



Illinois Wesleyan University
Digital Commons @ IWU

John Wesley Powell Student Research
Conference

2010, 21st Annual JWP Conference

Apr 10th, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Sexual Healing: Gender, Sexuality, and the Balance of the Masculine and Feminine Creative Principles in the Healing Cult of Asclepius

Aislinn Lowry
Illinois Wesleyan University

Nancy Sultan, Faculty Advisor
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc>



Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#)

Lowry, Aislinn and Sultan, Faculty Advisor, Nancy, "Sexual Healing: Gender, Sexuality, and the Balance of the Masculine and Feminine Creative Principles in the Healing Cult of Asclepius" (2010). *John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference*. 1.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc/2010/oralpres7/1>

This Event is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Oral Presentation O7.1

**SEXUAL HEALING: GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND THE BALANCE OF THE
MASCULINE AND FEMININE CREATIVE PRINCIPLES IN THE
HEALING CULT OF ASCLEPIUS**

Aislinn Lowry and Nancy Sultan*

Greek and Roman Studies Department, Illinois Wesleyan University

The healing cult of Asclepius at Epidauros flourished in the 4th Century BCE as droves of men and women made the pilgrimage to slumber in his temple, hoping to receive healing from the god in a dream. This study analyzes gender roles and sexuality within the cult of Asclepius through the analysis of inscriptions, medical texts, poetry, mythology, and art. I will argue that the ancient Greek understanding of gender identity and sexuality was so omnipresent that it permeated everything from the concepts of illness and health themselves, to the appearance of the deities, and even the way healing was administered and received within the sacred precinct. Also, I contend that Hygeia and Asclepius, representing health through harmony with nature and medical intervention respectively, were created and function in healing cults as an interdependent, inextricably linked sexual binary: health, equated with femininity and nature, and medicine, culturally constructed and masculine. Ultimately, I conclude that the balance and adequate influence of both the masculine and the feminine creative principles, embodied by the divinities of healing and represented by all actors and objects associated with them, must be present for healing to occur.