (which is probably about the median age of sexually active women) and the majority to be illiterate. The latter finding may be subjective because she relates: “Better-educated girls who engage in casual or regular prostitution usually have other jobs in which to categorize themselves. Illiterate prostitutes often do some trading, but they are easy for interviewers to spot” (p. 90). Nearly all were rural-urban migrants, but the townships she studied are staging posts for migrants to the city, and some had come to marry and were supporting themselves in the meantime.

Most reports of fear of sexually transmitted diseases refer specifically to the most commercial of prostitutes, apparently assuming that they have the largest number of sexual partners and are least discriminating. This was the case in the Yoruba villages in the 1930s (Ward, 1938: 150), on the Zambian Copper Belt in the early 1950s (Epstein, 1981: 311–312), and in Uganda in the 1960s (Karp and Karp, 1973: 394; Laughlin and Laughlin, 1973: 357). Yet, when 1,361 male students in Kenya were asked what they most feared during their first sex experience, none said venereal disease (Guest, 1978: 30). This, of course, may merely support evidence presented above that male adolescent sex is almost always with teenage girls, not prostitutes.

Nowhere do we have figures on what proportion of male multiple sexual contacts are with prostitutes or other women with a large number of additional sexual partners. There are figures showing some Nairobi working-class area prostitutes averaging nearly 1,000 sexual contacts per year (Dawson, 1988: 62), although this need not, of course, mean a like number of different partners. Although this figure is not implausible, the qualitative reports from West Africa, and indeed elsewhere in East Africa, appear to suggest much lower frequencies.

A synthesis and a research challenge

In many ways sub-Saharan Africa is an alternative civilization. It is more classless than Eurasia, and it does not take sexual relations overly seriously or regard many of those relations with deep guilt. Thus it has longstanding attributes that are only recently coming to characterize the West, largely cut off now from its landed roots and either losing its religion or secularizing. This is why sub-Saharan Africa often seems to outsiders much more "modern" than much of Asia, and why African migrants to developed countries often feel little culture shock, with women playing as full a role in the new society as men. It is also why global analyses of transformations from "traditional" to "modern" society are largely meaningless: traditional South Asia bears little resemblance to traditional sub-Saharan Africa and much resemblance to modern Greece, Sicily, or Andalusia.

Societies that do not regard most sexual relations as sinful or as central to morality and religion, and, at the most, have fairly easily evaded prohibitions even on female premarital or extramarital sex, are dominant in sub-Saharan Africa. They have been modified in outlying parts of the region, such as Nigeria's Hausaland, by the arrival long ago of Islam, and in other areas more recently and to a lesser degree by Christianity. Africa has always been selective about what it took from Christianity, suspecting it of preaching Western values, and this has been even more the case in recent times with the passing of colonial governments and with the onset of the sexual revolution in the West.

Fairly permissive (to employ a Eurasian concept) sexual attitudes are found generally across sub-Saharan Africa and have little relation to the intensity of the lineage structure or to whether it is patrilineal or matrilineal. Patrilineality is widespread in the region, as is gerontocracy. With rare exceptions, however, societies are not really patriarchal in the Eurasian sense for there is not the same obsession that the term usually implies with controlling the morals and mobility of women. The permissiveness should not be seen primarily as conducive to the spread of venereal disease and AIDS, but rather as an integral part of the whole society that has given women

great freedom (as well as responsibility and often onerous work). As a result, and uniquely among Third World regions, young girls in sub-Saharan Africa enjoy lower levels of mortality than their brothers (P. Caldwell and J. Caldwell, 1986; Rutstein, 1984).

There are some differences in the degree of sexual permissiveness. For instance, the Luo probably are more restrictive and the Ila less so, but even the Luo are not like Arabs, Indians, or Calabrians. Furthermore, until we get more and better data it would be wise to suspect that some of these differences are more in the eye of the anthropologist than they are reality. Regional differences in most aspects of sexual relations are not as great as they currently are in the case of the duration of postpartum sexual abstinence, but the shortening of that period in much of East Africa is a phenomenon only of the present century and probably owes much to the greater fear there of premarital pregnancy and of the use of methods for preventing it, both of which may have developed or intensified only in recent generations.

The regional differences that most concern us here are those in the incidence of AIDS and in the possibly related incidence of venereal disease and female primary sterility. The region where substantial infecundity has been prevalent for generations includes large parts of Zaire, Gabon, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, and southwest Sudan—the northwest segment of the current area of greatest AIDS intensity. This geographical area was possibly partly defined by sexual permissiveness as Romaniuk (1968) argued; however, patterns of sexual behavior were not constant but changing as a result of major foreign disruption of isolated and fragile societies (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1983). The area may also have been defined by the minimal availability of medical resources for countering gonorrhea before sterility resulted, as is suggested by lower levels of sterility in the region's cities. Better access to medicine may also be the explanation of lower levels of sterility in such countries as Uganda, Kenya, and Zambia, which are now threatened by AIDS. The parallel between venereal disease and AIDS as sexually transmitted diseases holds only for infection and not for cure, because only the former can be successfully treated, and hence the geographical distribution of sterility owes much to the pattern of medical services.

Larson (1989) leans toward an explanation of the regional distribution of AIDS based on more intensive female foci of infection in the cities of Middle and East Africa, with a higher proportion of male extramarital sexual relations with professional prostitutes each servicing a large clientele. This, in turn, she explains by much higher ratios of males to females in East than in West African cities, a product of different colonial regulations in the mining and European settlement areas of the former and of an older urban tradition in the latter. On the whole, the sex ratios support her argument, although it should be noted that the most severe colonial restrictions on the entrance of women into mining and urban areas were in the south, where the South

African–Rhodesian system prevailed, while urban populations in West Africa outside the savannah were small until the present century except in Yorubaland (Caldwell, 1985: 483–485). Larson also notes that the differences between the regions in both the colonial and independent periods rest largely on the restricted economic role of women outside farming in the East compared with their domination of trading in the West. Nevertheless, even in East Africa, a sex ratio near one among those infected by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV-1) (Piot and Carael, 1988: 75) shows that we are not witnessing a group of males with few other sexual contacts than prostitutes. An alternative explanation is the spread of the disease from an original source with greater speed along the main transport routes and toward the larger cities (S. Halstead, personal communication, 1987). If the last explanation is correct, then it is only a matter of time before the AIDS problem in West Africa is as acute as in the East.

We wish to put forward another possible explanation for the failure of sterilizing venereal disease to have a major impact on most of West Africa—an explanation that may also ensure relatively low future levels of AIDS. In the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases our hypothesis places less stress on such foci of infection as prostitutes and more on the subsequent sexual networking.

In recent generations the major contrast in sexual activity between West and East Africa has been the persistence of long periods of postpartum sexual abstinence in West Africa. In our large sample of Ibadan City in 1973, wives were abstaining from sexual relations for about 65 percent of the time between marriage and menopause, partly because of the duration of abstinence associated with birth, typically from about the fourth month of pregnancy until 22 months after giving birth, and partly because they averaged over six births. By their early 40s the majority of wives were permanently abstaining. Not only does this greatly restrict the period of sexual relations, but continuous periods of abstinence each averaging 28 months mean a greater chance of realizing during this period that the husband has symptoms of venereal disease. Not all West African ethnic groups abstain for longer than one year because of pregnancy and childbirth, but Schoenmaeckers and colleagues (1981) showed that at least three-quarters of all ethnic groups do so (and, as their notes make clear, many of the rest probably do). Almost certainly, the average West African woman has sexual relations less often than her East African counterpart, and this may also be true, but by a smaller margin, for men.

The main purpose of this essay has been to show that the sub-Saharan African population is not a morally backsliding Eurasian population that can be returned by exhortation and educational campaigns to a pattern of sex occurring predominantly within marriage. Indeed, aggressive and badly targeted campaigns could severely undermine social institutions, hurting in

particular the position of women and some of the most socially marginal groups. And they will not always be successful, partly because many African societies admire risk-taking, especially dashing behavior by young men, and partly because many of the less literate have alternative explanations for venereal disease, which are easily transferable to AIDS, in terms of extra-human forces and witchcraft. Campaigns will also have great difficulty in increasing the use of condoms outside the most commercial forms of sex, a very important point if the spread of AIDS owes less to foci of infection and more to sexual networking. In 1973 in Ibadan the sexual partners of only one percent of women had ever used condoms and most of that practice was in the most commercial of relations.

This does not mean that the fear of AIDS will not decrease the frequency of sexual relations outside marriage. In the long run it probably will, and at the same time it will strengthen spousal emotional and even economic links. Africa may be nudged toward a Eurasian pattern not by missionaries but by fear. This is unlikely to be the unqualified gain that many foreigners expect. There is also a possibility that if fewer women are ready to participate in premarital or extramarital sexual relations, then those who are will have more sexual partners. The greater economic nucleation of the conjugal family consequent upon the increasing sexual and emotional binding of the married couple will probably also encourage fertility decline even in conditions where governments are apprehensive of rising mortality levels. We may witness a demographic transition driven primarily by AIDS.

The social emphasis in this essay does not mean that we dispute the need for medical, biological, and health breakthroughs. On the contrary, precisely because the main thrust of the essay is that social change can be very damaging if too fast and if based on models of very different societies, the appeal is for the maximum development and application of what biomedical research and public health measures can offer. One possibility is obvious. If the high incidence of HIV in Middle and East Africa is not solely the result of networks of sexual relationships, but is also the product of a persistence of untreated genital lesions and ulcers, largely from venereal-type diseases but perhaps to some extent from unhygienic conditions in poverty-stricken environments, then massive internal and technical-aid-funded programs to suppress venereal disease and to clear up such lesions and sores should be a high priority. This may mean huge human and financial investment in African public health, which would pay large dividends beyond those returned from checking AIDS.

A present major need within Africa—arguably the major need in formulating a sound basis for policy—is for good and culturally sensitive social research. The demand will increase for more accurate knowledge about almost every matter treated largely in hypothetical terms in this essay. This includes for each marital, social, urban–rural, and ethnic group reasonably

correct estimates by sex of numbers of sexual contacts over time, numbers of different partners, and the type of partner and the nature of the relationship. We also need to know the extent of, and the rate of change in, these relationships and the degree to which knowledge and fear of AIDS is responsible for that change. Of more fundamental social importance is the need to know the function served by different kinds of sexual relations and what happens if these relations disappear. What, for instance, will be the position of deserted wives, women escaping from unsatisfactory marriages to the city, and of adolescent girls in the towns seeking affection or the wherewithal to stay in school? Will AIDS mean that rich and powerful men are more and not less attracted to the ideal of having many wives and ensuring their sexual faithfulness?

Even in Africa's alternative civilization these questions are sensitive, and responses can easily be untrue or frivolous. This sensitivity has, of course, been heightened by the Westernizing experience of the last 100 years. International survey programs concerning sexual practices are likely to be hardly worth the paper on which they are printed. Much of the work will have to be done personally by trusted researchers, using interrelated anthropological and small-scale survey methods. Adequate methodology will be developed as the research programs continue.

The emphasis here on change and on the urgent need for research that can both guide and alert does not overstate the gravity of the crisis. If projections showing half the deaths in the region being caused by AIDS only a dozen years hence prove correct, then that disease will dominate all other considerations in African social policy, and society and social relations are likely to be ridden with fear. All enlightened guidance based on adequate knowledge will be invaluable.

Meanwhile, it should be realized that the extent of sexual networking has probably already begun to decline. For public health reasons we need to know the extent and rate of that decline. We should also realize that any decline will cause economic hardship to some women. The extent of that additional hardship should be investigated to guide social policy. Inevitably, the threat of AIDS means that publicity campaigns are needed to show the danger of sexual networking, but such publicity should not allow women to be pictured as the source of distress and evil. Finally, the social adjustments are likely to prove so difficult and so painful for the weakest groups that all possible medical measures should be taken. Central to this need is a massive attack on reducing the level both of venereal disease and of the physical sequelae of such disease. Health systems should not wait for social change to achieve this but should gear up for direct medical programs.

Note

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