

"Finding Paradise in Reality"

(INTERVIEW WITH WILLEM POPPELIERS)

Sexual Grounding Therapy®, developed by Willem Poppeliers, the Dutch psychologist and body-psychotherapist, is regarded as a cutting-edge discipline, both therapeutically and socially. Once described as creating an 'Inner Condom', Sexual Grounding Therapy is known in Mexico, Holland, and Switzerland, but is new to the UK. It is a new form of body-oriented group-therapy, which appeals to parents, teachers and therapists, in which participants sometimes work without clothes and involve the whole body. In this paper, Poppeliers (WP) answers some basic questions about Sexual Grounding Therapy and lists its objectives, in his unique Dutch-English conversational style. This dialogue has been expanded and adapted from a lecture at UNAM (The National University of Mexico), Mexico City, February 2004 and conversations during in January 2006, with Nick Duffell (Q).

Q: In a world where sex seems to be everywhere exploited, where teenage pregnancies and aids are on the increase, and where relationships are increasingly short-lived, your Sexual Grounding Therapy has been said to create an 'Inner Condom'. Why is this, and what are you trying to achieve with this radically new way of working therapeutically?

WP: I can say something about the objectives of Sexual Grounding Therapy, if you like, but first a general remark: Sexual Grounding Therapy aims to win back for future generations the nature-given right to full sexual expression, practised without the distortions and extreme hedonism placed on the genitals in today's world. For me, losing natural sexuality has been the biggest cause of alienation and unhappiness in our world. In Sexual Grounding, we always put the child at the centre, and in its developmental frame. If you look to the outside world, when a child tries to express its sexual nature, people start to look from their own adult perspective and project their thoughts about sexual intercourse, or their own disappointedness about being a shame-free sexual person. And most sexual acting-out comes from not having been treated as whole person – right from the beginning - with genitals and sexuality, born from intercourse. If people are allowed to become whole persons, sexually, bodily, then I think a natural regulation of sexuality follows instead of repression or over- excitement. Then people express their sexuality coming from relationship, out of intimacy, out of bodily function, and not simply out of charge or stimulation. You can say this is an emotional condom, it is an internal attitude change. If we don't have this, if we continue to leave relationship out of sexuality, then we don't protect ourselves, or our children. Now we have to create an inner condom, because we have to learn to protect ourselves. But I think the best thing is that we learn how to change our attitude to sexuality. So, I will say something about the objectives of Sexual Grounding Therapy.

1. Sexual Grounding Therapy is giving ground to sexuality by bringing explicitness into genitality so that the genital-heart connection can be re-established and harmonised within the body.

Q: I do understand that in the West we seem to be encouraged to become persons from the waist up, as it were, but what do you mean by 'explicitness to genitality'?

WP: In Sexual Grounding Therapy we explicitly include the genitals, since they have been excluded in most therapies. I believe that repression and exclusion has caused over-excitement and danger to become projected on to this natural part of the body. So in Sexual Grounding Therapy we bring genitals and the whole body back to reality, because our species was born through sexual intercourse. Also, as you say, a human is not just a brain - the genitals, along with the heart, have an important role to play in the body's energetic system. If we leave out the genitals we cannot become grounded. This brings me to the next objective.

Q: Can you explain what it being 'grounded' means to you ?

[Note: Alexander Lowen , the founder of Bioenergetic Analysis, developed from Wilhelm Reich's Vegetotherapy, coined the concept and practice of Grounding. According to Bioenergetics, grounding "occurs first of all on the physical level. Being grounded is to have a physically secure but flexible stance. Phenomenologically, this means to be connected to reality." (<http://www.bioenergetic-therapy.com>)

WP: I come to that next.

2. Sexual Grounding Therapy researches and implements therapeutic practices that establish this basic grounding in all who seek Sexual Grounding Therapy services.

3. Being sexually grounded is being present in our hearts – physically, emotionally, sexually, and spiritually – creating a spiritual connection between present, past and future.

Q: How can we learn to live in our hearts, sexually?

WP: This is a really practical question. This is not for everybody so conscious – we get distracted by our conditioned part of the brain. Imagine we have a lot of thoughts about sexuality and they consume energy - we invest energy in it and they consume energy - and very often that distracts from the relationship between heart and genitals. Body-psychotherapy has always been busy to reconnect people so that they stop only living in their heads.

4. When we satisfy and surrender to both the Masculine and Feminine Streams we also complete the primal longings of our forefathers and foremothers and of our children and future generations.

Q: People today, and particularly in the therapeutic world, tend to look on masculinity and femininity as social constructions, and gender identity to some extent as a matter of choice. Your work prefers to re-establish parents as authors of what you call 'Masculine and Feminine Streams'. Can you explain that and say how this existential nature of sexuality you refer to works?

WP: In sexuality is our origin, our future, and also our roots. In a culture that has often excluded the reality of genitals, a child is alienated from his or her sexual nature, and loses its roots. It doesn't see a future. In Sexual Grounding Therapy, the most important direction for participants is

recognising Father and Mother as sexual creatures, as sexual sources. If you can really realise - with your whole body - that father and mother are the source of sexuality for you, and that their genitals play an very important role via intercourse, and the whole emotional range around it, things become different. Then you look to your neighbour and you see that you both only come from such intercourse. It is not easy, and we prefer not to do it – to look at someone and realise that this person comes from intercourse. I think it is like seeing through the eyes of Hieronimus Bosch! If we do it, mostly we start to laugh.

But here are our roots, and here is where the distortion comes. It looks like we cannot accept that totally, that this behaviour and this emotions and this whole charge has to do with my existence in the world, and it is directly connected with being in the world. Our cells know it, but the cortex denies it, and when you do that your heart goes out. Your heart jumps in again, when you start to realise it again and say to yourself, wait a minute I have to really look to my life. So then you take all these sources, your cortex, your heart and your genitals. So recognising father and mother as sexual creatures is a very fundamental thing.

5. Sexual Grounding Therapy considers the genitals always in context with the whole person and developmental stages in life.

Q: How are genitals put ‘in context’?

WP: If you think of the body of the child developmentally, the outside world reacts on the development of the child through 4 parts: eyes, mouth, anus and genitals. [Note. According to early psychoanalytical developmental theorists, the life-energy is focussed in, and unfolds developmentally, through the body-centres which interface with the environment - after Freud, Reich and Horney].

When the child is focussed in the eyes, when it is just born, I think it is treated rather well by the parents; and also when the mouth is involved. But when the anus is involved, we change a little; it’s more delicate. And when the genitals are involved it looks like the educators shift to a grown-up age.

Q: Why is seeing the genitals from an adult perspective wrong for the child?

WP: Because they put this developmental stage in their own adult frame – it is very strange. For when the child has to be fed by the mother, the mother, takes a very small spoon. But when it comes to the genital stage the mother does not have a small spoon; she has an adult spoon. Why is that possible? Where is the right spoon? So in Sexual Grounding we like to see the child exactly in the stage where it is, and the parents from the outside world have to relate to that stage. Then its safe and it’s normal - genitals are normal, like the mouth, eyes and anus. In Sexual Grounding Therapy we are very strict in that, because the child has to be safe and to be approached in the stage that it is.

6. Sexual Grounding Therapy emphasises professional work on the whole body, including genitals, not for enhancing sexual relating for pleasure and ecstasy, but to bring about full genital functioning throughout life.

Q: I do understand that Sexual Grounding is nothing like some of the movements that aim for the cultivation of ecstasy that are around in the New Age, but still, is not sexuality also about pleasure?

WP: Sexual behaviour now is more and more only for pleasure. I think we have a to pay a price if we disconnect sexuality from reproduction. It is always a point: how can the child come out of 'dirty' behaviour, animalism. When we start from evolution, I think there is a key; but we don't want to have so many children. And that has to do with the fact that we cannot regulate sexuality, the way it has to be regulated. If our heart is completely in, it's easier, because then the whole body is involved; if not, only a part, and then it comes a little obsessive. It becomes just a charge and a discharge. This is very complicated.

Q: Can you say more about professional work that includes the genitals? Why should this be necessary?

WP: It is hard to transmit to people that you can work on the body, on the whole body in psychotherapy. In medical healthcare, they can. If you have a disease on your genitals, they don't say its taboo. I think it's coming, but it is very slow. It has to be protected, it has to be open, direct, not with a secret agenda. It has to be open and natural in the frame of the developmental stages. And it has to be professional.

And there have to be norms, and that's why Sexual Grounding therapists have to agree to very precise ethical guidelines. The norms for me are connected with the development stages – the most natural way - and we know that already. When we can really reflect our own sexual development we can feel on the body level what was wrong and what was right. So if we put this whole genital relationship in a fundamental, natural way, there comes laws or rules, natural rules. And it is far more easy for society to transform these rules into more cultivated one, if it is based on nature.

Q: But society does not seem to know how to do that. Do you think that society has a vested interest in people being hooked on sexuality but estranged from their true sexual nature?

WP: If you look to society as a commercial thing, economically, yes. Imagine that whole commercialisation of sexuality drops out. But would we like that? Do we want to have another life, or do we adapt to it because of the economics? I don't know. But when you are not exploitable anymore, I think society is not glad with you.

It is a difficult question. But Sexual Grounding likes to stick to nature more, because our point of view is, can we give the children back their sexually grounded nature? Now they are lost very often, lost.

When you put future perspective in sexual intercourse, it changes. If you say to your partner "I want to die with you" it has impact. But we don't say that any more. We create eternity, by reproduction, but we are afraid to relate. We say "I only want to see you for only one year". This does not fit. It has all to do with lack of fulfilment. And fulfilment is strong when you put past and future perspective into sexuality. And the child is teaching you that every day, if you really look to them.

7. Sexual Grounding Therapy approaches the genitals in their function as contact organs and generative organs that produce, protect, and nurture the next generation.

Q: This is a whole new dimension to seeing sexuality – challenging and positive! But society is not there yet, so don't you think we need still to take the lid off about

sexuality? For example, don't you think that liberating people to have sex when and where they want will do the trick, for example legalising prostitution?

WP: I believe - and we have to be careful with this - because this is a very strong thing in the world - but one thing always strikes me very much, that people who are in the prostitute business don't want their children to follow them into it. Why? So there is left something which is difficult for them. And I believe when you can find this original sexuality back, I mean through the developmental ages, that prostitution wouldn't exist without criticising itself, without a conscience.

Q: Are you saying that prostitution is a symbol of social illness?

WP: No, Sexual Grounding doesn't like to mention illness, or even to criticise society so much. I don't think that illness is the right word - maybe it is more about frustration - because prostitution is not only when it is for money, you can find it in the family - you see it on a broad scale. In fact, sexuality is much stronger, it is always in service of life, as in the last objective.

8. Sexual Grounding Therapy supports these genital functions in order to generate life-force and well-being of the whole somatic-emotional body.

This is important because in this time of the development of society, because when you look to relationships, we use intimacy to learn to relate. But Sexual Grounding turns it the other way round and says: you take relationship to start to learn to be intimate. And it becomes clear why this is so when you look to the child in it's developmental frame. When you look to reality, the little child was in the cold, genitally. It tries to relate, about what it was feeling in the body, but the approach of the educators was not adequate. So the whole energy to relation from the beginning was missing, and that's why we use sexuality to learn to relate, because we really want to learn to relate. Paradise in Reality © Willem Poppeliers & Nick Duffell 2006 6

Q: What happens if you repress your sexuality, how does it affect your life and what are the consequences for society?

WP: There are two questions here. First the personal: when you prevent the body from expressing, the body suffers. And I dare to add that if you make a decision to use it only for pleasure, there is no fulfilment. There is discharge and charge, and that's nice. Wonderful - we like it. But we are not fulfilled. We have to repeat it all the time, and it doesn't last long. We have to do it 5, 6 times a week or 3 times a day. Why all this repetition? I think it has to do with unfulfilment. If you take the body seriously, and you start to regulate this charge, the whole body becomes involved, and you start to behave differently. More senses start to come into the communication. I remember myself that I start to say very nice words to my wife instead of just trying to get her into bed! So when you have that included and you start to have intercourse, it's different, it lasts longer. It is not easy for us, because our charge and discharge is often conditioned by society, So now to society. Society has economic advantages when you change relationships. I don't want to blame the things here, but we have to look to reality; so society is not a good teacher, in that sense.

Q: And what would you say is the price we pay?

WP: The price is that we are not fulfilled and we repeat. If you take the internet now, sometimes it starts to become obsessed. And I think that, naturally, it was not meant, that sexuality was not meant to be obsessional.

Q: You talk a lot about the role of parents and I know many people are confused about sexuality within parenting, and you also talk about putting the child at the centre, so if children see their parents having intercourse, is it OK for them, do they see it as a natural thing?

WP: That depends. When you are open, you know, that, emotionally, and relationally, and especially concerning genital charge, you can be very strong. And that is too much for the child. The child can only understand, when it is according to their own energetic state; but we don't take that into account. I think that naturally the body will tell. Why should you involve the child in this strong energy? For instance, when we are very angry with each other, you do not bring the child in. Energetically, naturally we know the road. So I think that naturally the body will regulate this.

And secondly, the child is not busy with intercourse the way we are. So in this question is a projective part, and that's OK, but we have to get this projection out, and that relates to what I said before about the 'small spoon'. If we go back to our time with our partners and the child comes in, we know exactly the road, and the child feels himself recognized.

Q: You say that a vital part of sexual development for this child is "learning and experiencing the deep feelings of masculinity and femininity". What is the relevance of this in today's world where people are struggling to make relationships work?

The child has both sides, because it is connected to both parents. You cannot ask a child "who do you love most?" because it gets a conflict. So both the masculine and feminine parts have to be recognized. They can be recognized, if we stop the war, the war between the sexes. So if we can exchange energy in the relationship, we are busy with both parts. So the man is busy with masculinity and femininity, and the woman is busy with it too, and that makes the balance, and the child feels complete.

Q: With all this emphasis on the procreative side of sexuality isn't Sexual Grounding Therapy a heterosexist theory?

Not at all. But I don't make a difference between homo and hetero-sexuality. Sexual Grounding Therapy only talks about masculinity and femininity. That comes from both sexes. Both sexes have been born from the reproduction between a mother and a father. And if it comes from both sexes, it is liberating. But if you go for reproduction, you go to the other sex, its natural. You don't go for reproduction to have it with your partner of the same sex. You may have wishes in that direction, but your body knows what sexuality is. In this we are very realistic. We have a lot of people in our groups who live with people of the same sex. It is not a problem. But also the species seems like it is evolving anyway, towards a kind of bisexuality, which is another way of living our sources.

Q: Lastly, although you work with body-psychotherapy, your ideas seem to have a transpersonal dimension. You say that for a child to be grounded throughout the Oedipal period and puberty is like "finding paradise in reality". Isn't this somewhat idealistic?

WP: This is not idealistic, it is reality. It is realistic. It comes from life. If you find paradise in reality, you stop your idealism, because it has no function anymore.