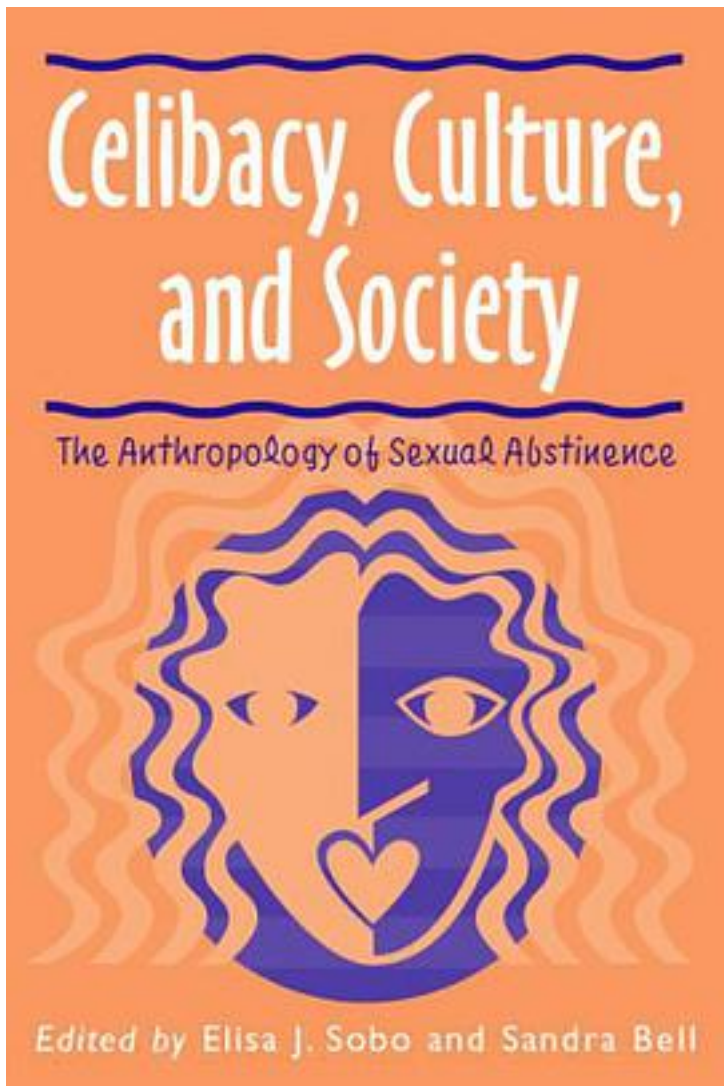


Celibacy, Culture and Society



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This is the first cross-cultural inquiry into the practice of celibacy around the world and through the ages, among groups as diverse as Kenyan villagers and U.S. prisoners, Mazatec Shamans and Buddhist nuns and monks, Shaker church members, and anorexic women. The examples of celibacy described here illustrate the complex relationship between human sexuality and its particular sociocultural context. Ideas about the body, gender, family, work, religion, health, and other dimensions of life come sharply into focus as the contributors examine the many practices and institutions surrounding sexual abstinence. They show that, though celibacy is certainly sometimes a punishment or a deliberate ritual abstinence, it also serves many other social and material functions and in some cases contributes to kin-group survival and well-being. Celibacy, Culture, and Society represents a significant step towards understanding the functions and meanings of sexuality.

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