

The Fascinating Story of Sex

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Introduction

Finding some spare time on my hands as a result of a sudden and rather unexpected redundancy, I started doing some writing, and after a time, whilst doing some research on an entirely different subject, fell on an interesting passage about the naming of Gropecunt Lane in London. One thing led to another and before long the thought processes were spreading to the ideas of prostitution, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases and many other things related to sex. There was no intention when I started necessarily to follow this route, it was just that as I learned more the whole subject became fascinating from a historical perspective and very pertinent to every generation that has ever existed, including our own.

Sex is something that, for many people, happens from time to time, with the body acting, at least from a physical perspective, normally rather seamlessly. This apparent simplicity masks what is an almost unbelievably complex process. I make no excuse for pointing out at several junctures just how complicated the relevant evolutionary, biological, anatomical, physiological, emotional and biochemical processes that support attraction, partnerships, mating and conception actually are and how unsurprising it is that things can go wrong, as they frequently do for many people.

Sex has after all had hundreds of millions of years to develop from the simple task of a cell dividing into two through to the massively more challenging task of placing sperm inside the female body, waiting for it to find its own way towards the egg, fertilising the egg and then the egg implanting in a uterine lining that has been made specifically ready for the purpose.

Each of the subject areas in this book has been worthy of separate works in its own right and it is just not possible given the limited space that is available to satisfactorily cover all of the detail. I'm sure that there will be experts out there in each of these areas who could expand what I have written in a few simple lines into a chapter, or maybe even a book. This does not detract from the fact that once all these disparate subjects are pulled together into a single place, the subject of sex can be seen to be just what it is, tremendously interesting. The book therefore is not intended to cover everything related to sex in minute detail. Rather, I hope the reader will be interested enough to go and search out further reading for themselves where the need arises or maybe

where a particular subject 'tickles their fancy'.

With a subject as huge as sex, I am sure that there are other subject areas that the reader will be able to think of that have not been covered in much detail. For instance, I cannot profess to have any experience of homosexuality and this vast and worthy topic is covered rather superficially here with references only to the historical context such as the Greek love of pederasty.

We would be forgiven for thinking that living in the world we do, with incredible technology and access to information, that the massed human minds could come up with a few new things about sex. Whilst this might be true for those aspects that require specific physiological or biochemical knowledge, such as our ability to effectively control the menstrual cycle, it is not so true for the more basic functions of sex and relationships where the more ancient peoples knew it all already. They clearly had more time on their hands to consider all the options than we give them credit for and it is interesting how often something that you might think of as being a comparatively modern invention, such as the concept of contraception, or even something like the double-headed dildo, were there way back in Greek and Roman times.

What has happened is that science and medicine have been able to explain away some of the fundamental errors that were made in the past, such as the source of semen and the problems caused by a wandering womb. Many of the original writings on sexual matters go right back to the Egyptians or Greeks, with, particularly the Greek texts, then being translated into other languages in Europe and being used as reference sources for medical books of the time. It is surprising how late on incorrect concepts lasted and just how long it took the medical world to remove them from more modern medical texts.

Our modern scientific understanding has enabled me to give the reader some detail about the different forms of reproduction, how genes are passed on, how semen and sperm function, how an individual sperm can fuse with an egg and how research led to the development of the contraceptive pill and an understanding of the menstrual cycle.

Another thing that becomes apparent is that the whole concept of 'normal' is wholly ridiculous. There was a vast spectrum of sexual activity right around the globe in days gone by, as there is now and Kinsey's work has shown just how broad and varied our current sexual antics are. There is a percentage of the population that are more than happy to engage in different forms of sexual activity but there are very few indeed where the percentages are very high. In fact, the only thing that I could find that was reported to be used by 100% of people in a survey was the use of the missionary position in marriage. For all of the other sexual activities the general population picks and chooses according to their own and their partners particular preferences and desires. And that is of course just the way it should be. Despite this, authorities, particularly religious authorities, have tried to model our behaviour to avoid 'sinful' activities ranging from banning the natural and normal act of masturbation right through to the condemnation of the use of condoms in an HIV ravaged Africa. Political authorities have also tried to control areas such as prostitution, sometimes in order to restrict the progress of venereal disease and sometimes for the financially beneficial aspects of income generation and the power that goes with it.

There are many who have dabbled with the control of sex and sexuality, including us as individuals as we try to manage our sexual desires. The book mentions some of these in a little more detail and, without wishing to give too much away, the reader will be unsurprised to learn that most have been a spectacular failure.

Apart from looking at the prevalence of the individual types of sexual activity such as different sex positions, oral sex, masturbation and anal sex, that are the result of all of those hormonal and emotional drivers, the book also looks at all the other things that result from these inbuilt desires. These include prostitution and the use of prostitutes, infidelity, sexually-transmitted diseases, erotic art and writings, the development of vibrators and contraception.

Humans have never been universally comfortable with their own desires and book also looks at concepts of celibacy, abstinence and virginity. Whether long-term monogamous relationships were developed originally in order to control sexual access is a debatable point and I have reviewed how different societies dealt with the concepts of relationships and marriage. Just as there is no such thing as normal with sexuality, there is also no such thing as normal when it comes to relationships and marriage.

The book is an attempt to make some of the facts that surround our own sexuality available to the reader and, on occasion, to look back down the past few millennia to see how all of our predecessors dealt with precisely the same issues that we have to deal with today. Far from being used for procreation only, the enjoyment of sex was there right from the start, as were all the other things that went along with it.

So, please read on and enjoy!

Let's get it together and swap genes

Sexual reproduction is a form of reproduction where specialised cells called gametes, that are haploid, meaning that each has half the number of chromosomes of other bodily cells, combine to produce a fertilised cell with the correct number of chromosomes. The female gamete is large and is called the ovum, or more commonly the egg, and the male gamete is called the sperm.

Creating eggs and sperm with half the number of chromosomes that are contained in a normal cell requires a rather neat trick called meiosis which only occurs in eukaryotic cells, that is cells with a nucleus. In humans, meiosis cell division produces four haploid cells each with 23 chromosomes rather than the 23 pairs of chromosomes found in normal cell. Once a haploid egg and sperm fuses, the resulting fertilised cell is again a diploid cell with 23 pairs of chromosomes now containing genetic material from the mother and the father. This fertilised cell is now called a zygote. In another rather clever move, the head of the sperm contains an enzyme which helps to disrupt the membrane of the egg, preventing other sperm from entering. This is a rather simplistic overview but the actual complexity is mind-boggling and makes you realise why the whole thing must go horribly wrong on occasion, or just not work at all.

Almost all animals, and many plants including the flowering plants, use sexual reproduction, but this is by no means the only way to end up with offspring. Prokaryotic cells, cells that lack a membrane-bound nucleus, mitochondria, or any other membrane-bound organelle, such as bacteria or the ancient Archaea use asexual reproduction but do have the ability to swap genetic material, an important consideration when you are looking at, for instance, the resistance of bacteria to antibiotics.

Some animals also use asexual reproduction, parthenogenesis, where embryos may develop without the need for fertilisation. The list is surprisingly long, with both hammerhead sharks and black tip sharks reproducing asexually in captivity, with the offspring being shown to be genetically identical to their mothers. Greenfly produce hordes of dastardly plants sucking babies during the summer by asexual reproduction and reptiles have also been shown to be able to reproduce asexually. The list also includes rotifers, a type of freshwater zooplankton, grass thrips, and several species of stick insect of the genus *Timema* which have apparently reproduced only asexually for millions of years, without any apparent detrimental effects; they are after all, still here.

Another version of reproduction used in the animal world is Polyembryony, where a fertilised egg or embryo divides to form genetically identical offspring. This is known in parasitic wasps and also in the nine-banded armadillo where the process is obligatory and usually gives rise to quadruplets that are genetically identical and of course, the same sex. So, if you are a nine-banded armadillo and have a brother or sister, then you probably got several others as well.

Another process, monozygotic twinning, occurs in other mammals including humans where a single egg is fertilised producing one zygote that then divides into two separate embryos, or sometimes even three. This is not an uncommon event and most of us will know of identical twins. In fact, there are 10 million identical twins and triplets in the world.

One of the great questions and mysteries is; why have sexual reproduction at all? With asexual reproduction, every organism that is produced can reproduce again without the need for a partner whereas with sexual reproduction, 50% of the offspring will be male and unable to bear offspring of their own. Without wishing to refer to males as being a deadweight burden, you get the picture. Another disadvantage of sexual reproduction is that you may have the most magnificent specimen, at the peak of physical perfection and design, which is then only able to pass on 50% of its genetic material to its offspring. So these combined disadvantages must be outweighed by even more significant advantages otherwise animals would have given up on sexual reproduction a long, long time ago.

A significant disadvantage of asexual reproduction is that genetic mutations can build up over time and that these will always be passed on to the offspring. Sexual reproduction, because it combines genetic material from two individuals, can mask mutations. The offspring of asexual reproduction will also be identical to their mothers and, if the world around is changing, with predators evolving and plants producing defensive chemicals such as psoralens, a species may not be able to adapt to these changes and would simply not be able to tolerate a new world. There are a few species that have lost the ability to reproduce sexually completely and only time will tell whether this was a good move or not.

Darwin got it right; it is a very competitive world out there and natural selection works. Adapting by inheriting genetic material that best suits current environmental and competitive conditions is enabled by sexual reproduction and worth doing even if you do end up with 50% of the population, the males amongst us, just standing around trying to persuade a partner that you're handsome enough, strong enough and clever enough to warrant having sex with. A generally futile task.

Once a species has adopted sexual reproduction, there is then the enormously complex task of ensuring that you can successfully transfer the gametes from the male to the female. This all sounds simple enough if you're in the fortunate enough position to have a penis, but it is not so straightforward in all animals.

The basic options are external fertilisation or internal fertilisation. While internal fertilisation implies a continuing commitment by the mother, with external fertilisation this is not necessary, but as we will see, many animals still have an ongoing commitment to their developing offspring even if they were fertilised externally.

In its simplest form, external fertilisation is spawning, where eggs and sperm are released into the water. For the animals involved, this avoids having to have and to look after all of those complicated internal anatomical devices which would be required to keep an offspring developing internally such as a womb. Sperm have the advantage of being able to swim, using a flagellum, probably demonstrating that from an evolutionary perspective they were originally released into water. Being released into proximity with the egg has obvious benefits in terms of the chance of fertilisation occurring, but where the partners are not able to be in exactly the same place, they have to come up with other alternatives. If you look at corals, enormous quantities of sperm and eggs are released at a specific time with remarkable precision, ensuring that even though the parents may not be in the same location at the time of fertilisation enough genetic material is floating around in the same general vicinity to ensure that fertilisation happens often enough to ensure that the species survives.

Better would be to release eggs and sperm close together and if we look at, for example the salmon, this is precisely what happened. After travelling enormous distances, back to the stream that they were originally hatched in, male and female salmon will court and release eggs and milt at the same time in the same scraping on the stream floor. The attrition rate of the eggs and young is so staggering that huge quantities of eggs and milt are released. The whole process is so exhausting to the fish that they die soon afterwards, leaving the fertilised eggs and newly hatched alevin to look after themselves.

Parental input does not always stop with external fertilisation. Many fish species will lay eggs onto a surface, as the male fertilises them at the same time, and will then fiercely protect the fertilised eggs from any predator. Some species will even take the precaution of cleaning the eggs with their mouths to ensure that they don't succumb to bacterial infections or parasites. Other fish species have taken it a stage further by taking the fertilised eggs up into their mouths. An example would be the mouth brooding cichlids from South America and Africa. Here, the fertilised eggs will develop inside the parent's mouth and even after they have hatched, the young will continue to return to this safe haven in times of risk. Amazingly, this apparently safe behaviour is parasitised on occasion with, for example, the Cuckoo Catfish, laying her eggs so that they are taken up into the mouth at the same time as the hosts, but hatching before the hosts own eggs, then with the young feeding on them and being released only to scurry off into the distance. The Discus fish from South America takes maternal care to a new level, exuding a milky substance from her flanks which the young feed on until they are able to take care of themselves.

Fish have even developed ways of laying eggs away from water, with the Spraying Characin male and female leaping from the water to lay fertilised eggs on overhanging foliage. The male then keeps them moist by spraying them as they develop until they hatch and fall into the water.

It's not only fish that have developed novel techniques. Darwin's Frog which comes from Chile and Argentina and was originally discovered by Charles Darwin on his voyage on HMS Beagle, develops its tadpoles inside the vocal sac of the male. The male Pipa Toad pushes the fertilised eggs into the spongy skin on the females back where they become embedded, sinking into the surface. They develop here through to the tadpole stage and emerge from their mothers back as tiny adults ready to make their way in life.

Internal fertilisation occurs quite widely amongst animals and they do not always need the luxury of a penis in order to facilitate it.

It goes back a long way, and even in vertebrates there is some debate as to whether the early archaic fish known as placoderms, which flourished between 435 and 360 million years ago, used internal fertilisation. These cartilaginous fish had armour plating and some of the earliest jaws with larger species growing longer and heavier than the modern great white shark. In 1938 a palaeontologist, David Meredith Seares Watson, reported that a placoderm called Rhamphodopsis had claspers, similar to those found in male sharks and rays, which were tubular and probably used for internal fertilisation and mating as sharks do today.

Internal fertilisation was not necessarily there to stay with some evolutionary lines retaining it whilst others switched back to egg laying and some even subsequently re-adopting internal fertilisation. If you just look at fish, it appears that internal fertilisation may have evolved on as many as 29 separate occasions.

The guppy, a fish many of us may have kept or seen in an aquarium, has a structure in the males called a gonopodium which functions as an intromittent organ, a reproductive appendage that allows internal fertilisation. It's not just humans who can be left or right-handed and the male guppy will either have a gonopodium which can move to the left so that he can mate with the female when he is to the right of her or one that can move to the right, in which case he can mate with a female if he is to the left of her. There is probably a PhD waiting to happen here, looking at whether guppies can be ambidextrous when it comes to gonopodium movement and if so, why?

Fish using internal fertilisation can either go on to lay eggs subsequently, such as the dogfish where you will sometimes find a mermaid's purse washed up on the shore while walking, or give birth to live young which is the case with the good old guppy.

Some other creatures have rather more bizarre arrangement. Spiders use internal fertilisation, but here, there is no sex. The male spider is at rather more risk than many of us during a sexual encounter. Often the female is much larger and venomous, being specifically designed to kill things just like the male, and often he has to approach across a web, again, a device specifically designed to ensnare things just like the male before the female delivers the lethal injection. The courtship rituals and spiders are therefore incredibly intricate, with the detail of the intricacy depending on whether the spiders hunt using a web or by sight. Spiders which use a web may use a rather prolonged series of spider thread tapping at the right frequency and strength to ensure that the female is aware that she is not dealing with a meal, just a mate. Jumping spiders, which have incredible eyesight use a much more visual system, waving arms in the air and displaying what are sometimes the most fabulous and iridescent colours on their abdomen, such as the wonderful peacock spiders.

Whatever the build-up, the end result is to try and fertilise the female without being eaten. This is achieved by the male depositing a package of sperm called the spermatophore which he then generally places directly into the female using a leg. It really doesn't sound like as much fun as sex, but it's all they've got.

At least the male spider stands some chance of getting away with it. The male praying mantis does engage in a form of sex but, for him it's a once only experience and the female will generally resort to sexual cannibalism, using his well-earned protein to sustain her and ensure that she can go on and breed again. Sometimes it's just good to be a mammal.

All birds and mammals use internal fertilisation and all birds lay eggs. This does not mean that the level of parental care is always the same however, with some chicks such as those of many Partridge species, being independent almost immediately and others requiring weeks of devoted care and feeding from their parents before they are strong enough to leave the nest.

In some species such as the ostrich and many waterfowl, the male has a phallus while in others the phallus is absent with sperm stored in the cloaca, the common opening of the urinary tract and digestive systems, before mating. It seems that having a phallus is the more primitive state with birds mostly evolving away from it. Species that do have a phallus use it to place sperm nearer to the ovaries so that if a female mates with more than one male, the male with the longest phallus is more likely to father the offspring. Who says big isn't best.

In some waterfowl, the vagina forms a spiral, with the male's phallus spiralling in the opposite direction, meaning that the female has some degree of choice and that he can't exactly slip his phallus in while she's not looking. On the other hand, it does make mating a rather forced affair and many of us will have seen a drake on top of an almost submerged duck, holding her by the neck and trying to mate with all the subtlety of a rampant hippopotamus.

Male birds which lack a phallus pass stored sperm by pressing the entrance of his cloaca against the females who facilitates this by moving into the right position. Here, the whole process can be over very quickly, sometimes taking less than a second. In order to get this far he may have had to go through some incredibly intricate and amazing courtship display using an array of psychedelic feathers and you just wonder whether it's all worth it for less than a second! The drivers are much more than just the sexual release achieved.

Mammals appeared in the late Triassic period about 225 million years ago and, as they exist today, they are a very strange bunch indeed. One of the things that differentiate mammals from birds and reptiles is a possession of mammary glands that produce milk to feed the young.

After internal fertilisation there are three basic options which are used by mammals. The five species of monotremes, including the four echidna species and the unbelievably strange duck-billed platypus are monotremes where monotreme means 'one hole' referring to the fact that, like birds and reptiles, they have a single opening, like the cloaca, used for both reproductive purposes and as an exit for the digestive and urinary systems. Monotremes lay leathery and calcified eggs which is all rather peculiar for mammal. Once the babies hatch they are fed on milk that the mother exudes, not through nipples but directly through her skin, as if sweating.

The second option is used by marsupials where babies are born in a very underdeveloped state, crawling up to the pouch or marsupium where they attach themselves firmly to a nipple and stay

there until they're old enough and developed enough to leave for their first forays into the wider world.

The final option is as used by placental mammal where the foetus is kept within the female's body and fed through an umbilicus via the placenta. Here, pregnancy might be lengthy, such as the 18 months or so for an elephant. This is not always the case though and the turnaround time for some rodent populations such as voles or small mice is so rapid and their breeding age so young that without predation every country in the world would be several feet thick in them within a year.

The babies of placental mammals can be entirely helpless, sometimes taking years to develop to the stage where they are independent of their mother. Humans are a good example of this where it might take 15 or 20 years for a child to be sufficiently trustworthy to be let into the wider world. On the other hand, many of us know that the financial burden can go on for many years after this!

Whole books and television series have been produced on some of the brief details given above and the natural world is unbelievably complex, intricate, interrelated and interdependent.

The word penis was possibly derived from the French *pénis* or maybe directly from the Latin *penis* meaning penis or tail. The human penis, which most of the time appears mildly pathetic, looking rather sorry for itself, is in fact a miracle of evolution. Not only does it act as a duct for the urinary system, connecting the bladder to the outside world, it manages to do so unobtrusively, almost cowering for cover and then, miraculously at the appropriate moment, leaping into life to deposit semen, with its payload of genetic material, right next to the cervix.

The penis develops from the same tissue in the embryo as the clitoris in females, where some of the tissue, instead of developing as the skin around the penis and the urethra, develops into the labia minora instead. The main parts of the penis are the root or radix, the body or corpus and the epithelium making up the skin of the shaft of the penis and the foreskin covering the glans.

The radix is the part attached to the body, lying within a superficial perineal pouch and consisting of the bulb of the penis and the crus of the penis. The main corpus of the penis is made up of three columns of tissue, two corpora cavernosa on the dorsal side and a corpus spongiosum on the ventral side, with the ventral surface marked with a lateral groove. The urethra goes through the prostate gland and joins the ejaculatory duct, passing through the penis across the corpus spongiosum to the opening, or meatus, at the tip of the glans. Urine and semen both take the same route to the outside world. An epithelium of skin covers the shaft of the penis and the foreskin although the inside of the foreskin and the covering of the glans are made of mucosal tissue. Sperm are manufactured in the testes and stored in the epididymis before passing through the vas deferens, having various fluids added to them, more of which later, and then on up the penis, towards who knows what.

A lot of mammals have a baculum, or erectile bone that helps keep the penis stiff, but we poor humans have to rely entirely on the penis becoming engorged with blood to reach an erect state, making erectile dysfunction all the more likely.

The angle that the erect human penis forms to the body is related to the ligaments that hold it in position, with less than 5% of men having an erect penis that is up right or less than 30° from the vertical and about the same number having an erect penis that is between 120° and 180° from the vertical, in other words, pretty well pointing straight down. About 60% of men have an erect penis that is between 30° from the vertical to 85°. None of this has any particular relevance to a penises

ability to function correctly during a sexual encounter.

So, you're wandering around with an erect penis and need something to do with it. The options are obviously manifold but by far the most common is vaginal sex.

The word vagina is from Latin *vāgīnae*, meaning a sheath or scabbard and is a muscular tube which connects the vulva, the external genitalia, to the cervix. Even though the word only refers to the internal structures, it is in common use to refer to both the vulva and the vagina.

Unlike in men, women have a separate urethral opening for urination that is smaller than, and above the vaginal opening.

Vagina is a rather clever multiuse device, functioning as a means for sexual intercourse and the depositing of sperm near the cervix, childbirth and the exit of menstrual flow. It has another trick in that, during sexual activity, it becomes moist, or maybe even positively wet, due to lubrication from the Bartholin's glands, allowing for easier sexual intercourse.

The external vulva consists of the labia minora, the labia majora, the clitoris, the clitoral hood covering the clitoris, the urethral opening and the perineum, the tissue between the vagina opening and the anus.

Internally, the vagina has circular folds called rugae, particularly in the first third nearest the vaginal opening, which may help to cause friction during sex and hasten ejaculation. The cervix projects into the vagina with the opening positioned such that it can take advantage of a pool of semen deposited by the lucky male. The vagina itself is composed of layers of mucosa, connective tissue and smooth muscle running both in a circular and longitudinal direction. Around the cervix, the vagina has four vaginal fornices, with the upper quarter of the vagina separated from the rectum by the recto-uterine pouch. Along its length the vagina is supported by ligaments and muscles and has its own supply of blood through an arterial system that includes the uterine artery, vaginal artery, the middle rectal artery and the internal pudendal artery.

Talk about over-engineered. And we take the whole thing for granted, generally because it all works rather seamlessly.

To move on to sex itself, what exactly is it? Apart from being Latin for six, the specific definition varies somewhat depending on which source you refer to. The definitions below are taken from Dictionary.com. either the male or female division of a species, especially as differentiated with reference to the reproductive functions. the sum of the structural and functional differences by which the male and female are distinguished, or the phenomena or behaviour dependent on these differences. the instinct or attraction drawing one sex toward another, or its manifestation in life and conduct. coitus. genitalia.

The word sex itself comes from Middle English of about 1350-1400 from the Latin *sexus*, perhaps akin to *secāre* to divide. Coitus is derived from the Latin word *coitio* or *coire*, meaning 'a coming together or joining together' or 'to go together' and is used to describe various sexual activities although it is usually used to refer to penile-vaginal penetration.

When it comes down to animals, the definitions leave something to be desired. For instance, it will be reasonable to surmise that external fertilisation does not constitute sex whereas, the insertion of a penis into a vagina does. What about the insertion of modified fins or claspers or, as is the case with many birds, the pressing of the entrance of the male cloaca onto the females without any actual insertion? Similarly, many invertebrate animals may use a limb or modified limb to transfer a package of sperm into the female. This deft movement may involve some sort of insertion but not by an appendage such as a penis which is in itself able to convey genetic material.

The legal definition varies from place to place and country to country but here is an example taken from the web. 'Sexual intercourse means vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, fellatio or cunnilingus between persons regardless of sex. Penetration, however slight, is sufficient to complete vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse or fellatio and does not require emission of semen. Penetration may be committed by an object manipulated by the actor into the genital or anal opening of the complainant's body'.

The term vaginal sex or vaginal intercourse refers to any vaginal sexual activity, particularly if penetrative, including sexual activity between lesbian couples. Copulation most often means the mating process of non-human animals but can also be used as the sexually reproductive act of transferring sperm from a male to a female or sexual procreation between a man and a woman, or any sexual activity between opposite-sex or same-sex couples.

Researchers commonly define sexual intercourse as penile-vaginal intercourse while using specific terms, such as anal sex or oral sex, for other forms of sexual behaviour.

Studies into what people understand by the word sex or sexual intercourse are not always in concordance and, as we will see later, opinions can be made to fit the circumstances!

A few facts

The work of Alfred Kinsey (1894 - 1956), the American biologist, professor of entomology and zoology and famous sexologist, provides a tremendous insight into many of the topics related to human sexuality. Kinsey helped found The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction which is often just referred to as The Kinsey Institute in Bloomington, Indiana in 1947. The institute's mission is 'to advance sexual health and knowledge worldwide.'

Kinsey's important works on sex include *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* written in 1948 and reprinted 1998 and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* written in 1953 and reprinted 1998. These and other works provide many of the data presented here.

Not surprisingly, penile-vaginal penetration is the most common form of sexual intercourse in heterosexual couples with reports suggesting that it occurs in almost every sexual encounter being the most prevalent sexual behaviour among men and women of all ages and ethnicities.

Once we have all started, how often do we have sex? Kinsey suggested that the data from men and women within marriage were comparable, which is hardly surprising, seeing as the average heterosexual marriage has one man and one woman. The frequency of sex was 2.8 times per week if you were in your late teens, 2.2 times a week by the age of 30 and only once a week by the age of 50.

The German newspaper Bild reported on a survey by a condom manufacturer which showed that No.1 in the list of sexually active countries was Greece with an average of 164 sessions per year, or more than three a week! Next was Brazil with 145, Russia and Poland with 143, India with 130, Mexico and Switzerland with 123, China and New Zealand with 122 and in 10th, Italy with 121 sexual encounters per year. The world average was 103 times per year or just a little less than twice per week. The lowest recorded was Japan at 48 times per year and less than the average 50-year-old American would expect. The long hours and cultural work ethics in Japan have a lot to answer for and are no doubt contributing to the lowering birthrate. Another interesting fact was that almost every continent made it into the top 10 which just goes to show that enthusiasm for the subject is pretty widespread.

Before we dive further into sex so to speak, what about foreplay, the chance to get your partner excited, and not the reputed Australian version 'Brace yourself Sheila.'

Kinsey reported that in 11% of marital encounters, foreplay only lasted three minutes, with it lasting between 4 and 10 minutes in 36% of encounters, 11 and 20 minutes in 31% of encounters and more than 30 minutes in 22%. Approximately 20% of men and women reported that foreplay lasted between 3 and 12 minutes while 19% of men and 14% of women reported that it lasted between 13 and 17 minutes. You could surmise from these last data that men are thinking that they are helping for longer than they actually are.

Kinsey found that in descending order, foreplay in marriage was simple lip kissing (99.4%), manual stimulation of female breast (98%), manual stimulation of female genitalia (95%), oral stimulation of female breast (93%), manual stimulation of the male genitalia (91%), deep kissing (87%), oral stimulation of the female genitalia (54%) and oral stimulation of the male genitalia (49%). The Kinsey interviews showed that there is no part of the human body which is not sufficiently sensitive to effect erotic arousal for at least some individuals in the population. Breasts, especially the nipples, were erotically sensitive in perhaps half of the females, with breast stimulation alone sufficient for orgasm in a very small percentage of females. There were 2 % of women who even by their late 40s had never had any sexual arousal under any sort of conditions.

How long does sex generally last? Kinsey reported that 17.6% of men ejaculated within two minutes of the start of sex, 47.6% within five minutes and with only 22.9% claiming that they could last more than 10 minutes. He did however speculate that for perhaps 75% of men, ejaculation was possible within two minutes and reported that this was a frequent source of marital conflict. This is not a great shock when only 22.8% of women reported being able to climax within two minutes. In marriage, Kinsey said that 52.6% of women said sex lasted less than five minutes with only 19% claiming that it lasted 10 minutes or more.

As well as being sexually active, it appears that Greeks can make it last a reasonable time as well. The same Bild report referred to earlier said that the Nigerians can make sex last longest at an average of 24 minutes followed by the Greeks at 22 minutes. One of the reasons is probably because 80% of the Greeks consider sex as utterly relevant while only 38% of the Thai population believed that sex was a significant part of their lives.

Kinsey reported that peak sexual performance for males was between the ages of 16 and 20 years old whereas for women, solitary sexual activities such as masturbation or nocturnal dreams to

orgasm gradually rose to a maximum, levelling off and then declining after 55 or 60 years of age.

Kinsey developed a Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale, also known as the Kinsey Scale used for measuring an individual's response to heterosexual or homosexual experiences. He reported that 46% of the male population had engaged in both heterosexual and homosexual activities or had reacted to persons of both sexes and that 12% of white males aged 20 to 35 years old gave a rating of 3 on the 7-point scale showing an about equal heterosexual and homosexual experience/response. For men aged 16 to 55 years old, 10% reported that they were predominantly homosexual and 8% exclusively homosexual.

For women, a rating of 3 occurred for 7% of females aged 20 to 35 years old and 4% of previously married females aged 20 to 35 years old. Between 2% and 6% were more or less exclusively homosexual and 1 to 3% of unmarried females of the same age were exclusively homosexual.

Kinsey determined that it was impossible to count the number of people that were either heterosexual or homosexual and that it was only possible to report behaviour at a specific point in time.

Later reports from the United States estimate that 3.5% of adults identify as homosexual or bisexual (Gates, 2011) and 0.5% to 1% of the population identify as asexual, having no sexual attraction to anyone (Yule et al, 2014). Almost three times the proportion of women (17.4%) reported any same-sex contact in their lifetime compared with men (6.2%) aged 18–44 (NHSR, 2016).

All of these individual preferences and needs have driven a vast array of sexual activity and behaviours!

Prostitution and history

The well-used adage is that prostitution is the world's oldest profession and, even though it is difficult to argue one way or another as to precisely when it came into being, it is abundantly clear that it is rather well documented in many societies throughout the ages of mankind. In fact, it has been so universal, that there is a wealth of information available on the matter and entire tomes have been written solely on this subject. This makes it somewhat difficult to précis the subject in a few pages without missing out huge chunks of relevant, but here is the story briefly.

The derivation of the word whore is rather tortuous to say the least, so here is a version from the web. The English word whore is from Middle English hore, from Old English hōre, from Proto-Germanic hōrō, from Proto-Indo-European kāro-

↑
(dear, loved), keh ro (desire), German Hure

↑
(whore), Middle High German huore, Old High German huora, Dutch hoer, Old Norse hóra

↑
(whore), hórr

↑
(adulterer), Danish hore and Swedish hora. Non-Germanic cognates include Latin cārus

↑

(dear), Albanian koj

↑
(to feed, lure, bribe) and Sanskrit क्रीड (to play)

↑
(kāma, love).

The word prostitute comes from the mid-16th century as a verb from Latin prostitut (exposed publicly, offered for sale), from the verb prostituere, from pro (before) and statuere (set up, place) whilst the word hooker only dates back to 1835 and may have been derived from the US Civil War General Hooker or coastal features between the ports of New York and Baltimore. Just to confuse things further, hooker has several other meanings including a small two masted fishing boat and a position in the game of rugby union! And then there is harlot derived from the old French herlot or arlot

↑
meaning vagabond or tramp. There are also a whole host of colloquialisms and slang such as slut, skank, hoe or nightwalker, so you can take your pick.

One of the earliest forms of prostitution recorded was sacred prostitution using temple prostitutes as practised by the Sumerians and referred to by the Greek historian Herodotus (484 - 425 BCE) in his book The Histories and Thucydides. He reported that in Babylon, every woman, at least once in their lives, would have to go to the sanctuary of Militta (Aphrodite or Nana/Anahita) and there have sex with a foreigner for a price which was more symbolic than for monetary gain, as a sign of her hospitality. There may have been many types of temple prostitute, possibly with some being brought to the temple as virgins to take part in sexual rituals or sexual rites not always accompanied by payment. The Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian law code from about 1754 BCE, contained provisions that detailed the inheritance rights of women, including prostitutes. It was reported by Strabo, the Greek philosopher, geographer and historian (64 BCE - 24 CE) that the temples at Paphos and Corinth had at least 1000 working temple prostitutes.

All the shrines and temples along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers that dealt with the practice of sacred prostitution were removed by Emperor Constantine in the 4th century CE as he was progressively introducing Christianity although some sources suggest that sacred prostitution did not survive widely into the Greek or Roman times.

Sacred prostitution was also recorded in one form or another in many other locations and times in history including ancient, mediaeval and modern India and Mesoamerica and South America.

The 16th century Aztec society also had temple prostitutes and sometimes male adolescents who would congregate at temples. Not surprisingly, the Roman Catholic conquistadores were absolutely appalled by the whole practice. This and the fact that the Aztecs took a great deal of solace from human sacrifice was used as a justification for the extirpation of the Aztec society which the conquistadores achieved with a rapidity that was breathtaking even by contemporary historical standards.

The Greek word for prostitute is porne, derived from the verb pernemi (to sell) that also gave rise to the lowest class of prostitute the pornai.

The first Athens brothel appeared in the 6th century BCE built by the Athenian statesman Solon (638 - 558 BCE) with the profits funding the building of a temple dedicated to Aphrodite Pandemo,

patron goddess of society and commerce.

Prostitutes and brothels were common in ancient Greece with some classes of prostitute often being independent, sometimes influential and part of the taxpaying community. Rather an anathema to pretty well all modern street girls one would suspect. This was however not the case for the lowest class of prostitute, the poor *pornai*, who were often barbarian slaves, owned by a citizen pimp and frequenting lower class brothels and red light districts.

There were categories of prostitute that specialised in working outdoors, who met their clients while walking and then returned to the client's house or who worked near bridges and in the 5th century BCE, it was said that the price was 1 obole, a sixth of a drachma and the equivalent of an ordinary worker's day salary. These prostitutes were the next class up from the *pornai*, sometimes being women with no rights to citizenship or *metic* women, sometimes poor widows who had lost their income or *pornai* who had managed to buy their freedom after many years' hard graft in brothels. They often wore an outrageous amount of make-up including white lead and mulberry juice making it as patently obvious as possible what they were all about. In Athens, this class of prostitute had to be registered and pay taxes like any other member of the community.

Like with everything else, inflation bites, and by the 4th century BCE it was a couple of drachma for a basic service. It is not just modern societies that have created imaginative ways of paying for things. In the 1st century BCE the punter could set up a subscription, like going to the gym, at five drachmas for a dozen visits. By the 2nd century CE a young virgin might cost 100 drachmas and you could set up an arrangement where a group of friends could club together and pay for a girl, between them having exclusive rights to her, as a sort of ancient connotation of the modern timeshare principle.

The *auletrides* were a class of Greek prostitute skilled in more than just sexual encounters. They were flute players, dancers, jugglers and acrobats. They could be booked for functions as well, when the more sexual of their talents were probably highly appreciated after a few glasses of *retsina*. Other similar types of entertainers were the *psaltria*, or harp players, and the *kitharistria*, or lyre players. They often reported to a *poroboskos*, who may have acted as a madam to hire them out.

The highest class prostitutes were the *hetaera*, meaning companion, who were expensive and formed long-term relationships with their customers, providing friendship as well as sex. Instead of being paid for each sexual performance, they were paid by the amount of time that they spent with the customer.

Ancient Rome almost continuously fought with someone or another and this generated an enormous number of foreign slaves, where the women were most often pushed into prostitution, sometimes for wealthy owners who owned vast numbers. Abandoned children were raised as prostitutes and enforced prostitution and enslavement was used as a punishment for free women who had broken the law.

The ruins at Pompeii reveal a large brothel called the *Lupanar*. In a similar way to Greece, prostitutes were categorised depending on their speciality the way they worked. Some of the large brothels, during the 4th century CE, as the Roman Empire was becoming Christianised, even became tourist attractions and were possibly state-owned. Prostitution was legal up until this point although it was expected that an individual would moderate the frequency of their sexual contacts and demonstrate self-control. Fat chance!

Clearly prostitution was not just a western phenomenon, occurring in all parts of the world that the human species had managed to colonise, which was pretty much all of it.

In China the ying-chi, meaning camp harlot, were an early form of independent prostitute and were reportedly recruited by the Emperor Wu (156 - 87 BCE) to keep his armies happy on their long marches.

In ancient India, the rich would ask Nagarvadhu to sing and dance and were called brides of the town. Famous examples include Amrapali, state courtesan and Buddhist disciple, described by the writer Acharya Chatursen Shastri (1891 - 1960 CE) in his book, Vaishali Ki Nagarvadhu, and Vasantasena, a character in the classic Sanskrit story of Mricchakatika, written in the 2nd century BCE by Sūdraka. The tawaif were courtesans who catered to the nobility of the Mughal Empire. *

The Fascinating Story of Sex is a wonderful and factual trip through the world of sex. As well as looking at all of those basic sexual activities that many people will have engaged in down the ages, the book also covers the history and development of aspects as diverse as contraception and erotic art and literature.

The history of anal sex, including the Greek love of pederasty, is covered along with sections on oral sex and masturbation. There is also a look at the ancient literature related to sex positions including all of those interesting and seemingly impossible positions that even the writings of the time suggested had to be learned!

The worldwide profession of prostitution is briefly reviewed having been established before humans actually got hang of writing and leading to many famous London prostitutes, some of whom were very well connected with royalty, powerful and well off.

Attitudes towards sex vary considerably depending on where and when you lived with, at one extreme, islands where the inhabitants just made love in open view in the streets to, on the other extreme, an island where there was no foreplay and couples made love in the dark with clothes on! The same principle applies to marriage, monogamy and polygamy, where what is just fine for one culture is either not practised or totally unacceptable to another.

Humans have never been terribly good at coping with the reality of their own desires and the story of abstinence, virginity and the periodic attempts to suppress natural and normal activities make for interesting reading.

And then there are all those mistakes that were made way back in history that were carried forward into comparatively modern times leading to the ideas of the wandering womb and the Victorian physicians approach to dealing with women with hysteria by inducing a hysterical paroxysm. This in turn partly led to the development of the sex aid with its fascinating evolution from water jets through to the modern battery powered multifunctional vibrator.

We know a lot more about science now and the book discusses what an orgasm actually is, what semen consists of and how a sperm miraculously fertilises an egg which then becomes implanted in the lining of the uterus. But, they understood the basic principles right back at the dawn of human culture and attempts were made then and in civilisations worldwide more recently, to control pregnancy by using a whole host of chemical and mechanical contraceptive devices, eventually leading to the development of the contraceptive pill. You will be surprised just how imaginative

people can be when they want to have sex but avoid all of the consequences like pregnancy or sexually-transmitted disease. Much of the development of barrier method contraceptives was actually to prevent the spread of venereal disease and the global history and explosion of syphilis and human immunodeficiency virus in the 16th and the 20th centuries are both worrying and fascinating.

There is the history of erotic art and writing, from the wonderful and breathtakingly voluptuous Venus statues dating back tens of thousands of years to the artefacts of Pompeii which were regarded as so obscene that a special locked museum room was established to house them. And then there were what, even now we would consider as, the grossly perverted works of the Marquis de Sade and the rather tame erotica of some other authors which was banned at the time and for obscure reasons remained banned all the way through to the 20th century.

Whilst this book is factually based, it does contain sexually explicit material and is not recommended for readers under 18 years old.

Read on and see just how fascinating sex is!

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