Perceptions of Gender Roles, Gender Power Relationships, and Sexuality in Thai Women Following Diagnosis and Treatment for Cervical Cancer

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Cervical cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among women in developing countries, including Thailand, Vietnam, and Colombia (Dos Santos Silva, 1999; National Cancer Institute, 1996). The 1992–1995 age-standardized incidence rates of cervical cancer per 100,000 women in the Philippines (22.5) and Thailand (29.2) were considerably higher than the world incidence rate (9.0). In developing countries, most women are diagnosed with an advanced stage of the disease (Hacker, 2000). In southern Thailand, cervical cancer accounts for 24.8% of all cases of cancer in women, and more than half of patients are diagnosed at stage II or higher (Prechavittayakul & Sriplung, 1999).

Used to treat advanced stages of cervical cancer, radiotherapy has a number of side effects, including fatigue, decreased vaginal blood flow, and reduction of vaginal lubrication. Several studies have found that, following radiation therapy, women have a shortened vagina and dyspareunia (Flay & Matthews, 1995; Jensen et al., 2003). The illness also reduces self-image, sexual desire, and sexual intimacy between partners (Warner, Rowe, & Whipple, 1999). In a small study that explored beliefs about cervical cancer and the use of healthcare services among Thai women with the disease, Jirojwong, Thassri, and Skolnik (1994) found that women changed their relationships with their spouses, their daily activities, how often they left the home, and their relationships with family members and friends after their cancer diagnoses; however, little detailed information regarding the changes was provided.

Studies conducted in Sweden, Singapore, and New Zealand (Bergmark, Avall-Lunqvist, Dickman, Henningssohn, & Steineck, 1999; Cull et al., 1993; Flay & Matthews, 1995; Lalos & Lalos, 1996; Yeo & Perera, 1995) found that women with cervical cancer reported dyspareunia and a fear of disease recurrence, which explained the marked reduction in the fre-