

Book Review: *Public Sex: Gay Space*

Edited by William Leap, Published by Columbia University Press / New York, 1999

Reviewed by by Steven Donaldson, M.A.

The reviewer is a Christian counselor in private practice in Portland, Oregon. He is the author of a 1998 article, "Counselor Bias in Working with Gay Men and Lesbians," which was published in the journal Counseling and Values.

This book is collection of papers by scholars who, among other things, defend the phenomenon of gay sex in public places. Editor William Leap labels as "sexual fascists" those who support public-decency laws. He claims such people seek to "curtail all forms of gay-related sexual experience," and says it is wrong for government to control sexual culture.

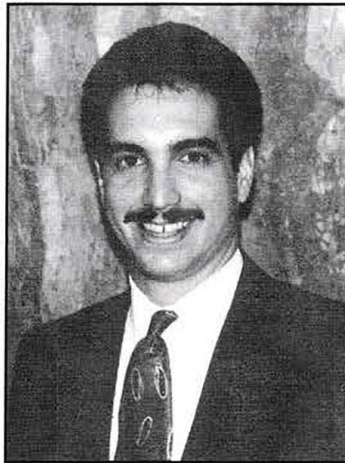
The book infers that because sex in public places occurs so commonly over time, place, and across cultures, then laws against it make no sense.

Yet the authors do not seek to answer the underlying question of *why* a man would wish to have such experiences—of compulsive, anonymous public sex—and instead they reduce the issue to one of repression forced on the gay community by outmoded right-wingers, paranoids, and religious fanatics.

In fact, the authors uniformly ignore the question of what that sort of behavior in fact can do to the individuals engaging in it. They equate sexual pleasure with happiness. But what brings us pleasure, does not always bring us happiness. And at no point in the book does any author consider the consequences of anonymous sex or marital infidelity on the individual or his family. The multiple medical consequences of homosexual behavior are also generally avoided with the exception of a few passing and insufficiently serious warnings about AIDS.

Like other books written from a gay-affirming perspective, this book discourages the homosexual reader from exploring the meaning of his erotic attractions, and takes what is called a "sex-positive" perspective—that is, all consensual sex is assumed to be good. Yet as psychoanalytic therapists have known for years, through their study of unconscious motivation, some erotic feelings are deficit-based, and there can be a significant change in sexual feelings when we come to understand the drive that fuels them.

For the homosexual male, we have learned that these impulses often represent a powerful drive for the male approval, acceptance, and affection that such a person missed in his childhood. Through a process of defensive detachment, the prehomosexual boy gives up on the developmental struggle to be fully male and identify securely with his own gender. He accepts as a substitute, *having* a man (homosexuality). But these needs can never be adequately fulfilled sexually. Relief from unconscious fears, via the homosexual act, is only temporary, and the behavior eventually takes on a compulsive quality.



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On the surface, this work appears scholarly. The authors have been very effective in presenting arguments with a high degree of face validity. Thus this book's persuasive power is formidable, raising the following legal questions:

1. Does the state have the right to make laws against consensual sexual behavior in public places, as long as it occurs out-of-sight of other parties?
2. Does any group have the right to curtail the sexual pleasure of consenting individuals?

The ability of these authors to argue persuasively demonstrates the shift in our worldview during the last eighty years. The assumed, but unstated basis of all the arguments presented in this work is sociological law—i.e., the belief that law has no absolute basis in a God-given moral philosophy, but instead is founded on the public sentiment of the age.

This shift is a natural outgrowth of the philosophy of secular humanism, which has been the dominant worldview during the latter half of this century. This shift is exemplified in television personality Carl Sagan's trademark introduction to the popular PBS science series, "Cosmos," seen regularly by 140 million viewers. Sagan said, "The cosmos is *all that is, or ever was, or ever will be.*"

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This was not a shift in scientific understanding, as the public has come to believe, but a choice—a *leap of faith*—to see things from the point-of-view of materialism, which denies the possibility of a transcendent reality. If Carl Sagan was correct, then human life has no meaning other than what man creates for himself. Man becomes his own god, his own judge, and his own creator of truth. If man is his own final reality, then there is no reason for him to look outside himself to grasp a morality or law designed into the nature of the universe.

Yet the liberty and equality we enjoy in this country was produced not by a materialist model of the universe, as Sagan would advocate. Rather it was produced by a Judeo-Christian model that puts God at the center of the universe and places humanity, society, and government below Him.

As Francis Schaeffer so aptly states, "Humanism, with its lack of any final base for values or law, always leads to chaos. It then naturally leads to some form of authoritarianism to control the chaos."

Many of today's young people reading *Public Sex: Gay Space* will simply not understand the problem. Most will likely feel at least subliminal distaste at the ideas the book advances, but having adopted a materialist model of the universe, they will not know on what basis they could possibly argue against the book's "rights-based" mentality, which sees a civil right in every conceivable behavior and lifestyle.

After all, if man has no purpose outside of his own desires for pleasure, then sex, too, has no higher purpose or meaning than orgasm. Eroticism thus naturally becomes disconnected from love, from commitment, from fidelity, from procreation, and from any higher purpose other than what each man chooses to construct for himself.

John Witherspoon, one of the signers of our constitution, said, "A republic...must either preserve its virtue, or lose its liberty." By basing its laws on a natural-law understanding of what is virtuous and good—rather than creating a "rights-based" mentality which allows every man to pursue his own ends—a society has a philosophical basis for rejecting the public sex which this book is advocating.

Looking to this philosophical understanding of the "good," rather than focusing simply on "rights," we can determine that certain behaviors fly in the face of the common good, and can make and defend laws that contain them.

But within the prevailing academic philosophy of secular humanism, there is no objective basis for determining what is good and what is not. Nor, within psychology, is there any objective basis for understanding what is normal and what is abnormal. Following this reasoning, psychoanalyst and author Robert Stoller has called sado-masochistic sex "no more abnormal than dislike of zucchini." Prominent psychologist Michael Wertheimer agrees that when a person is anxious or depressed, or obsessive-compulsive, or suicidal, none of these are disorders *in the absolute sense*. They're only problems *if a society thinks they're problems*.

Because normality is now widely seen as socially constructed, then if a majority of the populace decides that sex at truck stops and in public bathrooms is a "civil right," then the authors of this book will be free to pursue their own lifestyles. If a majority wants to legalize adult-child sex, that too will become legal.

Most young people, thinking in today's "rights-based" mentality, will have no idea how to argue against this book's ideas.

If the academic community is to include *Public Sex: Gay Space* as a serious argument in the debate, we will further undermine the philosophical basis of our freedom and prosperity. Worse, our society starts down the road that will lead eventually to chaos—and then we will need an authoritarian government to contain the chaos that inevitably results when a citizenry cease to be virtuous and self-governing.

Instead, let us stand strong, even if we are opposed on all sides, for the truth that there *is* something higher than humanity; that there is a moral order to which we are accountable; and that there are things much more significant in life than the reflexive satisfaction of drives and appetites.

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