

ASKANEXPERT

An MATC instructor sheds light on recent events



MEAGAN PARRISH / CLARION

Amy Gilliland, human sexuality instructor, gets down and dishes about the dirty deed.

Let's talk about sex

Open and honest discussions dispel fear despite the giggles

MEAGAN PARRISH

Clarion Managing Editor

If you haven't taken MATC's course in Human Sexuality, you could probably use it. After all, sex is a normal part of most of our lives yet many Americans don't know how to talk about it.

If the subject makes you uncomfortable, you are probably not alone.

"Being open takes practice," said Amy Gilliland, a part-time psychology instructor who is teaching her first course at MATC this semester.

But in Gilliland's Human Sexuality class there's no time for hang-ups. To get everyone over the initial uneasiness, Gilliland spent some time at the beginning of the semester filling the chalkboard with all the sexual words her students could come up with.

Gilliland said she thought most of the attitudes people come into her class with are there because of how we, as a society, packaged our beliefs.

"I do a lot of unpacking in my class," she explained. "But at some point someone will try to pack it all up again."

The course work her students then face is rigorously academic while maintaining the appeal personal relevance. For Gilliland, her moment of sudden personal interest in the subject came when at 14 years old, she found a copy of Nancy Friday's classic erotica collection, *My Secret Garden* under a pile of her mother's sweaters.

"I became fascinated by why women had these feelings," she said.

Gilliland has since kept her academic and professional career busy with research and jobs relating to sexual health. She came to Madison 20 years ago from San Francisco to get her graduate degree but stayed to raise a family and because her physical German features helped her feel more at home in Wisconsin.

Gilliland said she hopes that after her class, students will leave less judgmental, better at analyzing research more comfortable with their sexuality. In the busyness of our lives, taking health for granted could mean denying ourselves a lot of happiness.

"People who are orgasming twice a day most likely have a better outlook on life," Gilliland reasoned.

Gilliland spoke with The Clarion about many issues regarding our sexual behavior, but specifically on the topics of fetishes—an issue that has earned some recent attention on campus because of a club recently formed for students to discuss kinks and their sexual lifestyles.

Everyone has sex, so why are we often afraid to talk about it?

We have a culture of fear. Often our partners become our adversaries rather than being there for pleasure. We are also making people afraid of their bodies and afraid to eat. When you are not afraid of your own sexuality you are empowered. I think empowered people make a better society.

We are supposed to be mastered. It's like our body's urges are supposed to be mastered or risen above. So anything to do with the body is looked down upon, including sex. As more people become comfortable with the sensual mature of their lives, as we are with food and aromas, we are finding a more meaningful connection to pleasure and hopefully sex. People seek connection with one another. Sex is one of the ways we connect. But we have to work at it being meaningful—which means we have to talk.

Do you know how many people are into kinks?

Any kind of statistic is hard to trust because there is always an issue with

having a representative sample. But if you use economic indicators, you can see as far as purchases of supplies go, there's a definite increase in the market.

Is porn kinky?

Some porn is kinky. It comes back to the line between normative and non-normative, or A-typical. At what point does erotica become pornographic? We all struggle with that. We don't have an answer. What we do know is that it affects attitude and behavior. It has been shown repeatedly that porn tends to heighten the viewers acceptance to whatever they are exposed to. This exposure builds upon the rest of the psyche of the individual. There's no restriction on porn in this generation. How is this going to change things? Young people are exposed to porn all the time that was not available in previous generations. It's kind of a social experiment to see what will happen.

Why do people get into kinks?

It's a need. There's a need under every behavior. People are sexually excited by risk but that's not always the attraction. It's not the case with foot fetishes, where feet are the object of pleasure. There's a difference between bondage and bondage that involves Japanese knot tying which is like putting a beautiful decoration on the body. There doesn't always have to be a sexual component. It's the sensations. There are feelings and smells and emotions that make people love shooting guns in order to get the same kind of feelings.

Are kinks dangerous?

Some can be risky. Transvestitism as a fetish can be risky because of the meaning our society ascribes to it. But just because it is uncommon, does that make it wrong? I think it has to do with consent and safety.