

# But where is Love?

by Venetia Riches



The Responsible Society was formed in 1971 by a group of doctors, teachers and social workers who were concerned at the casualties resulting from the increasing pressures on and exploitation of the young.

If you would like to study the evidence on which most of this paper is based, please write and ask for a copy of "The Case for Responsibility".

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"But Where is Love?" was written by Venetia Riches following a talk which she gave to a boys' school about the pressures on the young. The boys suggested that she should write a paper based on her talk, to be used as a basis for thought and discussion amongst young people in schools and youth clubs. They felt that this could fill some of the gaps in sex education, which so often ignores young people's need for understanding human relationships.

She was then 21 and a medical student at one of the London teaching hospitals. Having worked with deprived and handicapped children and the elderly, she has actively concerned herself with the problems of modern society. She has several times broadcast on radio and television and visited schools discussing these problems.

## But where is Love?

LOVE is the most precious possession of the human race. The saddest thing is that it is also the most tarnished. The most unhappy people I've met are those who have no love. Without love, life doesn't seem worth living. In fact, people who take overdoses of drugs do so because their most important relationship is disintegrating. It's just as sad to see someone dying without anyone to comfort him through his last days and weeks. Love is needed as much by an old age pensioner as it is by a new born baby.

I'm not going to define love – because everyone knows deep in his heart what it means, but I will tell you about how easy it is to stop the grain of love that is in everybody from developing and how easy it is to kill it.

The best things in life aren't easy to get, and love is no exception. Even everyday relationships can be so difficult – when you think about it, how many people do you know really well and feel at home with? Relationships happen at all levels and there are very few at real depth. If people aren't loved they become unhappy, and they try to hide their lack of relationships from their friends and from themselves, by filling in their time with "experiences" and having so-called "intimate" relationships in which although bodies are close, minds are light years apart. The quest for this substitute love and the sensations it involves becomes so distracting that the unsatisfied depths are hidden and forgotten and the girl or boy flits from friend to friend, is always going to discos and parties and having a swinging time. But imagine being like this when you're middle-aged, then you'll find that the need to love and be loved will be powerful. The paths for getting there may have become sadly inaccessible and overgrown through lack of use.

This doesn't mean that the only kind of life that will lead to love is a frugal existence without discos and parties, and boy or girl friends. Not at all. You have to be aware all the time of the basic need of everyone to be loved, keep it alive and refuse to allow others to kill it or the outside world to pollute it.

## MARRIAGE

"Marriage is old-fashioned and traditional. Abandon it. Why should a ceremony make any difference to a couple who are in love anyway?" So runs the argument that is trotted out with predictable regularity by certain sections of the mass media. Look into their family backgrounds and marriages and you will find little that is worth talking about except perhaps in gossip columns! It's like the fable in which the fox who had lost his beautiful bushy tail tried to persuade all the other foxes to have theirs cut off.

Despite what they say, marriage is becoming increasingly popular. Which shows that people still need, perhaps more than ever, a loving relationship with one person. It shows that they are prepared, at least in the beginning, to spend their whole lives with that one special person.

The statement that marriage is traditional and conventional and, therefore, should be abandoned doesn't show much reasoning or depth of thought. By making a big fuss of marriage the two people concerned are giving their feelings for each other a really tough test in showing their relatives and friends that they have confidence in their own love. Confidence is a very firm foundation. Two people I know decided to live together permanently because the man "didn't really believe in marriage". Though the girl loved him deeply and would rather have married him, she accepted this situation. Two years later he got tired of her. If she'd realised that his wish not to get married amounted to a lack of confidence in their relationship she wouldn't have been so desperately hurt. As she's someone who doesn't fall in love easily, and because she's 27 she's worried that she'll never find anyone else who will love her.

Living together is sometimes thought of as a trial marriage. It's considered good because the people involved get to know each other without committing themselves, and are therefore less likely to make mistakes about their eventual choice of partner. This is based on an absolutely false assumption. A marriage is for good, and a trial is temporary.

This one fundamental fact alters the whole colour and perspective of the relationship, and most important, the effort put into it, to make the relationship grow. Few people with gardens bother to weed them thoroughly and plant new seeds unless they know that they are going to be permanent residents. Love is like a garden. The flowers bloom only if the strangling weeds around them are frequently removed. If the task is left too long the effort involved is daunting, and the whole thing is given up in despair. What might have been love is never given a chance.

Sadly, while marriage is becoming more popular, so is divorce. What goes wrong? Let's go back into the garden and look at it from that point of view.

First of all the ground isn't prepared enough to plant the seeds of love. Most people do get married and live happily ever after, though it's more difficult than that clichéd phrase suggests. Secondly, a consumer society teaches us to be envious of the garden next door, and to give up our garden easily and find a new one. A pity that it doesn't teach us to remodel the garden that we already have, and that if the weeding is done often and well enough people from the outside don't have to come in to get rid of the stinging nettles, deadly nightshade and bindweed that are strangling love. Thirdly, there are outside influences. For instance, the Divorce Reform Law may have solved many immediate problems for people by making divorce easier, but it is one of the factors which undermined the confidence that should be the start of every marriage. Another thing that pollutes our garden of love is the fact that it is currently thought that premarital experience is vital to a happy and fulfilling marriage. This is quite simply not true. The divorce rate is higher in those who have slept around before getting married. Also, the more partners that a person has had before marriage the less likely he is to be satisfied with a single sexual relationship when he is married.

## ABORTION

Why is this? A possible answer could be that if someone has several partners their interests shift from the seeking of love and satisfying longlasting relationships to the gratification of immediate desires. Also, it could be that his love has to be watered down to be shared with more than one person. Also, boys often don't realise that girls have a great feeling of permanence and emotional involvement when they first love. To destroy this feeling produces instability later on. Boys are by nature hunters, though this is no excuse for license!

If you're thoughtful, and that doesn't mean that you'll be serious and never enjoy life, there's no earthly reason why you should add another number to the statistics of unhappiness.

Abortion is very easily dismissed as a "solution to the population problem, which is especially good because it also gets rid of unwanted babies". It's less simple to iron out the psychological problems that result in many girls after they have had an abortion. Life and people aren't so straightforward as that thoughtless statement suggests.

When you consider that the foetal heart begins to beat three weeks after conception, and that at the time that most abortions are performed the foetus looks like a baby, even though it is so minute – it's difficult to escape from the fact that abortion is killing.

This partly accounts for the psychological turmoil that many girls and women go through for several years after an abortion. When you consider how wonderful and mysterious life and every living being is (and you don't have to be religious to think that); and when you consider the potentialities of the smallest embryo, it's hardly surprising that a girl's deepest feelings are so profoundly distressed and disturbed after an abortion.

Some girls seem to adjust very well to these feelings – but what is involved in this adjustment? It can only be a dulling and suppressing of their sensitivity and love of life. This doesn't bode well for future relationships and especially those with future "planned children" that the women may bear. If an unplanned life can so easily be disposed of how can the life of a planned child be as treasured and loved as deeply as it should?

Aside from the point of view of relationships with future children, it has been shown that children born of pregnancies subsequent to an abortion are more likely to be premature (with all its added complications) and are more likely to suffer congenital malformations.

In 1969, the first full year after the abortion law, there were 49,829 abortions. In 1980 there were 130,264 abortions. In 1968, the illegitimate live births were 69,806 and in 1979 they were 69,467 which doesn't show the reduction you would expect after so many abortions in a period of falling birth rate.

So what about contraceptives? They are said to be the answer to the high level of abortion. But what isn't mentioned is that the overall failure rate is as high as 20% – even 20% of girls "on the pill" have to stop using it temporarily or even permanently because of the many side effects. So the risk of pregnancy is still quite considerable, and it's the girl who's left holding the baby. Do you ever hear of the problems of the unmarried Dads?

An interesting point is that in Rumania, where the abortion rate had become four times higher than the live birth rate and the lax abortion laws had to be tightened up, "the men have regained their respect for their women; their women have regained their lost respect for themselves, and there has been no increase in the rate of back street abortions".

Is our respect and love going the way that theirs did?

#### WHAT HAS THE PERMISSIVE SOCIETY TO OFFER?

The permissive society can give you sex when and where you want it, contraception to avoid unplanned pregnancies, abortion to get rid of those that slip through the net. Easier divorce for when people get tired of each other and want something new (it's just too bad about the 100,000 children who suffer every year as a result of broken homes). No censorship so that anybody can say or write or photograph whatever comes into his head and force it into the minds of unsuspecting individuals. In fact people can do their own thing. Of course you may get V.D. (and in the case of girls, without even knowing you have got it). And it's not as simple to treat as the common cold, as some would have us believe.

But where is love? Where is the joy to be alive and the appreciation of the beauty of life and love? Is it groping in a writhing heap in the back of a Ford Escort on Putney Heath? Is it tangled in sweaty pink-fleshed reality on cinema hoardings? Is it a bewildered and distressed child whose father prefers a sweet young thing to his mother and himself, and whose mother isn't happy and isn't the same anymore? Is it a two inch human foetus being thrown thoughtlessly into an incinerator while its heart is still beating?

What can people be thinking of? They can't be thinking, they are just reacting mindlessly to the stimuli of a consumer orientated society where pseudo love is sold and an unscrupulous few make millions from the disillusionment they have craftily created.

With a little thought and care for the future, for the meaning of life and the importance of relationships and real love, none of these things need ever happen.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Here are some suggested questions for discussion among young people. They were thought up by sixth-formers at a mixed comprehensive school after having read the first edition of the pamphlet. They also believe that some fully-grown adults might profit by thinking about them!

1. Make an honest list of arguments for and against marriage. Now go down the list crossing out what you don't believe. What do you think (a) your parents and (b) any children you might have one day will make of your list?
2. What would it mean to you if you had an abortion?
3. How would you feel if you were a bastard?
4. What are the disadvantages of the concept of a "trial marriage"? How many "trial marriages" should someone try before deciding that he/she isn't going to make a success of it?
5. If contraceptives can be made efficient and a quick cure for VD made generally available, are there any arguments against promiscuity left?
6. Do you think as some have suggested, that portrayal of sexual perversion, promiscuity and immorality through magazines, films or television is harmless in all circumstances? If not, what should be done about it, and why?
7. Under what circumstances would you lock up your daughters? What about it if they didn't want to be locked up?
8. When would "groping in a writhing heap in the back of a Ford Escort on Putney Heath" have anything to do with love?
9. Is there anything you are ashamed of? What has it got to do with the real meaning of that word love?
10. What is love?

