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AFI DOCS Film Review: Maria Finitzoâ??s Cliteracy-exploring DILEMMA OF DESIRE Shouts For More

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson June 29, 2020

Watching the opening scene of the cliteracy-exploring documentary, *The Dilemma of Desire*, I was intrigued watching a woman, neuroscientist Stacey Dutton, Ph. D., in an office present-day, walking across the screen and opening a Grayâ??s Anatomy Textbook, while a voice-over narration informs the viewer. What happens next befuddled me. I could not believe my eyes. Here is a woman in 2020 with an anatomy book that has no picture or information on the female clitoris. Unbelievable right? Well, apparently, the edition being discussed was published in 1858. A sleight of hand so to say. The intent is crystal clear in todayâ??s protest language, â??Letâ??s get emotional people! This is pussy power were dealing with here!!!â?•

But, the best was yet to come as the filmâ??s most intriguing characters were introduced. One, a Brooklyn-based artist, Sophia Wallace, has a routine of going to the gym listening to â??work-outâ?• music then taking lyrics and reframing them with the clitoris in mind. From there, prints are created celebrating the â??clit,â?• and the hundred laws of cliteracy. To accentuate, a revealing text title poses the question with dramatic flair, â??Can you draw a clit?â?• Pulsating music accompanies the next segment, Womanhood: The Clitoris Chapter, introducing â??Critical Thinking â?? The Best Work of Sophia Wallaceâ?• â?? a very thought-provoking art exhibit celebrating the female â??joy button.â?• More importantly, Wallace is a compelling force on the screen as she shares her experience, strength, and hope in navigating desire as she expresses her truth as Director Maria Finitzo captures mush of it in Veriteâ?? style.

In todayâ??s world, we often hear somewhat crude and vulgar terms such as â??bumping ugliesâ?• or â??doing the nasty.â?• Wallaceâ??s phrases, in juxtaposition, are framed in glitteringly gold letters â?? a beautiful and highly respectful manner and miles away from â??bumping ugliesâ?• or â??doing the nasty.â?• After Wallaceâ??s whirlwind world, Finitzo goes on to highlight Linda Diamond, PH. D., Professor of Psychology and Gender Studies, a monthly newsletter for women interested in â??pleasure in a practical everyday sense,â?• an industrial engineer manufacturing elegant female vibrators as well as a stunning Chicagoan woman, Coriama, who proudly postulates she has the will to

negotiate for what she needs sexually.

Interestingly, Finitzo, a Peabody Award-winning director, spouts themes from Audrey Lourdeâ??s feminist-leaning essay, *Uses of the Erotic,* that women have been suppressed from power and information by the male world. To prove her point, Finitzo adds a black and white still photograph of a woman suffering from what Dr. Sigmund Freud referred to as hysteria. Today, â??hystericalâ?• women in Decatur, Georgia, have formed a female support group. Here women create a sacred, safe space to explore the bounds of their sexuality. Adeptly, Finitzo managed to score footage from a meeting of the â??mineâ??s.â?• as the women from Decatur openly share intimate feelings about their clitorises.

Nevertheless, â??the little man in the boatâ?• remains the misunderstood, â??shuntiveâ?• part of the female anatomy, keeping women suppressed, as they are systematically warned against the dangers of eroticism and the resulting information. In one especially memorable scene, Finitzo mixes a driving, non-diegetic musical score culminating in a crescendo with a voice-over narration describing the clitoris as a powerful provocative force, a replenishing force. Some top-notch burlesque sequences, both archival performances as well as current-day performers, add an exquisite, erotic vibe.

The Dilemma of Desire, executively produced by Academy Award-winning Barbara Kopple, is an exceptionally well-executed film advocating that women are sexual beings with the right to live fully in the expression of their desires. The craftsmanship in gathering footage, in editing, informative narrative voice-overs, and musical score support and add timely emotionality in underscoring Finitzoâ??s sharply-pointed direction. My hat comes off to the cast and crew.

Probably most surprising was Finitzoâ??s ability to add tongue-in-cheek scenic elements underscoring the buffoonery surrounding the massive dismissal of the â??devilâ??s doorbellâ?• â?? in my opinion, a very serious oversight. But in the end, though the coverage seemed somewhat excessive, I found it wholly conceivable to view the clitoris as a replenishing, provocative force after viewing *The Dilemma of Desire*. A bit long, however, with a runtime of 109 minutes. Highly recommended.

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