

HEALTHY SEXUALITY

# Brokeback Need Not Be Brokeforward

By Dilsey Gibson

**E**nnis and Jack acted out of a sense of passion, desire and attraction. Their physical love spanned the whole of their adult lives, deliberately obscured by marriages and children and the trappings of social convention so as to avoid the kind of attention that might brand them for ridicule, isolation, or death. Yet in their most private exchanges, propelled by lust and longing, even *then* were they sexually healthy? Is it possible to achieve healthy sexuality in private, without some measure of public acceptance? Do we acquiesce too easily to the premise that it was only the times that stood in their way? In fact, Ennis and Jack's world is not much different than the world we live in today. Our culture still won't support, or even acknowledge, that healthy sexuality is a critical aspect of living a full life in a positive, accepting environment.

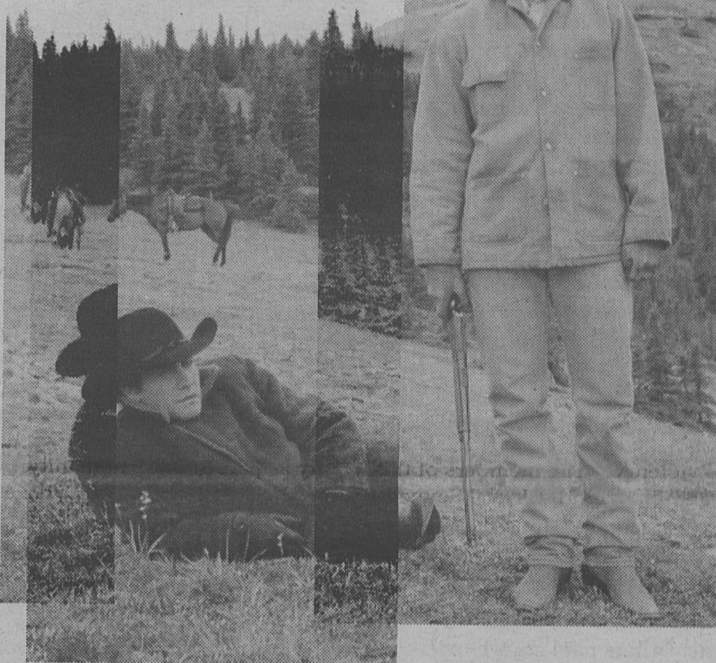
Instead we are bombarded with statistics about sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancy, and sexual violence. It is our culture's way of monitoring "sexual health" by telling us what is wrong, engaging in endless hand-wringing about our evil and forbidden ways. There is a different and more affirming way to focus on human sexuality, a way that looks at sexuality from a strong, healthy and optimistic perspective.

*Healthy sexuality involves our attitudes, values, feelings and beliefs about sexual identity, attractions and behaviors. At all ages healthy sexuality includes our natural feelings about pleasure and desire. Healthy sexuality leads to a positive sense of self, appreciation of others, good communication, and successful platonic and romantic relationships.*

*Healthy sexuality: Includes an understanding of how gender roles and expectations, social norms, body image, family values and peer expectations affect one's expression of their sexuality. Requires skills for effective communication, making informed and intentional decisions, and successfully navigating one's physical, emotional and social development. Needs an environment that values the diversity of*

*healthy sexual expression, and Takes courage to be oneself and the freedom to act on that courage.*

Had Ennis and Jack lived in a world where gender roles and expectations were not centered around masculinity and heterosexuality ... their lives and ours would be quite different. If young teens knew



that the buzz about oral sex was NOT part of every fourteen-year-old's world ... they and we would less likely succumb to a misconstrued social norm. If young women and men didn't compare their bodies to the airbrushed, diet-driven Lindsay Lohans or the steroid-enhanced superstar Jason Giambis ... we might come to realize that different bodies show us different types of beauty. If family values and peer expectations did not so persistently diverge around virginity, popularity, physical affection, attractiveness, and sexual expression, then we might all be more comfortable expressing our unique sexuality.

To live sexually healthy lives, we must be able to communicate well with friends, partners, family and the larger world. We must be able, on an intimate level, to say how we feel, what we like and what we want. We must be able to say yes as well as to be able to say no, and we must believe that all sexual intimacy must be consensual, mutual and respectful. On a global level we must be able to speak for our right to make our own decisions, to have the freedom, indeed


the public sanction, to live safe and fulfilling sexual lives.

Those safe and fulfilling lives must be obtainable for everyone. To some this might seem as amorphous and improbable a goal as world peace. It is attainable, but getting there requires

a culture whose institutions, government, businesses, media and religious entities create and endorse policies that ensure everyone's sexual rights. Living sexually healthy lives calls for a culture that inspires and thrives on difference and acceptance.

In this re-imagined world, each teen's emerging sexuality would be seen as a natural and healthy part of her or his development; sex education would be required for middle school and high school graduates, and access to information about sexuality would be available to everyone. Here, sexual orientation would just be another part of one's identity, and gender roles would be leveled; thus eliminating all gender expectations. Relationships would be discussed with family, friends and intimate partners in a way that encouraged and supported individuality and the healthy expression of one's sexuality.

Imagine Jack and Ennis in this world. Imagine Brokeback Mountain with a happy ending.

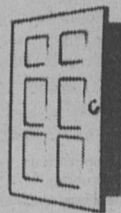
 Dilsey Gibson is a free-lance writer from Middlesex.



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