

SEX

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MG EDITORES

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I have been keenly observing developments in sexuality since 1966, the year I graduated from medical school. It is hard to imagine another period of time as short as the last few decades in which so many changes have taken place in the behaviour of entire populations. I saw the introduction of the contraceptive pill and the freedom movements that, in 1968, affected people all over the world and influenced the way of life of a whole generation of young people. Many of them, who were previously more conservative, began to use drugs such as marijuana and cocaine. More recently, there has been an enormous increase in alcohol consumption by young men and – especially – women. I am not ignoring facts with more positive consequences that have also taken place. One such example is the increasing number of young women who invest in their intellectual development in order to become independent professionals. I see casual erotic encounters – “hooking up” – between teenagers of the same social class and age group as a positive thing. I also appreciate certain changes in the sexual initiation of young men:

many now prefer to remain chaste until their first relationship, a situation in which young women also tend to lose their virginity without feeling guilty or ashamed.

I do, however, think it is necessary to separate the things that have proven to be constructive from those that have had negative consequences. I watched the first stirrings of so-called sexual freedom, especially women's. Women gained the freedom to display their bodies, stimulating the fascination of many men and the wrath of some. We believed that greater sexual freedom would bring society more peace and love – and fewer wars. It is not what happened.

More recently, I saw the revolution in sexual – and even romantic – customs introduced by the rising importance of the virtual world: the growth of the porn industry, young men's fascination with all manner of visual stimuli, the tendency of many toward indolence and a lack of interest in studies and "real" girls. I see the extent to which couples' sex lives have been influenced by what they see in porno films, and don't view it favourably. On the other hand, masturbation has clearly gained a "dignity" that it was previously denied, which may lead to some interesting reflection.

The saddest thing for those who, like me, put faith in the prevalent ideals of the late 1960s and 1970s (so well documented by respected authors such as H. Marcuse and W. Reich, among others), is seeing that all these developments have only led to greater dissatisfaction for

large portions of society. We are more and more depressed, unhappy, competitive, materialistic and consumerist. I'm not sure we can attribute the sadness that plagues us solely to what has taken place in the realm of sexuality. But it seems that the premise that sexual emancipation would lay the foundations for us to be happier and more solidary, better friends and more competent in matters of love, hasn't proven to be correct in practice.

Ideals that do not work in practice should be abandoned, but it isn't what generally happens. In fact, it is incredible that all these changes haven't been accompanied by real shifts in the way most of us – including psychology professionals – think. Reality has evolved but theory hasn't!

To this day, most people can't, for example, separate sex from love and see that they are different impulses. We are taught that they are part of the same instinct and the belief remains when the facts point to the contrary, even in the minds of the highly educated. Few are the "porous" spirits capable of abandoning old notions, living with doubt and generating new ideas that better explain the facts. While it is already difficult for people to recognise sex and love as separate things, it seems it is even harder to see how sex is related to aggression. This difficulty remains even in the face of the most flagrant evidence, both biological (in the primitive world, more violent males were cer-

tainly more competent at copulating with females) and cultural (in so many languages, lewd terms designate maximum verbal violence).

I believe that knowledge should help improve quality of life, individual happiness and the consideration and pleasure we derive from interpersonal relations in general, especially more intimate ones. Beautiful theories that fall short of these objectives should be discarded and replaced with others that can help us develop knowledge that contributes to our well-being.

That is the reason for this book, which brings me back to the subject of my early studies. I consider this rewinding to be essential, since the consequences of our prior convictions have been so negative. Our so-called sexual freedom has ended up intensifying everything it was supposed to fight. We appear to be headed for an abyss. We need to muster up the humility and wisdom to see that it's better to start over, hence such a broad-sounding title – sex. This is my intention.

I know how hard it is when we find ourselves face-to-face with a point of view that is vastly different from the one we are used to. I know how difficult it is to change our paradigms and that we tend to prefer reading things that correspond with our points of view. Nevertheless, I hope that you, dear reader, will indulge and accompany me in these reflections, which, in my view, may provide a new way of looking at sex. Although there are many publications out there, I think there is

still much to be done before we can consider sex a well-resolved subject. My aim is to contribute to the discussion with a new perspective. It is a thorny, difficult subject, but I will try to set out my ideas as clearly and succinctly as possible.



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My objective here is to start anew. I believe that ruminations on the subject of sex to date have taken some erroneous turns down dead-end roads. Well-resolved matters tend to be forgotten and aren't discussed as often. We essentially fret over things that aren't going so well. When we're sick, we mostly think about how bad we feel and how to get better. When our health is restored we welcome it back with great pleasure (a negative pleasure, because it corresponds to the end of pain) and it goes back to being less relevant. Sickness is an important topic in our subjectivity, while health isn't.

Sex has unique characteristics due to the fact that it is a positive pleasure; that is, it doesn't require a prior discomfort in order to manifest. We can be doing nothing and suddenly feel the pleasant sensation of arousal. **But sex is also cause for great worry. We doubt our sexual competence or ability to satisfy our partners and worry about whether or not we conform to society's standards of beauty, frequency of sexual relations, the size of our sexual organs, etc.**

And the list doesn't stop here. We want to know if we are making the most of what is nowadays said to be

life's greatest pleasure. We want to know if others are doing better in the areas of seduction and sexual conquest, if it is important to have a range of experiences with a variety of partners, if we should masturbate as often as we do, if the pleasure we feel when touching certain parts of our bodies is "normal" or an indication of a fetish, if we should seek to live out our group sex fantasies in real life, and so on.

I know few people who are satisfied with their sex life, who don't feel they are missing out on something by living as they do. The vast majority dream of things that are way out of reach: not all of the circumstances that lead to desire provide the conditions for it to be acted upon. In fact, few people are satisfied with what they have in all of the areas considered important by contemporary culture. Most complain about their physical appearance, their social and financial position, that they have too much (or too little) work, that they are aging and have to live with the external signs of it, as well as growing dietary, alcohol, and other restrictions.

This is an era in which more and more adults have childish character traits stemming from their difficulty dealing with frustration, setbacks and limitations. I'd say the hardest thing of all is coping with limitations and the fact that we weren't born with everything. More than ever I am reminded of something Bertrand Russell once said (sadly, I have lost the original reference) to the effect that the only thing people don't com-

plain about not having enough of is common sense – which he considered the scarcest of attributes.

Sex has also taken similar paths and, as in other areas of life, what we do and the satisfaction we obtain from it are now quantitatively assessed. Most people are under the impression that others are enjoying more sexual pleasure than themselves and are satisfied with their sex lives. This is because few people like to feel outdone and many, as a result, exaggerate their own conquests. They know they're lying, but others tend to believe them. This used to be common among teenagers, but it appears to have spread to all age groups. In this quest for eternal youth, in which ageing appears to be against the rules, we are regressing more and more and are becoming adults with childish characteristics!

It is clear to me that we urgently need to go back to square one in our thinking about sexuality and hone our notions of life and the human condition. Our current way of thinking has produced very negative consequences and the number of depressed, frustrated, unhappy people – even among more privileged sections of society – is growing daily. This is because we live in a world of comparisons in which everyone looks at those who have more and are saddened by what they don't have – instead of being thankful for what they do have. No one's glass is “half full”, rather, they are all “half empty”.

I am not overlooking the correlation between what goes on in the area of sexuality and what people experi-