

# **Whisperings of Intimacy**

## **Sexuality, Spirituality and Spiritual Direction**

by

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*“May God make known to you, dear child,  
who he is and how he treats his servants  
and especially his handmaids;  
how he consumes them within himself.  
From the depths of his wisdom,  
he shall teach you what he is  
and with what wonderful sweetness  
the one lover lives in the other and so permeates the  
other that they do not know themselves from each other.  
But they possess each other in mutual delight,  
mouth in mouth, heart in heart,  
body in body, soul in soul,  
while a single divine nature flows through them both  
and they both become one through each other,  
yet remaining always themselves.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Hadewijch of Brabant, “Union with God” in *Beguine Spirituality: An Anthology*, Edited by Fiona Bowie, p108.  
(Formatting mine)

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# **Whisperings of Intimacy: Sexuality, Spirituality and Spiritual Direction**

## **Introduction**

Sexuality and spirituality have had a chequered relationship, seen as antagonists for many centuries, separate parts of the dualism of body and soul, flesh and spirit,<sup>2</sup> sex being seen as a barrier to intimacy with God.<sup>3</sup> Modern focus has been on their inter-relatedness, how sex and sexuality point us to God, sexuality being energy for intimacy<sup>4</sup> and communion,<sup>5</sup> “*the basis of all human relating, both with other people and with God.*”<sup>6</sup> I wanted to learn about directee’s actual experiences of the inter-relatedness of sexuality and spirituality, including sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer. What their attitudes were to sharing aspects of their sexuality in spiritual direction, what would encourage them to share, and whether their director’s gender would be an issue.

Neither sexuality nor spirituality were defined for the questionnaire, it was left to respondents to decide what these terms meant for them. Respondents appeared to regard sexuality along a continuum from being focused around sexual feelings and activity, to including femininity/masculinity and wider aspects of relating.<sup>7</sup> Spirituality was focused around respondents’ relationship with God.

## **General Information**

Sixty-one questionnaires<sup>8</sup> [Appendix 1](#) were sent out to 41 present and 20 former participants, supervisors and markers in Spiritual Growth Ministries’ Spiritual Directors’ Formation Programme. Thirty-six were returned completed. Eight

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<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James Whitehead, *Wisdom of the Body*, p9.

<sup>3</sup> E. Glenn Hinson, *Spiritual Preparation for Christian Leadership*, pp118-121.

<sup>4</sup> Fran Ferder and John Heagle, *Your Sexual Self*, p8.

<sup>5</sup> James Nelson, *The Intimate Connection*, p26.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher, *People of Passion*, p227.

<sup>7</sup> “*Sexual feelings may also occur within the direction relationship as an outright substitute (displacement) for one’s hunger for the Lord.*” (Gerald May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*, p112.) This aspect of sexuality within spiritual direction was not identified within any of the responses given.

<sup>8</sup> See [Appendix 1](#) for the complete questionnaire and covering letter.

respondents preferred not to complete the questionnaire, returning it blank.<sup>9</sup> Although a range of ages were represented, the majority of respondents were between 46-65, with 92% female.<sup>10</sup> [Tables 1-3](#)

Respondents varied in how long they had been receiving spiritual direction, with an average of 10.7 years.<sup>11</sup> [Table 4](#) Current participants averaged 7.7 years.<sup>12</sup> [Table 4B](#) [Email](#) These figures suggest a better return rate for past participants, supervisors and markers. This suggests the sample may have more respondents with experience as spiritual directors than the original 2:1 ratio suggested, as well as being skewed to all respondents having a minimum five months spiritual direction training.

### **Directees' Attitudes to Sharing Sexuality in Spiritual Direction**

Our attitudes to sexuality affect our relationships with others, how we view ourselves and how we relate to God.<sup>13</sup> Respondents were asked about their attitudes to, and experiences of, sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction.

Respondents' attitudes were graded as positive (50%), negative (8%) or neutral/mixed (42%).<sup>14,15</sup> [Table 5](#) All men had neutral/mixed feelings towards sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction. Those who had shared their sexuality within direction were more likely to have a positive attitude.<sup>16</sup> [Table 6](#) This seemed due to the positive affects/benefits the sharing occasioned. Also, respondents who had been receiving spiritual direction longer were more likely to be positive.<sup>17</sup> [Table 7](#) Those who had not shared were more likely to respond with a neutral/mixed reaction. Of the three who felt negatively about sharing, two had actually shared, yet, although their directors

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<sup>9</sup> Completing the questionnaire was entirely voluntary. Respondents who preferred not to complete it were asked to return their questionnaire blank.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 2, [Tables 1-3](#) for a summary of the basic information.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 4](#).

<sup>12</sup> This information was obtained separately to the questionnaire (see Appendix 1 for the follow up [email](#)), and was asked of all current participants not just those who completed the questionnaire. See Appendix 2, [Table 4B](#).

<sup>13</sup> Fran Ferder and John Heagle, *Your Sexual Self*, p25.

<sup>14</sup> Percentages given are the percentages of those respondents who answered that particular question.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 5](#).

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 6](#).

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 7](#).

made it safe, they still felt reticent, indicating such reticence can take time to work through.

Positive respondents believed sexuality is part of who they are, so it should be able to be brought to spiritual direction, although several wanted an assurance the focus would be their spiritual life.<sup>18</sup> For those with mixed reactions, it also depended on their director's maturity and trustworthiness, with some aspects feeling okay e.g. gender/role/relationship issues, but there was wariness about aspects like erotic images. Two respondents mentioned in theory fine, but probably not in practice with their current opposite-gender directors.<sup>19</sup> [Table 8](#) Those with negative reactions struggled with gender and marital differences between themselves and their directors, and hesitancy in talking about their sexuality with anyone.

### **What Directees Need in the Spiritual Direction Relationship**

Respondents were asked what they would need in the direction relationship and/or from their director so they felt safe to share their sexuality. Respondents mentioned:

- The need for an established relationship that was comfortable, open, respectful and empathetic, with clear boundaries.
- Wanting, through experience, to know that the director listens to a wide range of issues safely and maturely.
- Trust in their spiritual director was key.<sup>20</sup>
- The need for honesty, acceptance,<sup>21</sup> affirmation, and feeling believed and valued.
- Wanting an assurance of confidentiality, in a non-judgemental, understanding atmosphere.

Trust in the director's ability to appropriately handle sexual material was also important. That the director:

- Would not inappropriately explore directees' sexual lives or relationships.

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<sup>18</sup> Comments by respondents are in summary or compilation form.

<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 8](#).

<sup>20</sup> Important for over half the respondents.

<sup>21</sup> The second most frequently referred to attribute after trust.

- Accepted that sexuality is an appropriate topic for spiritual direction, had given permission for this type of disclosure,<sup>22</sup> and was not shocked when it was raised.
- Was comfortable with their own sexuality, having explored their own issues in this area.<sup>23</sup>
- Was well trained, having wisdom and experience, understanding the inter-relatedness of sexuality and spirituality, having an awareness of psychosexual development, and some knowledge of mystical spirituality.<sup>24</sup>

Also mentioned:

- a preparedness to work with non-heterosexuals;
- a liberation/justice perspective of sexuality;
- being the same orientation as the directee;<sup>25</sup> and
- a contemplative, prayerful attitude asking, “What is God saying about/through this?”<sup>26</sup> [Table 10](#)

### **Gender Issues in Sharing Sexuality in Spiritual Direction**

Gender is a consideration when we begin looking for a spiritual director. Tilden Edwards notes an opposite-gender director “*can reflect more of the mystery and otherness of God, . . . There is more likely to be complementarity in the relationship and less likely to be subtle competition.*”<sup>27</sup> Although he cautions that past tensions in relationships can make intimacy cross-sexually very difficult. Where fear or anger inhibits a person, a same-gender relationship may be best, just as it is best for a genitally very driven person.<sup>28</sup> Respondents’ perspectives were sought on how their

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<sup>22</sup> Gerald May suggests “*it may be helpful for the director to ask a few questions about sexuality early on in the relationship*”, so directees know it is an acceptable topic for discussion. (Gerald May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*, p115.)

<sup>23</sup> It is important that directors are open to exploring their own sexuality issues, because “*Fear of one’s own sexuality leads to fear of the sexuality of others*” (Jean Vanier, *Man and Woman He Made Them*, p46.). Also, as directees’ relational and sexual histories may hold blocks preventing progressive intimacy with God (Janet Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction*, p120), we need to be comfortable with sexuality as a topic if we are to assist our directees.

<sup>24</sup> “*Directors need to educate themselves in the [mystical] tradition and deal with their own resistances to these experiences. By doing so, they can facilitate for their directees the process of deepening intimacy with God in whatever form the experience takes.*” (Janet Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction*, p115.)

<sup>25</sup> In this case heterosexual.

<sup>26</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 10](#) for the full list.

<sup>27</sup> Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, pp108-109.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p110.

spiritual director's gender might affect their willingness to share their sexuality in spiritual direction.

For 67% of respondents, across all ages, genders<sup>29</sup> [Table 11](#) and various marital/relational states<sup>30</sup> [Table 12](#) the director's gender was an issue, although several mentioned it as more a preference than an issue *per se*. Seventy-eight percent currently had same-gender directors.<sup>31</sup> [Table 13](#) Those who had not shared their sexuality were more likely to find their director's gender an issue.<sup>32</sup> [Table 14](#) Although this did not preclude three respondents who had shared with opposite-gender directors still feeling their director's gender was an issue,<sup>33</sup> despite all feeling positive about the experience.<sup>34</sup> [Table 15](#)

Respondents felt past wounds made it more difficult to share with an opposite-gender director. Boundaries and appropriateness, as well as feeling uncomfortable were of concern. Also the need to be valued by a director of the same gender meant a same-gender director was deemed to be more appropriate.

Several respondents observed men and women experience and express their sexuality differently,<sup>35</sup> so same-gender directors are better able to understand their own gender's sexuality. Uncomfortableness with their own sexuality contributed to some reticence, and several married respondents preferred to restrict this kind of sharing to their spouse or same-gender directors. While some respondents felt the director's experience, time in the relationship, and trust were of equal or more importance than gender.

Points mentioned in overcoming "gender as an issue," centred on the director's experience, attitude, maturity, competence, safe boundaries, trustworthiness,

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<sup>29</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 11](#).

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 12](#).

<sup>31</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 13](#).

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 14](#).

<sup>33</sup> Centered around the inappropriateness of sharing with an opposite-gender director/a preference for a same-gender director, and needing a very experienced director and a well-established direction relationship before considering sharing.

<sup>34</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 15](#).

<sup>35</sup> James Nelson has observed that men and women have distinctive experiences precisely because of their male and female bodies and these do exercise considerable influence on their spirituality. (James Nelson, *The Intimate*

confidentiality, openness, gentle humour, own sharing, and the director being much older than the directee. Although some respondents still doubted they would share their sexuality with an opposite-gender director even if these were in place. Several respondents thought the only option would be to change to a same-gender director if their sexuality needed discussing, or alternatively, not raise the topic. Also suggested was trying the director out a bit, or that, potentially, openness to God's Spirit may mean gender would not be an issue.

### **Directees' Experiences of Sharing their Sexuality in Spiritual Direction**

Half the respondents had shared some aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction. This was across all ages, but no men had done so.<sup>36</sup> [Table 16](#) There was evidence of a desire to share, but hesitancy to do so, among those who had not shared, with two respondents indicating they had wanted to share an issue but had not done so.<sup>37</sup> [Table 18](#)

For those who shared (all women), the majority (59%) had only shared with same-gender directors.<sup>38</sup> [Table 19](#) Four people shared their sexuality within their first year of direction, another five between 1-4 years, and three between 10-20 years.<sup>39</sup> [Table 21](#) With the particular director that respondents first shared with, the majority (65%)<sup>40</sup> [Table 22](#) shared within the first four years of that direction relationship (at least two with opposite-gender directors); five of these within the first year. This shows the trust required for this sharing can be built up early, with directors of both genders.

For all but three respondents sharing their sexuality had been a positive experience and for all but one, including those with opposite-gender directors, the director had made it safe to share.<sup>41</sup> [Table 23](#) The respondent who felt unsafe, shared with a same-gender director, showing a same-gender director is no guarantee of safety.

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*Connection*, p21.) Also men and women experience and appropriate religious symbols, and symbolise their relationship with God differently. (James Ashbrook, "Different Voices, Different Genes," pp103-105.)

<sup>36</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 16](#).

<sup>37</sup> One man, one woman. Both felt neutral/mixed towards sharing, and neither had been in direction for more than 6 years. See Appendix 2, [Table 18](#).

<sup>38</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 19](#).

<sup>39</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 21](#).

<sup>40</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 22](#).

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 23](#).

Two-thirds of married respondents had not shared an aspect of their sexuality in direction, while the majority of single/‘those currently not in relationship’ had done so.<sup>42</sup> [Table 24](#) However, nothing in the answers given sheds any light on why this is so. Their attitudes to sharing their sexuality varied,<sup>43</sup> with some indicating they would share their sexuality if they believed it was affecting their spiritual life.

Respondents felt their directors made it safe to share by:

- Listening to and respecting them,<sup>44</sup> and not being shocked or embarrassed by the topic.
- Affirming sexuality is a part of being human, so appropriate to bring.
- Accepting them: their experience being valued, through non-judgemental listening.
- Being compassionate, relaxed, empathetic, supportive, attentive and warm.
- The direction relationship having trust, appropriate boundaries and confidentiality.
- Allowing respondents to take things at their own pace, and asking appropriate God-focused questions.
- Being aware of how deeply personal it was, and helping to ‘unpack’ the experience gently, not adding to or minimising it, instead helping respondents find ways to stay with the experience.
- Owning differences in marital states, and revealing they had some idea of what the directee was talking about, through sharing their own experience.<sup>45</sup> [Table 10](#)

The environment felt unsafe when the director did not know how to discuss it or guide the directee.

Those who found sharing their sexuality positive, felt affirmed and understood. They felt their sexuality and experience were more integrated; that they could bring ‘all of themselves’ to the conversation. This felt freeing and helpful. They no longer had to keep their sexuality out of God’s reach, discovering it was important to God and they could be honest with him. This led to deep self-acceptance, honouring of the body,

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<sup>42</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 24](#).

<sup>43</sup> One negative, eight neutral/mixed and five positive.

<sup>44</sup> The two most frequently given attributes that helped respondents feel that it was safe to share their sexuality.

<sup>45</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 10](#) for the full list.

and a greater sense of wholeness. Their relationship with Jesus deepened; including a growing sense of Jesus' humanity; and realisation that sexual feelings in prayer are a "normal" part of union.<sup>46</sup> For some, a specific issue was worked through. For others sometimes it was immaterial, sometimes it led to deep discovery.

On the other hand, for those whose feelings about sharing their sexuality had been negative or mixed, the respondent's own ambivalence meant sharing their sexuality did not feel positive, while the director's different interpretation left them feeling unsettled. When the director did not know how to discuss it, the respondent became wary of sharing their sexuality again. So it is important directors know how to assist directees with this topic.

### **Sexual/Erotic Feelings/Images in Prayer**

Sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer have been detailed within mystical writings.<sup>47</sup> However, when contemporary people experience them they can be experienced as frightening<sup>48</sup> despite being described as happening with considerable frequency.<sup>49,50</sup> Respondents were asked about their attitudes to sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer, whether they had experienced them, and what they had learnt from them.

As with attitudes to sharing sexuality, attitudes to sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer were graded into positive (58%), negative (6%)<sup>51</sup> [Table 27](#) and neutral/mixed (36%).<sup>52</sup> [Table 25](#) Fifty-six percent of respondents had experienced sexual/erotic images/feelings in prayer; spread across the ages and genders.<sup>53</sup> [Table 28](#) Interestingly, four of eight neutral/mixed respondents and four of twelve positive respondents, who had experienced sexual/erotic feelings/images, indicated their initial response was

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<sup>46</sup> The "encounter with the divine may be characterized by feelings of desire, arousal, passion, and union." (Janet Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction*, p96.)

<sup>47</sup> Janet Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction*, pp100-107.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p105.

<sup>49</sup> Gerald May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*, p115.

<sup>50</sup> For example: "As I knelt at the altar rail to receive the sacrament, I found myself unusually moved by wonder, desire, and longing. ... I was feeling unmistakable sexual arousal. My entire body-self was longing for the divine." (James Nelson, *Between Two Gardens*, p4.)

<sup>51</sup> Two respondents, neither of whom had experienced sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer. See Appendix 2, [Table 27](#).

<sup>52</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 25](#).

negative when they first experienced these.<sup>54</sup> Their attitude had changed through reading, prayer, and teaching and affirmation from a spiritual director.

Those positively disposed towards sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer believed they were God given, a response to God's love, and an aspect of intimacy and closeness with Him, as their whole persons, including their sexuality, can come alive when they pray. Respondents' reactions varied from not really focusing on them, to welcoming and exploring them. Although observing, like any area, they could get out of kilter.<sup>55</sup>

Respondents learnt through these feelings/images that they could relate to God in all their experiences, including their sexuality. That God's love is real in multi-dimensional ways,<sup>56</sup> receiving and enjoying them as expressions of love to and from God, resulting in a deeper intimacy with God. Reading the images on the metaphoric level, they spoke of the respondent's desire to surrender to God, revealing that this desire for God is deeper than head knowledge or what can be verbalized, and unveiling the depth of Jesus' desire and passion for the respondent.

### **Inter-relatedness of Sexuality and Spirituality**

People relate sexuality and spirituality in various ways, including making links between marriage and sex, and how God wants to relate to us; observing that both are part of our humanity and need to be integrated for us to be whole; and seeing sexuality as energy for intimacy with God and other people.<sup>57</sup> [Appendix 3](#) Respondents were asked if, and how, they had experienced a connection.

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<sup>53</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 28](#).

<sup>54</sup> Typified by being afraid, embarrassed, ashamed, disturbed, repressing them, questioning their appropriateness, and questioning whether they were of God or were self-generated. Those who felt negatively towards sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer also expressed similar reactions to the idea of experiencing these.

<sup>55</sup> Gerald May cautions against focusing on sex or sexuality as the way to God. "*Sexuality offers us the closest possible experience of joining with another, and it reflects in broken but endlessly hopeful ways what God's in-loveness with us might be like. But it is not the path to God*" (Gerald May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*, p114.)

<sup>56</sup> Although the particular ways God's love was multi-dimensional were not detailed, examples of multi-dimensional aspects of love can be found in: James Nelson, *Between Two Gardens*, p82; and James Nelson, *The Intimate Connection*, pp54-55.

<sup>57</sup> There is far more to this topic than can be covered here. See [Appendix 3](#) for a more detailed selection of various aspects of the inter-relatedness of sexuality and spirituality that I have come across, including those mentioned here.

All respondents said that sexuality and spirituality were related, although two could not identify how this was so in their actual experience.<sup>58</sup> [Table 31](#) The relatedness of sexuality and spirituality was enumerated in various ways, which I have attempted to break into several subcategories, although these overlap.<sup>59</sup>

### The “Bothness” of Sexuality and Spirituality

Sexuality and spirituality are both part of what it means to be human. Both are God-given gifts reflecting the image and nature of God. Both awaken emotions and can lead to fullness of life. Both share the experience of longing for love and intimacy, of being loved and responding to that love. Spirituality involves the whole person – imagination, body and feelings – all of which are part of sexuality. Sex involves acceptance, self-giving, oneness, and ecstasy, demonstrating trust and surrender at the deepest human level, which are also part of spirituality. Sexuality’s impulse to generativity is also part of spirituality.<sup>60</sup>

### Intimacy and Relating to God and Others

When we restrict prayer by excluding sexuality, we limit our relationship with God, and exclude an area of our relating to others from God. Our attitudes to our sexuality affect our view of ourselves and thus how we believe God views us. Our sexuality and desire for intimacy with God mix, as intense openness to another is part of our openness to the Other, and visa versa. Sexuality is a part of our relationships; we cannot separate being female or male from how we relate to others. Our responses are from a man’s or woman’s perspective, our relating to God included.

### Wholeness

Sexuality and spirituality are part of our whole being; we are not split into compartments. Spirituality touches every part of us including our sexuality, to pretend otherwise would be to lessen both and lack integrity. All of life can be a spiritual experience and the substance of spiritual reflection. We are called to wholeness,

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<sup>58</sup> See Appendix 2, [Table 31](#).

<sup>59</sup> Both genders contributed to the “bothness” and physicality compilations. Although only women contributed to the intimacy and wholeness compilations, men in the “bothness” compilation touched on intimacy.

including the area of our sexuality. As we recognise and integrate the masculine and feminine within ourselves we are helped to become more whole.<sup>61</sup>

### The Physicality of Sexuality and Spirituality

Deep openness to God and closeness in contemplative prayer can awaken the body sexually. Closeness to God increases our awareness of beauty in creation.<sup>62</sup> Aspects of engaging in deep love and sex are spiritual. When libido is low so is energy for prayer. Times of sexual frustration are often marked by distance from/lack of intimacy with God. Greater sexual intimacy and enjoyment parallel deeper spiritual connection. Sexual intimacy can be a very spiritual experience in which the presence of God can be 'felt'.

### Negative Inter-relatedness

From a negative perspective sexuality and spirituality were linked through sexual abuse connected to the church. Both sexual and spiritual abuse negatively impact a person's relationship with God. Although neither is dealt with in this paper, each needs careful companioning of the directee.<sup>63, 64</sup>

### Conclusion

Sexuality and spirituality "*are essential to humanity. Human beings are sexual beings and spiritual beings.*"<sup>65</sup> As such we would be wise to allow God to speak into our sexuality.

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<sup>60</sup> Generativity, "*the experiential knowledge that our presence to and with other people is life-giving and nurturing*", is listed as one of the signs of deepening psychosexual integration. (Fran Ferder and John Heagle, *Your Sexual Self*, p109)

<sup>61</sup> Many traits and behaviours have been stereotyped through social conditioning as either masculine or feminine e.g. assertiveness and receptivity, individuality and relatedness, analysis and intuition, independence and dependence, rationality and emotionality. Becoming whole involves each person integrating these aspects within themselves. Although Martinson suggests we need to weigh each trait and behaviour against its contribution to a just and humane society, and cautions against a compulsion that "*everyone is to be everything.*" (Roland Martinson, "Androgyny and Beyond," pp113-116.)

<sup>62</sup> In a broad view, attraction and responsiveness to beauty in nature are aspects of our sexuality. (Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James Whitehead, *Wisdom of the Body*, p40.)

<sup>63</sup> For issues that arise for sexually abused women in their relating to God see: Margaret Schrader, "The Effect of Sexual Abuse on Women's Naming and Experiencing of God."

<sup>64</sup> For helpful ways in companioning those who have been spiritually abused see either of Jeannie Cochrane's papers on "Spiritual Abuse," [www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz).

All respondents believed sexuality and spirituality are related. However, despite this, and the fact that all respondents have some training, and a number have some years' experience, as spiritual directors,

- 50% of respondents were neutral/mixed or negative in their attitude towards sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction;
- 42% were neutral/mixed or negative towards sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer;
- for 67% gender was an issue/preference; and
- eight respondents preferred not to complete the questionnaire.

It is probable, then, directees without such training will be even more ambivalent and reticent, especially if they are new to spiritual direction.

On the positive side,<sup>66</sup> when directors were able to appropriately handle directees' disclosures around their sexuality, the outcome was largely one of growth and wholeness for the directees. Some directors established significant trust with their directees, making spiritual direction a safe place for them to share their sexuality, as early as the first year of the relationship. Respondents' relationships with God also deepened through sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer. Although what respondents learnt from these, and about the inter-relatedness of sexuality and spirituality, varied from individual to individual.

Reflecting on respondents' experiences, a number of suggestions come to mind which could help directors to assist directees to feel more comfortable raising their sexuality in spiritual direction, should they feel they need to.

- Providing an environment that establishes trust, through openly listening, respecting, accepting, believing and valuing directees and their experiences; and providing clear boundaries, with an assurance of confidentiality.
- Exploring our own sexuality issues so that we grow more comfortable with this topic, and are less likely to be shocked or embarrassed when directees raise sexuality issues, not to mention grow more whole in this area ourselves.

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<sup>65</sup> Adrian Thatcher and Elizabeth Stuart, *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, pxii.

<sup>66</sup> Keeping in mind the limitations of the sample size, especially the small number of respondents who had shared their sexuality (17) and that all of them were female.

- Learning about the inter-relatedness of sexuality and spirituality, including mystical spirituality<sup>67</sup> and psychosexual development,<sup>68</sup> so we are more informed about these areas and how God can relate to us through them.
- Looking at, and being honest about, our preparedness to work with directees of differing sexual orientations, and any issues this raises for us, so we can be open with them about our ability to companion them and sensitively refer them on if we need to.<sup>69</sup>
- Being aware that material around sexuality may emerge quite early on in the spiritual direction relationship.
- Being sensitive to God's timing in identifying sexuality as an acceptable topic to bring to spiritual direction so directees know they have permission for this type of disclosure.
- Assuring directees that changing director, if gender issues become a concern, is totally acceptable.
- Not being shocked, uncomfortable or negative in our reactions when directees share their sexuality, but rather being sensitive to the personal nature of this topic, affirming directees, accepting and respecting them, and asking appropriate God-focused questions.
- Being prepared to share our own experience, when appropriate, to reassure directees they are not alone in their experiences.
- Being aware that reticence in sharing sexuality may still be present in directees, even if they have previously shared their sexuality.
- Reassuring and educating directees in the face of any fear and questions they may have about sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer.
- Becoming aware of sexuality issues that can arise for the different genders and marital/relational states,<sup>70</sup> although we also need to be honest about our limitations, and allow directees the freedom to change directors if they need to.

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<sup>67</sup> For example, the mystics Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hildegard of Bingen, Bernard of Clairvaux, and John of the Cross.

<sup>68</sup> For example see, Fran Ferder and John Heagle, *Your Sexual Self*.

<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of working with gay Christians in spiritual direction see Ron Larsen, "Gay Christians and Spiritual Direction," [www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz).

<sup>70</sup> While each directee's experience is unique some background knowledge may assist directors' understanding of the issues for each gender and the different marital/relational states. Useful resources include: Richard Foster, *Money, Sex and Power*; Lisa Graham McMinn, *Sexuality and Holy Longing*; Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James Whitehead, *Wisdom of the Body*; Margaret Evening, *Who Walk Alone*; Francis Foulkes, *Sane Sex*; James Nelson, *The Intimate Connection*.

We must also remember, “*Becoming a spiritual director is a lifelong process.*”<sup>71</sup> God continually calls us to growth both as people and as directors.

*“It is not a matter of accumulated skills that is central, but rather facing into the call toward self-stripping of illusion and sin that frees us to be ever more transparent and truly present with someone.”*<sup>72</sup>

*“God does make love with quite human beloveds in unmistakable ways. The director’s role does not include deciding how God can or cannot allure and love the directee but, rather, staying with the directee’s experience.”*<sup>73</sup>

So much of Christianity’s preoccupation with sex and sexuality has been around the struggle with purity, with ‘not doing the wrong thing’. This study shows there is a lot of good we can, and do learn through our sexuality. Although it is not the way to God, sexuality can, and does, aid us in our growth in intimacy with God.

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<sup>71</sup> William Barry and William Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, p134.

<sup>72</sup> Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, p129.

<sup>73</sup> Janet Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction*, p118.

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Appendix 1

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Covering Letter

Wellington  
June 2007

Dear

I am currently in my second year of training with Spiritual Growth Ministries as a spiritual director, and am doing a research project on “Sexuality and Spirituality in Directee’s Experiences”. As part of the project I am sending out questionnaires to directees. In consultation with Andrew Pritchard and Sue Pickering it has been suggested that I approach present and former participants in the SGM Spiritual Director Formation Programme, supervisors and markers, hence my approaching you.

Through the questionnaire I am hoping that I might be able to learn something about what it is that directees are looking for/wanting within the spiritual direction relationship as they think about sharing their sexuality within spiritual direction, and whether or not the gender of their spiritual director is an issue at all. I also hope to learn something of directees’ experience of sexual and erotic images and feelings in prayer, and how directees are experiencing the inter-relatedness of sexuality and spirituality. Hopefully this information will assist spiritual directors to provide an increasingly supportive environment for their directees who want to explore this part of their journey.

Accordingly I am asking if you would be prepared to fill in the attached questionnaire. This is entirely voluntary and the questionnaire will be completely anonymous, however, in view of the nature of this topic, if you would prefer not to complete the questionnaire I completely understand. Could you still please return the blank questionnaire in the postage paid envelope provided. I would like to have all questionnaires returned to me by 31 July. (Please do **not** include the covering letter as it has your name on it.) Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Blessings  
Jo Anastasiadis

## Questionnaire

### **Questionnaire: Sexuality and Spirituality within Spiritual Direction**

Thank you for being willing to complete this questionnaire. It is anonymous and all information given is confidential and will not be used for any purpose beyond this project. The privacy of all respondents will be respected; information presented in the project will be in summary form rather than individual respondents being quoted. All questionnaires will be destroyed on completion of this project. Following assessment of its relevance to other directors, the completed paper may be posted on the SGM website in 2008. If you require more space please use a separate sheet of paper and number your response with the corresponding question number. Please post this questionnaire in the reply paid envelope provided, as soon as possible before July 31st. Thank you.

#### **Questions**

1. How, as a directee, do you feel about/react to the idea of bringing your sexuality to spiritual direction?
2. How do you react to the idea that you might experience sexual or erotic images or feelings in prayer?
3. Have you ever had sexual or erotic images or feelings in prayer? Please circle your response:  
No (please go to question 4)  
Yes What was your response to these? What, if anything have you learned from them?
4. What would you need in the spiritual direction relationship and/or from your spiritual director so that you felt safe enough to share your sexuality in spiritual direction?
5. Would the gender of your spiritual director be an issue for you in sharing any aspect of your sexuality? Please circle your response: No (please go to question 7)  
Yes If yes, what would the issue be about for you?
6. What, if anything, do you think could help you overcome this issue around your spiritual director's gender?
7. In your experience are sexuality and spirituality related/linked in any way?  
Please circle your response: No (please go to question 8)  
Yes If yes, how have you experienced this?
8. Have you ever openly shared any aspect of your sexuality within spiritual direction, including sexual or erotic images or feelings in prayer?  
Please circle your response: No (please go to question 9)  
Yes (please go to question 10)

#### **Sexuality Not Raised within Spiritual Direction**

9. If no aspect of your sexuality has been openly shared within spiritual direction – have you wanted to share some aspect but not done so for some reason?  
Please circle your response: No Yes

(You have finished this section, please now go to question 15)

#### **Sexuality Raised within Spiritual Direction**

10. Did you share the aspect(s) of your sexuality with spiritual director(s) of the same/or opposite gender as yourself? Or both?  
Please circle your response: Same gender Opposite gender Both genders
11. How long had you been doing spiritual direction (with any spiritual director) before you shared an aspect of your sexuality in spiritual direction? \_\_\_\_\_

12. How long, before you shared, had you been working with the particular spiritual director with whom you **first** openly shared any aspect of your sexuality in spiritual direction? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Did your spiritual director make it safe for you as you shared the aspect(s) of your sexuality?  
Please circle your response:   No       If no, How could they have made it safe(r) for you?  
  Yes       If yes, How did they make it safe for you?
14. What for you was the affect/result of sharing the aspect(s) of your sexuality in spiritual direction?

**Other Information:**

15. How long have you been doing spiritual direction? \_\_\_\_\_
16. How long have you been with your current spiritual director? \_\_\_\_\_
17. How many spiritual directors have you had? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Is your current spiritual director of the same or different gender to you?  
Please circle your response:       Same           Different
19. Please circle your age range:   Under 25   26-35   36-45   46-55   56-65   66-75   75+
20. Please circle your gender:           Male           Female
21. Please give your marital status: \_\_\_\_\_
22. Any additional comments about this topic or questionnaire that you wish to make?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Should you wish to read the completed paper, it may be posted on the Spiritual Growth Ministries website: [www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz) in 2008, or contact me separately for a copy.

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**Follow up Email**

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Hi Folks

This is a quick request for some additional information for my project on sexuality and spirituality in directee's experiences. I didn't think to ask how many years you had been receiving spiritual direction before you started the programme, because originally I had not been intending to send the questionnaire to those currently on the programme.

Can you flick me a quick figure of how many years you had been receiving spiritual direction before you started doing the spiritual directors' formation programme?

You don't have to have filled in the questionnaire at all. I'm interested in finding out the average, so everyone's information would be of use.

Thanks so much.  
Blessings  
Jo

## Appendix 2

### Tables Summarising Questionnaire Information

#### General Information

**Table 1:** Number of people the questionnaire was sent to in each category.

- The majority of people who were sent the questionnaire (41 of 61, 67%) were currently doing the Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme.

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Questionnaires sent to	Total
1 <sup>st</sup> year participants	27
2 <sup>nd</sup> year participants	14
Past participants, supervisors, markers	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>

**Table 2:** Response rates for completing and returning the questionnaire.

- 72% of those surveyed returned their questionnaires.

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Number of questionnaires	Total
Questionnaires returned completed	36 (59%)
Questionnaires returned uncompleted before the required date	8 (13%)
Questionnaires outstanding	17 (28%)
<b>Total questionnaires sent out</b>	<b>61</b>

**Table 3:** Summary of respondents' age and gender distribution.

- There was a heavy skew towards female respondents, with the majority being aged between 46-65 years of age.

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Gender	Total	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
Female	33 (92%)	1	6	9	10	7
Male	3 (8%)			2	1	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1 (3%)</b>	<b>6 (17%)</b>	<b>11 (31%)</b>	<b>11 (31%)</b>	<b>7 (19%)</b>

**Table 4:** Age and gender distribution of respondents and the length of time they had been receiving spiritual direction.

- Respondents varied considerably in the amount of time spent receiving spiritual direction. The majority had been receiving spiritual direction for at least 6 years (average 10.7 years).

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Years receiving spiritual direction	Total	By gender		Across age ranges (in years)				
		Female	Male	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
0 - 5	10	9	1		2	5	1	2
6 - 10	9	9			1	3	4	1
11 - 15	9	7	2	1	1	2	4	1
16 - 20	6	6			2	1	2	1
21 - 25	1	1						1
26 - 30	1	1						1

### Background to Table 4B

It seemed probable that current participants would have been in spiritual direction for a shorter time, on average, than past participants, supervisors and markers. If this was correct, it appeared likely, looking at Table 4, that there had been a better response rate from past participants, supervisors and markers. To check this out the current participants, who were sent the questionnaire, were emailed to find out how many years they had been receiving spiritual direction prior to starting the course (a question not asked in the original questionnaire). This was then adjusted (by adding 6 months to first year participants and 18 months to second year participants) to give a comparative time frame to Table 4.

**Table 4B:** Distribution of the length of time current participants had been receiving spiritual direction.  
 - 28 current participants responded. With an average of 7.7 years, the comparison with Table 4 (average 10.7 years), suggests there was a slightly better return rate for past participants, supervisors and markers. [Return to Document](#)

Years receiving spiritual direction for current participants	Total
0 - 5	14
6 - 10	7
11 - 15	2
16 - 20	3
21 - 25	1
26 - 30	1

### Directees' Attitudes to Sharing Sexuality in Spiritual Direction

**Table 5:** Age and gender distribution of how respondents felt about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction.

- Across the age ranges, half the respondents felt positive about the idea of sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction. A few were negative. All the men were neutral/mixed in their attitudes. [Return to Document](#)

Felt about sharing their sexuality	Total	By gender		Across age ranges (in years)				
		Female	Male	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
Negative	3 (8%)	3			1		2	
Neutral / Mixed	15 (42%)	12	3		3	6	4	2
Positive	18 (50%)	18		1	2	5	5	5

**Table 6:** How respondents felt about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction in comparison with whether they had actually shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction.

- Respondents were more likely to feel positive about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction if they had already done so. Those who had not shared their sexuality in spiritual direction were more likely to have a neutral/mixed response towards doing so. [Return to Document](#)

Felt about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction	Total	Has directee shared their sexuality in spiritual direction?	
		No	Yes
Negative	3 (9%)	1	2
Neutral / Mixed	15 (44%)	11	4
Positive	16 (47%)	5	11

**Table 7:** How respondents felt about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction, in comparison with the length of time they had been receiving spiritual direction.

- There is a trend towards a more positive attitude towards sharing sexuality in spiritual direction the longer respondents had been receiving spiritual direction. [Return to Document](#)

Years receiving spiritual direction	Total	Felt about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction		
		Negative	Neutral / Mixed	Positive
0 - 5	10	1	6	3
6 - 10	9	1	5	3
11 - 15	9	1	4	4
16 - 20	6			6
21 - 25	1			1
26 - 30	1			1

**Table 8:** How respondents felt about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction in comparison with their current spiritual director's gender.

- It is unclear, from these figures, whether the current spiritual director's gender influenced the respondents' reaction to the idea of sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction. However, two neutral/mixed respondents commented that they were reluctant about the idea because they currently had opposite-gender directors. As well as the negative respondent with an opposite-gender director citing gender as an issue. [Return to Document](#)

Felt about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction	Total	Current director's gender compared with directee's gender	
		Different	Same
Negative	3 (8%)	1	2
Neutral / Mixed	15 (42%)	4	11
Positive	18 (50%)	3	15

**Table 9:** How respondents felt about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction in comparison with their marital/relational state.

- Showing a range of responses across the differing marital/relational states.

Felt about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction	Total	Marital/relational state						
		Committed Relationship	Divorced	Independent	Married	Single	Single (Religious)	Widowed
Negative	3				2	1		
Neutral / Mixed	15		1	1	11	2		
Positive	18	1			11	4	1	1

### What Directees need in the Spiritual Direction Relationship

**Table 10:** Qualities that respondents needed in the director and direction relationship so they felt safe sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction.

- A wide range of qualities were desirable, with trust, acceptance, confidentiality and feeling understood/believed/valued being key prior to sharing sexuality in spiritual direction. While respect, and a listening attitude, along with acceptance of the directee, acceptance of sexuality as a topic for spiritual direction, and a lack of shock/discomfort/negative reactions were key when respondents actually shared their sexuality. Both men and women were similar in what was most important.

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TABLE 10: Quality within the director or the spiritual direction relationship respondents wanted	Respondents who wanted this quality before they would share their sexuality		Respondents who felt the director made it safe to share because of this quality (all women)
	Women	Men	
Trust	17	2	3
Acceptance of the directee	8	1	4
Confidentiality	6	1	1
Feeling understood / believed / valued	6	1	1
Comfortable/close relationship	5	1	
Openness	6		2
Safety	5	1	1
Established relationship	4	1	1
Non-judgmental attitude	5		1
Trust/confidence in director's ability to appropriately receive such disclosures	3	2	
Confidence in director's experience/competence	3	1	
Maturity in spiritual director	4		
Clarity re boundaries	3		1
Director comfortable with their own sexuality	3		
Focus would be/was the relationship with God	3		1
Knowing that God/Holy Spirit is part of the process	3		
Knowledge and appropriate teaching	3		
Respect	3		5
Understanding the place of sexuality in spirituality	3		
Acceptance of sexuality as a topic for spiritual direction	2		4
Affirmation	2		
Contemplative experience/Prayerful attitude	2		
Director aware of mystic prayer experience	2		
Empathy	2		1
Honesty	2		
Lack of shock, discomfort, negative reactions	2		4
Listening attitude	2		5
Wisdom	2		
A sense that they are well trained	1		
Able to help directee explore and understand their experience	1		2
Awareness of psycho-sexual development issues	1		
Being present/attentive to whatever is being discussed	1		3
Caring attitude / supportive	1		1
Grace	1		
Have explored/are exploring their own issues around sexuality	1		
Liberation/justice perspective about sexuality	1		
Permission given for disclosure of sexuality issues	1		1
Preparedness to work with non-heterosexual	1		
Same orientation as myself	1		
Sense of director's humanity and vulnerability	1		
Sensitivity	1		1
Warm	1		1
Gentle			3
Patience/directee allowed to take things at own pace			2
Able to help directee stay with the experience			1
Awareness of how personal it was			1
Compassion			1
Encouragement to continue to explore this area			1
Laying cards on table as to different marital situation			1
Relaxed			1
Sharing they know personally what directee is talking about			1

**Gender Issues in Sharing Sexuality in Spiritual Direction**

**Table 11:** Age and gender distribution of respondents for whom the gender of their spiritual director was/was not an issue for them.

- *The spiritual director's gender can be an issue for both genders and all ages.* [Return to Document](#)

Is your director's gender an issue?	Total	By gender		Across age ranges (in years)				
		Female	Male	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
Maybe / Unsure	4 (11%)	4		1			1	2
No	8 (22%)	7	1		4	1	2	1
Yes	24 (67%)	22	2		2	10	8	4

**Table 12:** Marital/relational state of respondents for whom the gender of their spiritual director was/was not an issue for them.

- *Both those in relationships and those currently not in relationships felt that the gender of their spiritual director was an issue for them.* [Return to Document](#)

Is your director's gender an issue?	Total	Marital/relational state						
		Committed Relationship	Divorced	Independent	Married	Single	Single (Religious)	Widowed
Maybe/Unsure	4 (11%)	1		1	1 (4%)			1
No	8 (22%)				6 (25%)	2(29%)		
Yes	24 (67%)		1		17(71%)	5(71%)	1	

**Table 13:** Respondents' current spiritual directors' gender in comparison with their own gender.

- *The majority of respondents in this survey had spiritual directors of the same gender.*

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Current director's gender compared to respondents' gender	Total	By gender		Across age ranges (in years)				
		Female	Male	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
Different	8 (22%)	6	2		3	1	3	1
Same	28 (78%)	27	1	1	3	10	8	6

**Table 14:** Respondents who had/had not shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction and whether the gender of their spiritual director was/was not an issue for them.

- *Gender was not quite as likely to be an issue once a respondent had shared their sexuality in spiritual direction.* [Return to Document](#)

Is your director's gender an issue?	Total	Has any aspect of your sexuality been shared in spiritual direction?	
		No	Yes
Maybe/Unsure	4	2 (12%)	2 (11%)
No	8	2 (12%)	6 (35%)
Yes	22	13 (76%)	9 (53%)

**Table 15:** Respondents who had shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction, giving the director's gender they shared with and whether the gender of their spiritual director was/was not an issue for them.

- Even though three respondents had already shared with a director of the opposite gender they still felt that their director's gender was an issue. [Return to Document](#)

Is your director's gender an issue?	Total	Gender of spiritual director who has been shared with		
		Both genders	Opposite gender	Same gender
Maybe/Unsure	2			2
No	6	3	1	2
Yes	9	2	1	6

### **Directees' Experiences of Sharing their Sexuality in Spiritual Direction**

**Table 16:** Age and gender distribution of respondents who shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction.

- None of the men had shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction. Slightly more than half the women had done so, across all age ranges represented. (Realising that the information given did not specify at what age respondents actually shared their sexuality.) [Return to Document](#)

Has any aspect of sexuality been shared in spiritual direction?	Total	By gender		Across age ranges (in years)				
		Female	Male	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
No	17 (50%)	14	3		1	7	5	4
Yes	17 (50%)	17		1	5	3	5	3

**Table 17:** Length of time respondents who shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction had been receiving spiritual direction.

- There is, not surprisingly, a greater likelihood of sharing sexuality in spiritual direction the more years one has been in spiritual direction.

Years receiving spiritual direction	Total	Has any aspect of sexuality been shared in spiritual direction?	
		No	Yes
0 - 5	9	7	2
6 - 10	8	4	4
11 - 15	9	4	5
16 - 20	6	2	4
21 - 25	1		1
26 - 30	1		1

**Table 18:** Age and gender distribution of respondents who had not shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction asking whether they had wanted to do so.

- Only two respondents (one male, one female) had not shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction but had wanted to. [Return to Document](#)

Did you want to share an aspect of your sexuality but haven't for some reason?	Total	By gender		Across age ranges (in years)			
		Female	Male	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
No	15 (88%)	13	2	1	6	5	3
Yes	2 (12%)	1	1		1		1

**Table 19:** Age and gender distribution of respondents who had shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction detailing the gender of the spiritual director they had shared with.

- All respondents who shared their sexuality in spiritual direction were female. The majority did so with same-gender directors. [Return to Document](#)

Gender of spiritual director who has been shared with	Total	By gender		Across age ranges (in years)				
		Female	Male	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
Both genders	5 (29%)	5			1	2		2
Opposite gender	2 (12%)	2			1		1	
Same gender	10 (59%)	10		1	3	1	4	1

**Table 20:** Marital/relational state of respondents who shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction and the gender of the spiritual director they had shared with.

- At least some of those who were single / currently not in a relationship, and some in a committed relationship/married had shared their sexuality with opposite as well as same-gender spiritual directors. (Although the information given did not specify what the respondents' actual marital/relational state was when they shared their sexuality.)

Gender of spiritual director who has been shared with	Total (All female)	Marital/relational state				
		Committed Relationship	Married	Single	Single (Religious)	Widowed
Both genders	5 (29%)		2	2	1	
Opposite gender	2 (12%)		2			
Same gender	10 (59%)	1	3	5		1

**Table 21:** Comparison of spiritual director's gender and length of time respondents had been receiving spiritual direction from any spiritual director, before they first shared an aspect of their sexuality.

- 9 of the 17 respondents who had shared an aspect of their sexuality in direction had done so within the first 4 years of spiritual direction, 4 within the first year. Both with same and opposite-gender spiritual directors. (Average 5 years) [Return to Document](#)

Gender of spiritual director who has been shared with	Time in spiritual direction before first sharing an aspect of sexuality			
	< 1 year	1-4 years	10-20 years	Did not specify
Both genders	2	1	1	1
Opposite gender	1	1		
Same gender	1	3	2	4

**Table 22:** Comparison of director’s gender and length of time respondents had been with the specific director whom they first shared an aspect of their sexuality with.

- 11 of 17 respondents (65%) who shared an aspect of their sexuality in direction had done so within the first 4 years of being with the particular director they first shared with; five of these within the first year. Both with same and opposite-gender directors. (Average 2.7 years) [Return to Document](#)

Gender of spiritual director who has been shared with	Time with the particular spiritual director who was first shared with			
	< 1 year	1-4 years	10-20 years	Did not specify
Both genders	2	1		2
Opposite gender	1	1		
Same gender	2	4	1	3

**Table 23:** Age distribution of respondents who had shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction detailing the gender of the spiritual director they had shared with, and whether they found it safe to share with their spiritual director.

- Only one respondent had not found it safe to share with their spiritual director, (same gender).

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Gender of spiritual director who has been shared with	Did you feel safe sharing your sexuality in spiritual direction?	Total (all female)	Age range (in years)				
			26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
Both genders	Yes	5 (29%)		1	2		2
Opposite gender	Yes	2 (12%)		1		1	
Same gender	No	1 (6%)				1	
Same gender	Yes	9 (53%)	1	3	1	3	1

**Table 24:** Marital/relational state of respondents who shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction.

- Approximately two-thirds of those who were married / in a committed relationship had not shared an aspect of their sexuality in spiritual direction. The majority of those who were single / currently not in relationship had done so. [Return to Document](#)

Has any aspect of your sexuality been shared in spiritual direction?	Total	Marital/relational state						
		Committed Relationship	Divorced	Independent	Married	Single	Single (Religious)	Widowed
No	17 (50%)		1	1	15			
Yes	17 (50%)	1			7	7	1	1

### Sexual/Erotic Feelings/Images in Prayer

**Table 25:** Age and gender distribution of how respondents felt about sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer.

- For both genders and across the age ranges, the majority had positive attitudes towards sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer. [Return to Document](#)

Felt about sexual/erotic images/feelings in prayer	Total	By gender		Across age ranges (in years)				
		Female	Male	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
Negative	2 (6%)	2			1		1	
Neutral / Mixed	13 (36%)	12	1		3	4	4	2
Positive	21 (58%)	19	2	1	2	7	6	5

**Table 26:** How respondents felt about sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer in comparison with their marital/relational state.

- *The only two respondents who felt negatively towards the idea of sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer were married, otherwise responses varied across the different marital/relational states.*

Felt about sexual/erotic images/feelings in prayer	Total	Marital/relational state						
		Committed Relationship	Divorced	Independent	Married	Single	Single (Religious)	Widowed
Negative	2				2			
Neutral / Mixed	13		1		9	3		
Positive	21	1		1	13	4	1	1

**Table 27:** How respondents felt about sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer in comparison with whether they had actually experienced sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer.

- *Negative reactions were confined to those who had not experienced sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer. While there was a slight increase in feeling positive towards sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer after having experienced them.*

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Felt about sexual/erotic images/feelings in prayer	Total	Has directee had sexual/erotic images/feelings in prayer?	
		No	Yes
Negative	2 (6%)	2 (13%)	
Neutral / Mixed	13 (36%)	5 (31%)	8 (40%)
Positive	21 (58%)	9 (56%)	12 (60%)

**Table 28:** Age and gender distribution of those respondents who had/had not experienced sexual/erotic images/feelings in prayer.

- *Sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer had occurred across both genders and all age ranges. (Bearing in mind that respondents were giving their current age, not necessarily the age at which they had experience sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer)*

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Has directee had sexual/erotic images/feelings in prayer?	Total	By gender		Across age ranges (in years)				
		Female	Male	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
No	16 (44%)	16			3	4	6	3
Yes	20 (56%)	17	3	1	3	7	5	4

**Table 29:** Marital/relational state distribution of those respondents who had/had not experienced sexual/erotic images/feelings in prayer.

- Sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer were experienced by individuals of all marital/relational states represented. (Although respondents were not asked what their marital/relational state was when they actually experienced sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer, two married respondents indicated they were married when experiencing these.)

Has directee had sexual/erotic images/feelings in prayer?	Total	Marital/relational state						
		Committed Relationship	Divorced	Independent	Married	Single	Single (Religious)	Widowed
No	16				13	3		
Yes	20	1	1	1	11	4	1	1

**Table 30:** How respondents felt about both sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction and sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer.

- Although respondents may have felt positive about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction this was no guarantee that they would also feel positive about sexual/erotic feelings/images in prayer, and visa versa, although there were some that did.

Felt about sharing their sexuality in spiritual direction	Total	Felt about sexual/erotic images/feelings in prayer		
		Negative	Neutral / Mixed	Positive
Negative	3	1	2	
Neutral / Mixed	15		5	10
Positive	18	1	6	11

### Inter-relatedness of Sexuality and Spirituality

**Table 31:** Age and gender distribution of respondents' experience of whether sexuality and spirituality are related.

- All respondents believed that sexuality and spirituality are related. Those with a mixed response explained that although they believed sexuality and spirituality are related they could not identify how this was so in their actual experience.

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Are sexuality and spirituality related in your experience?	Total	By gender		Across age ranges (in years)				
		Female	Male	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
Yes	34 (94%)	31	3	1	6	11	9	7
Yes and No	2 (6%)	2					2	

### Appendix 3

#### Various Perspectives on Aspects of the Inter-relatedness of Sexuality and Spirituality

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How sexuality points to God and aids spirituality	Reference
Sex and marriage point to God through “two people, in their unconditionally loving embrace of each other, showing each other in flesh and blood what God is like.”	Rob Bell, <i>Sex God</i> , p155.
“sexual intimacy can produce moments of sheer transcendence – brief, sunset-like glimpses of eternity.”	Gary Thomas, <i>How Sex Points Us to God</i> , p1.
“Although sex is physical, it’s an emotional connection of souls, and it is a spiritual act. Every single act of sexual intercourse is an act of worship.”	Ginger Kolbaba, <i>Spirituality and Sex?</i> p3.
Through intercourse we partner with God in the act of creation.	Gary Thomas, <i>How Sex Points Us to God</i> , p1.
“it is by positively embracing and integrating our sexuality that we can grow spiritually and in our spiritual understanding.”	C MacKnee, “Sexuality and Spirituality,” p215, quoted in John Meteyard and Irene Alexander, <i>Redeeming a Positive Biblical View of Sexuality</i> , p3.
Because we are temples of the Holy Spirit, what a woman is allowing inside her and what a man is willingly entering is a sanctified body in which God is present. Somehow we enter, allow within us, God’s temple, God’s presence.	Gary Thomas, <i>How Sex Points Us to God</i> , pp2-3.
Sexual arousal and pelvic pleasure were created by God and as such are potential sources of divine revelation.	Fran Ferder, <i>Words Made Flesh</i> , p56.
Raising sexual potential in people often awakens their spirituality.	David Schnarch, <i>Passionate Marriage</i> , p391.
How spirituality aids sexuality	Reference
“Christian meditation often helps to sensitize us to the inner rhythm of each other. ... In meditative prayer we are sometimes given a new insight into how to strengthen our sexual intimacy.”	Richard Foster, <i>Money, Sex and Power</i> , p141.
“the process of spiritual awakening and growth is associated with periods of rising sexual passion.”	Gerald May, <i>Care of Mind, Care of Spirit</i> , p112.
“if one represses either their sexuality or spirituality they are in danger of thwarting the other as well.”	John Meteyard and Irene Alexander, <i>Redeeming a Positive Biblical View of Sexuality</i> , p3.
“Directees often discover that their deepening love for God, creation, themselves, and others influences everything including their appreciation of sexuality, sexual behaviors, and gender considerations.”	Jeannette Bakke, <i>Holy Invitations</i> , p92.
The “bothness” of sexuality and spirituality	Reference
“The longings for union, communion and creation of life that characterise sexuality, are also the hallmarks of spiritual desire.”	Sheila Pritchard, “Sexuality and Singleness,” p86.
“Spirituality, like sexuality, drives us out of ourselves [towards our neighbour.]”	Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher, <i>People of Passion</i> , p230.
Sexuality and spirituality have a “common focus on self-disclosure and being ‘known’ by another.”	John Meteyard and Irene Alexander, <i>Redeeming a Positive Biblical View of Sexuality</i> , p2.
“both [sexuality and spirituality] are essential to humanity. Human beings are sexual beings and spiritual beings.”	<i>Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender</i> , Adrian Thatcher and Elizabeth Stuart eds, pxii.

<b>Intimacy and relating to God and others</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<i>“Sexuality ... is our human capacity and longing for intimacy and communion with others and with God.”</i>	Marvin Ellison, “Sexuality and Spirituality,” p222.
<i>“Our longings for intimacy and communion with one another are a constant reminder of the intimacy and communion inherent in God, the Trinity.”</i>	Sheila Pritchard, “Sexuality and Singleness,” p85.
Our relational histories hold both gifts for intimacy and barriers that we bring to the divine-human relationship.	Janet Ruffing, <i>Spiritual Direction</i> , p100.
<i>“People who have repressed their sexual feelings ... tend to repress their feelings across the board. This means that their capacity to relate to others in a supportive or affirming way is truncated.”</i>	Thomas Keating, <i>Invitation to Love</i> , p46.
<i>“Sexual energy sustains the driving force of the motivation to serve other people with affection and warmth.”</i>	Thomas Keating, <i>Invitation to Love</i> , p46.
<i>“In the language of John of the Cross, sexual intimacy is the only effective analogy for expressing the meaning of intimacy with God.”</i>	Joan Timmerman, <i>Sexuality and Spiritual Growth</i> , p66.
<b>Wholeness</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<i>“increasing sexual wholeness is part of our redemption intended by God.”</i>	James Nelson, <i>The Intimate Connection</i> , p121.
<i>“a full integration of sexuality is an essential component of our overall spiritual growth. Our essences, our souls, are sexual, and we reduce our God-given reality if we deny or devalue the sexual dimensions of ourselves.”</i>	Gerald May, <i>Care of Mind, Care of Spirit</i> , p113.
<i>“in the touches and strokes of sexual sharing we are revealed to ourselves; we are brought to see a loveliness that we had been incapable of imagining on our own.”</i>	Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James Whitehead, <i>Wisdom of the Body</i> , p20.
<i>“If God is to be real, if our faith is to be real, then our prayer must be real and include everything [including our sexuality.]”</i>	Robert Wicks, <i>Seeds of Sensitivity</i> , p107.
Bringing sex-orientated thoughts and attractions to prayer instead of judging them allows God to speak into this area of our lives.	Jeannette Bakke, <i>Holy Invitations</i> , p93.
<b>The physicality of sexuality and spirituality</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<i>“The union of lovers ... is one of the most spiritual experiences of human beings.”</i>	E. Glenn Hinson, <i>Spiritual Preparation for Christian Leadership</i> , p129.
The <i>“encounter with the divine may be characterized by feelings of desire, arousal, passion, and union.”</i>	Janet Ruffing, <i>Spiritual Direction</i> , p96.
<i>“While sexual arousal and genital desire are only one part of a much richer human sexuality, these experiences can be bodily experiences of God’s hunger [to relate to us].”</i>	James Nelson, <i>Between Two Gardens</i> , p32.
As the physical world is a manifestation of divine reality, so our bodies, our sexual parts are also sacred.	Fran Ferder and John Heagle, <i>Tender Fires</i> , p42.
<i>“in our sexual lives we often find spiritual healing. Our physical embraces soothe old wounds and make forgiveness tangible. In the intimacy we share with a sexual partner, the reality of God’s goodness and forgiveness finally becomes more than rhetoric.”</i>	Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James Whitehead, <i>Wisdom of the Body</i> , p20.
Our attraction to another’s goodness, being drawn to beauty in nature, being moved by music and art, often stir us physically, because attraction and responsiveness are aspects of our sexuality.	Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James Whitehead, <i>Wisdom of the Body</i> , p40.