



Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth and the Politics of the Body

Riane Eisler

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Riane Eisler shows us how history has consistently promoted the link between sex and violence—and how we can sever this link and move to a politics of partnership rather than domination in all our relations.

Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth and the Politics of the Body Details

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From Reader Review Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth and the Politics of the Body for online ebook

Kate says

This book is dense, and it's taking me forever to read it, but that is not a criticism! Even if I stopped reading now, about 1/3 of the way through, I would know more than I've learned over years of feminist and feminist spiritual studies. Well-researched and diplomatic, this book offers real anthropological answers to the question that other books, documentaries, etc. left me with: how? How did everything "get this way"? Was it because women are physically weaker than men? Was it because of some human nature I wasn't sure I even believed in? Eisler answers these questions and so much more. And her terms "dominator" and "partnership" societies are very useful in explaining the issues. I can't wait to finish the book!

Crystal Barthelette says

It would be immensely difficult to convey how profoundly this book affected me. I had to read this book in increments as it was heavy subject matter, however the author, a Holocaust survivor, outlines the importance of working together in partnership as opposed to the system of domination we have been inundated by for thousands of years, which has been a system of avarice, malice, and harrowing violence, especially for the oppressed classes and for women and children. What the author does best is to lay the groundwork for what the solution to this problem would look like, by describing in depth the examples of previous partnership societies whose lives were much more peaceful in comparison. What struck me was how this book was written in the nineties, yet how relevant this subject is as we face a crisis among the sexes and under capitalism, which tells us about the price of everything and the value of nothing. It's about how these systems of domination from political to familial permeate our lives on all levels. It speaks of the power structures of systemic and institutional abuse versus the power at the heart of the people, and how we are now in urgent need of change as we witness a system and environment on the verge of collapse. This book altered my way of viewing the world in such a way that it made sense of the most senseless aspects of life and humanity. It didn't necessarily describe why people are so cruel, as it depicted the root of what leads to these cruelties in people and societies, and the ways in which we can individually and collectively work to overcome this problem in order that we might have more peace and partnership among us in our lives and in our environment by shifting our focus and way of living to one of pleasure rather than pain.

Steve says

a 1995 book envisioning a revolution in human relationships of all sorts which may be more hopeful than I am that such a change is forthcoming, but which does such a good job of analyzing the problems that I couldn't put it down. Her knowledge and research in archeology, history, science, religion, and many other areas are extremely informative. And her division between the dominator-dominated model in which we have been experiencing life for the last 2500 years at least, and the partnership model which she posits existed earlier, and to which she thinks we can recreate, is devastatingly clear and useful. I think she falters a bit in her understanding of how people can move in and out of fantasy worlds (from sex to literature to film), but I am also much more aware of ways in which the dominator paradigm is present where previously not noticed.

Rebecca says

I just got this book today (12/9), we'll see how it is - I was looking at "The Chalice & the Blade" but this book seemed much more like what I was interested in.

Note: I returned the book on 12/14... too impulsive of a purchase :) I'll find it at the library later.

Anna says

It is a very important book, which is a must read for every woman and man who are not happy with the dominators and the pain they have caused for centuries. I like the terminology she's been using, dominator and partnership models. I hope we can achieve to have a kind society based on partnership and equality soon. These values are going to bring up the peace to our planet naturally and eventually.

Moyokoyani Armando says

¡Qué manera de echar a perder un trabajo! Este texto confirma el dicho... "Segundas partes nunca fueron buenas" Después del excelente y documentado trabajo que realizó en el primer tomo, Eisler toma la bandera de la feminista extrema y se dedica a criticar con argumentos modernos la vida de unos cuantos antiguos; pues incluso dejó de considerar los elementos históricos de los que tanta gala hace en el primer tomo. Carencia de análisis histórico contextualizado y exigencia de comportamientos inverosímiles para las épocas antiguas.

Lo que pudo haber sido una excelente historiografía del machismo, se convirtió en palabrería de mercachifles y perorata sin sentido. Lo que pudo haber sido deconstrucción del patriarcado argumentada, terminó en griterío vulgar al encumbrado indiferente. Que tristeza... Y yo que compré otros dos libros de la autora ¡Rediantres!

Katherine Ripley says

This book completely changed how I view the world. It provides a broader context within which I could connect so many things I'd already learned about: feminism, feminist politics, social justice, racism, post-modernism, the list goes on. When it comes down to it, every single thing that's wrong with the world can be connected back to the theories and arguments in this book. I think this should be required reading for every college student.

Jason Carr says

I read this book about 18 years ago. There are ideas in the book that I still think about. The idea that there is inherent risk in a society that does not face sufficient survival stress. These societies often develop along a relatively more egalitarian, nurturing bent.

Societies on the edge are forced to innovate and develop a more dominating, authoritarian, aspect which gives them a competitive military edge.

Eventually, the dominator societies drive out the nurturing societies.

Also fascinating is the Middle Age drive of the Catholic Church to wipe out women healers by branding them witches (see *The Malleus Maleficarum*). This effort was motivated to instill their male healers who were largely ineffective. In the process, literally thousands of years of wisdom regarding the healing properties of local flora was lost. The cost to western civilization-immeasurable.

Not perfect, but one of those books that has the potential to permanently shift your conceptions.

Eva says

Sex is politics - and not only in White House, mind you. In her masterpiece Eisler invites reader to a thought provoking journey throughout cultural history. This book is about sex and how sexuality, especially women's sexuality has been abused for centuries (but hey, can you actually abuse a woman without abusing her man?) and how politics of the body affect our everyday lives on most basic levels. At parts it was pretty discusting to read the book and one might feel like never ever having sex again (joke!) while exploring all the actual brutality we have socialized to consider as a norm. Still, I would recommend to read Eisler and certainly BEFORE you head to 50 shades of... smth.

Hiba says

Finally I'm done after months and months of reading not because it is boring; it's everything but, it's because of the load of studying and work I had and I wanted to savour every page. Sacred Pleasure is overwhelming, captivating and mind-blowing. It traces how our concepts of sex and pleasure have changed throughout thousands of years from that of partnership to that of dominance and how that change have influenced and is influenced by politics, religion, human relationships among other things. It calls for a return to a partnership that will bring us a happier and more balanced life.

Moyokoyani Armando says

Este libro es una de las grandes maravillas que he tenido oportunidad de leer este año; muy bien documentado, derrumbó bellamente un par de supuestos de los que yo partía para explicar la imposición de la teología androgénica-violenta sobre la adoración de la mujer y la perspectiva del sexo como educación y comunión con el cosmos alrededor del 4000 a.C.

Las primeras tres cuartas partes del libro son una maravilla, Eisler merece todos mis respetos, es una escritora brillante y con un excelente manejo del lenguaje a pesar de ser historiadora-antropóloga;

generalmente estos libros son complejos pero Riane tiene un estilo simple, fluido, y excelentemente bien fundamentado; difiero con su interpretación del mundo griego, y me parece que hace mal uso de antropólogos modernos para explicar la cotidianeidad de Atenas, considero que si hubiese consultado directamente las fuentes (y hay muchas) tendría una perspectiva más amplia.

Parte de la perspectiva feminista y propone un nuevo modelo de interacción masculino-femenino, con el cual concuerdo enteramente. Sin embargo, Riane no está exenta de las críticas moralinas propias de su cultura y se suelta muchas veces en críticas derivadas de su interpretación de lo masculino y lo femenino, criticando a culturas lejanas desde la perspectiva moderna. Considero estas críticas (como su queja por la no aplicación de los derechos humanos en culturas antiguas) totalmente fuera de lugar; empero, esto sucede únicamente al final del libro, todo su desarrollo anterior me parece genial.

Sin duda, un libro ampliamente recomendable.

Josie says

This book exceeded my expectations.

It has helped me to identify dominator and partnership models of interacting.

It has helped me to see that there can be another way.

It has helped empower me to speak up on behalf of women and partnership societies everywhere.

Though a bit dry and academic at times, the way it has shifted my view has been extraordinary.

I would absolutely recommend.

Elizabeth Hall says

Every once in a great while, you read a book that shifts your entire perspective—a book that changes how you live in the world, because it changes how you perceive reality. Riane Eisler's *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myths, and the Politics of the Body—New Paths to Power and Love* was such a book for me. This book simultaneously made more sense than any cultural analysis I've ever read and blew my mind. It is a book that allowed me to further reclaim the feminine aspects of spirituality and to understand biology, culture (from prehistory to the present day), politics, pleasure, pain, and sexuality in ways that felt both new and ancient, as if the knowledge had been waiting for me to discover it, buried somewhere between conscious and unconscious thought. This book is now a cornerstone of my feminist understanding.

Eisler presents two modes of organizing society that can be traced back to prehistory: the dominator model (in which a few people hold power via fear and violence—a society based on pain) and the partnership model (in which men and women work together as equal partners—a society based on pleasure). By presenting evidence of prehistoric societies that modeled partnership and valued female sexuality and revered it as sacred, Eisler lays the groundwork for her cultural transformation theory. This theory, which the author introduced in her book *The Chalice and the Blade*, posits that "...many beliefs and practices we today

recognize as dysfunctional and antihuman stem from a period of great disequilibrium in our prehistory when there was a fundamental shift from partnership to dominator model ascendancy.” (p. 11) Eisler believes that our time is one in which it is possible to shift from a dominator model to a partnership model. To do so, we must understand the full context of our current dominator society and the ways it functions, both consciously and unconsciously.

At 400 pages and full of references, the book is not a quick or an easy read, but it is a vital one. Again and again, I underlined passages that spoke to the truth of our cultural existence. Here is one I found at random, just now: “...the truth is that our entire culture is permeated by the erotization of cruelty and brutality to women, so much so that we have learned to take it for granted.” (p. 233). Eisler makes her case for this so thoroughly, and places it so exactly in the context of both history and prehistory, that I feel like singing those lines from *Amazing Grace*: I once was blind, but now I see.

Some of what I see I was already seeing, of course—magazines and movies and billboards and ads in which women and violence and sex form an unholy trinity. But some I didn’t know—brutal songs from the military, for example, that call women bloody names and keep men dominating the world by linking the erotic with killing, particularly the killing of women. A “classic” cover of a porn magazine in which a woman’s upper half is coming out of a meat grinder. And that’s just our current culture, just a few fragments of what Eisler presents as evidence of the dominator culture in which we all live.

Despite the often depressing evidence of our current state—and, indeed, the state of cultural affairs for thousands of years—*Sacred Pleasure* is a hopeful book. It is a book which believes in the possibility of returning to our partnership roots, of seeing both sex and the female form as truly sacred—not just some of the time, not just in conjunction with reproduction under a certain set of religious restrictions which keep dominator cultural patterns dominant and keep women and sex subservient to male power structures—but all the time. Because a woman is naturally endowed with the sacred power to make her own sexual choices, in conjunction with a partner who respects her as an equal in the ancient dance of work and play.

Eisler organizes the book in two parts. The first, “How Did We Get Here?” examines our prehistory, in which Goddess worship was not a pagan thing, full of witchcraft and sorcery, but a natural thing—as natural as the moon and sun and sex. She discusses the partnership cultures of the past, such as the Minoans, who had a partnership culture that including sexual equality. And she emphasizes that in Minoan art “...we have a vivid picture of a highly sensual, erotic, pleasure-oriented way of living inextricably intertwined with the sacred.” (p.83) The Minoans—and other partnership cultures—were conquered by nomads who left their lands when the environment became too inhospitable for survival. And so it went—violent cultures in which women were subservient, pain was linked with sex and the sacred rather than pleasure, and to mention the word Goddess was to sound like a heretic conquered peaceful cultures in which sex and women were revered. And in the conquering, sex, the sacred, and woman’s role in society was rewritten. As Eisler traces this cultural shift, she draws on the work of historians, archeologists, biologists, psychologists, theologians, and other experts—in short, Eisler presents the history of sex and the sacred and human experience from a perspective that is as broad as it is deep.

In Part Two, “Where Are We and Where Do We Go From Here?” the author discusses the shift toward a partnership society that we have been undergoing for the last few hundred years, as women have slowly gained the right to vote, own property, hold jobs, and control our own bodies. Here, she discusses matters that are vitally important to our current cultural state—the definition of masculinity and the ways in which a dominator culture hurts and stunts men, the myths we tell our daughters that keep them searching for Prince Charming, power and politics and the female body, and the urgent need to create new myths and rituals to support spiritual and sexual growth and healing. Eisler’s conclusion is that to change our society, to return to

our partnership roots, we need spiritual courage and a shift in consciousness. We need an awakening.

The good news is, we are waking up—and have been for quite some time. To read *Sacred Pleasure* is to participate in that awakening, to honor ideas that have long been buried, and to understand—on a deep level—the spiritual and sexual significance of the work that lies ahead.

Elena Skoko says

This book gave me the clue to so many questions I had unanswered about female and male sexuality, about traditions and history of our species. Though in some points a feminist twist seems to shout out the anger and overshadow the presumed neutrality of a scholar's work, I like it. I didn't like some other statements used as facts, like the overpopulation theory, the family planning (from the one-sided western perspective) or the AIDS epidemics, while there is too much controversy about it to simply take them as facts. Also, being the author a holocaust survivor, many times in the book we are reminded about the atrocities suffered by the Jews, while some other ethnic groups suffering abuse are mentioned with less emphasis or unmentioned. Yet, my conscience was enriched by so much new knowledge and fresh points of view that I felt a genuine pleasure in reading it. I highly recommend this book to every woman who likes to search for why and because of her feeling there is more about sex and pleasure than the society wants us to think. I took off one star for the feeling that this splendid work is still not free from bias of different kind. I left four stars because of the amount of interesting and documented perspectives that are being offered that can inspire further research and considerations in many fields. (You can skip the last 40% of the book)

Katja Vartiainen says

4,5 stars. This book is very important. When I was reading Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" at 19 years old, I was asking myself, well, how did we get here? And Eisler's book shows us how our world of double standard and domination culture, including sexuality came to be.

It's a great analysis of the western religious heritage and its influences. If you ever wondered how it's affected to us having images of tortured martyrs, and a mislocated father figure, you should read this book. We are in Europe suppose to be proud of our Greek heritage, but as I learned it was a highly excluding society with cruel traditions. personally I've never been interested in the Greek mythology that much, maybe because it hasn't rang true?

There are really interesting tales, and it well build a picture of how our sexuality has been molded by societies and religions made to serve a few, and how this has lead mostly to the mistreatment of women, children and in the end men themselves. It describes the absurd shift from pleasure to pain, in many aspects.

The end is a bit dull and outdated with lists of people and groups active in making a change. But i appreciate that it tries to find a solutions and much needed alternatives.
