

FILMEX



Scene from "Private Practices: The Story of a Sex Surrogate," screening at Filmex today at 2:45 p.m. and 9:45 p.m.

Private Practices: The Story of a Sex Surrogate

2:45 p.m., 9:45 p.m.

Over the past few years, the words "sex surrogate" have cropped up in our lexicon of psychological terms. Working with trained therapists, surrogates serve as substitute sexual partners. The client and surrogate go through a sex therapy course together, starting with a hand caress until the two become lovers. When the therapy is over, it's hoped that the client can transfer his newly found feelings for another — and the surrogate goes on to another client.

Such is the story of "Private Practices: The Story of a Sex Surrogate," a touching and tender documentary about sex therapist Maureen Sullivan. As filmed by director/producer Kirby Dick, edited by Lois Freeman and Dick, and with camera by Christine Burrill and Catherine Coulson, the 58-minute film is a lot less shocking than it is sensitive.

Using all sorts of established "documentary techniques" (the voice-over, the unobtrusive camera, the long

takes and lack of tricky editing, the on-the-spot action, etc.) "Private Practices" really gets to the core of human sexual behavior. We're witness as two of Sullivan's clients, the 25-year-old and shy Christopher and the 45-year-old John come to her via their own therapists. Both are afraid of intimacy and love. In Chris's case, even the act of touching is painful. At the end of the session (four months), both are less emotionally crippled and able to create a relationship with women.

Still, Dick's film, which is almost clinical in nature (except the last session between Chris and Maureen) asks other questions, and we are given some insight into Maureen, who comes from a broken home (we see her with her father and brother and her own therapist), and admits that she's using sex therapy as a means to avoid commitment. At least until she can work her way through her own emotional problems. She understands pain, and the fact that we can all become fuller and richer by going through it. Until she comes to grips with her own life, there's always another client. —Ed Kaufman