



*S*exuality

**Perception & Performance
Throughout History**

Sexuality

Sexuality: Perception and Performance Throughout History

Sex is sex, right? It seems simple enough, whether the word brings to mind the image of two bodies copulating for the purposes of erotic stimulation, or the uncomplicated idea of procreation. Interestingly, the reasons for partaking in sex, who to have sex with, when to have it and whether or not to have it at all has been forever dictated. In any given time period, constraining forces of morals, religious beliefs and societal taboos intertwine to create a dominant perception on sex, and make it so that sex, can no longer be, just sex.

In the timeline of human existence, from the earliest civilizations extending into the Asiatic and Arab worlds, and from European and imperial cultures advancing into the New World and present day society, men and women have all taken part in basic carnal pleasures. And through those pleasures, humans have faced basic carnal truths. Gender roles, prostitution, fertility gods and goddesses, contraception, masturbation, homosexuality, erotic arts and even sexually transmitted diseases are among the complex realities and basic truths stemming from the simple act of sex. These pleasures and

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tenets create an obviously symbiotic relationship, and it is clear to see how dominant perceptions on sex are formed and evolve from era to era.

Early Life: Cognizant Sexual Thought is Born

From the time humans developed into the standing upright position, they have been aware of the basic differences between males

Neolithic drawings showing erect penises. Prehistoric cave paintings often show a line from the tip of the penis, ending in a tulip shape, which probably represents male potency. Photo courtesy of Johan Mattelaer, M.D.



The Venus of Willendorf is one of the Paleolithic sculptures showing a highly idealized female form. Photo courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

and females, and the primeval urge to fornicate. In the Paleolithic time period, when the population was sparse, the survival of the human race necessitated sexual intercourse and reproduction. This need led to the practice of promiscuity, as man assumed a direct correlation between increased sexual partners and more children. It was some 350,000 years ago, during the Ice Age, that humans sought refuge

from the frigid temperatures and moved towards cave dwellings. Within these dwellings, early family units were formed, units that centered on the role of the mother. The mother was the epicenter of the family, because until about 9,000 B.C., the reproductive role of the man was unknown. The concept of paternity was nonexistent — further reinforcing maternal importance.ⁱ However, as the cave-living habitats became more prevalent and bonds formed between man and woman, social paternity evolved, as did a man's responsibility to his children.ⁱⁱ

To early humans, sex was considered a “natural” act. People had sex not only for the necessity of procreation, but also because it was pleasurable — a simple idea not yet influenced by the inhibitions forced by religion and morality.ⁱⁱⁱ One “natural” consequence of sex was pregnancy and childbirth — a responsibility that fell to the woman. The woman's purpose — to procreate — is depicted in Paleolithic art. The concept of pregnancy and fertility is commonly integrated into an early sculpture style, referred to as the “Venus.” Some believe that archeologist Marquis Paul de Vibraye first used the term Venus to mock the statue's armless, footless and faceless body, and to emphasize the supple contours of the bosom and posterior.^{iv} The term is now commonly used to classify similar statues from the Paleolithic time period, including the Venus of Willendorf — the highly idealized figure often used to illustrate the Venus style. The small limestone sculpture (from Willendorf, Austria, circa 24,000 B.C. to 22,000 B.C.)^v has the same bulging stomach and buttocks, voluptuous breasts and a discernible *lack* of facial features and feet.^{vi} Present-day critics look at her bulbous body as a primitive ideal.^{vii} The Venus of Willendorf's body shape is thought to symbolize either maternity or fertility with religious under-

tones. Regardless of which interpretation you subscribe to, the elements of motherhood and the female role in procreation are dominant.

As the Ice Age came to an end, the Paleolithic era metamorphosed into the Neolithic, and with this change came differing attitudes towards



Fertility goddess found at Çatalhöyük. Courtesy of the Çatalhöyük Research Project.

The Mother Fertility Goddess

Around 8,000 years ago, the Çatalhöyük civilization flourished in Anatolia (present day Turkey). A true Neolithic city, the people of Çatalhöyük used tools made of bones and stone, and depended on the self-sustaining method of growing crops—a style of living that necessitated enough children to help cultivate the land.^{ix} This need lent itself to the worshipping of a fertility goddess to help women beget more children. The importance of the fertility goddess was depicted through the structural make-up of the houses, some with an entire room devoted to the “mother goddess.”^x This room held varying objects, ranging from murals of animals to geometric patterns. Dispersed throughout the shrine area were pieces of pottery, women's breasts, leopards and bull's horns and heads. In some homes, three bulls' heads were stacked on top of each other, with a female figure on top giving birth to a bull calf.^{xi} Although differing views exist on its significance, some historians relate this formation to human fertility. Even with the “male superior” views that existed, the importance of the maternal role is pervasive.



The Egyptian god Min represented fertility and sexuality, as is depicted by his erect penis. Photo courtesy of Johan Mattelaer, M.D.

women. Men and women moved into villages, where vegetation and livestock were ample. At this time, people developed a heightened awareness around the individual roles men and women played in reproduction. Until now, it was “natural” for women to be pregnant and give birth, and man’s participation was of little consequence. But as the early Neolithic man realized his contribution, he began to scrutinize the woman’s role in the reproductive cycle. Men perceived menstruation as a woman’s failure to conceive and took it as a sign of rejection and insult.^{viii} This idea of a woman being unable to conceive or being “broken” was one of the first times when females were cast in a subordinate role. As agricultural societies became prevalent, more children equated to more field hands — creating a “sex for procreation” perception dur-

ing the Neolithic era and a need for fertility deities.

The Rise of Civilization: Three Great Empires

As thousands of years passed, extensive, noteworthy civilizations ranging from the early Egyptians to the Greeks and Romans flourished. Although the empires differed in everything from dress to penal codes, common themes including the complexities of marriage, women’s subservient role and sexual transgressions among the gods were prevalent in each populace.

Egypt: Marriage and Contraception

Child-marrriages among the Egyptians were the norm, particularly for females, who married as early as the age of 12.^{xii} This practice of marrying young is cited as a cause for disease prevalence among Egyptian women. In one of the oldest known medical texts, *Kahun Papyrus*, circa 1900 B.C., conditions ranging from digestive problems to “a backache with a dragging-down feeling between her thighs,” now known as prolapse of the uterus are described.^{xiii} Men’s sexual disorders were not only better documented, but also better understood. The document describes conditions of impotence where a man was incapable of “fulfilling his duty” and referred to the commonly known venereal disease of gonorrhea as a “copulation sickness.”^{xiv} It is evident through this historical document that healers in Egyptian society affiliated disease with sex — and we see an early stigma attached to this simple, basic act.

Among the ancient Egyptians we also see some of the earliest forms of contraception. They realized that in order to prevent pregnancy it was

necessary to stop the seminal fluid from connecting with the womb.^{xv} With this goal in mind, Egyptians became knowledgeable on the tonics, concoctions and instruments needed for birth control. Practices included cleaning up seminal fluid after ejaculation and blocking off the cervical opening to prevent insemination. The *Kahun Papyrus* also describes recipes of crocodile dung, honey and sodium carbonate for insertion into the vagina to block the seminal fluid. Another commonly used method was *coitus interruptus* — where the



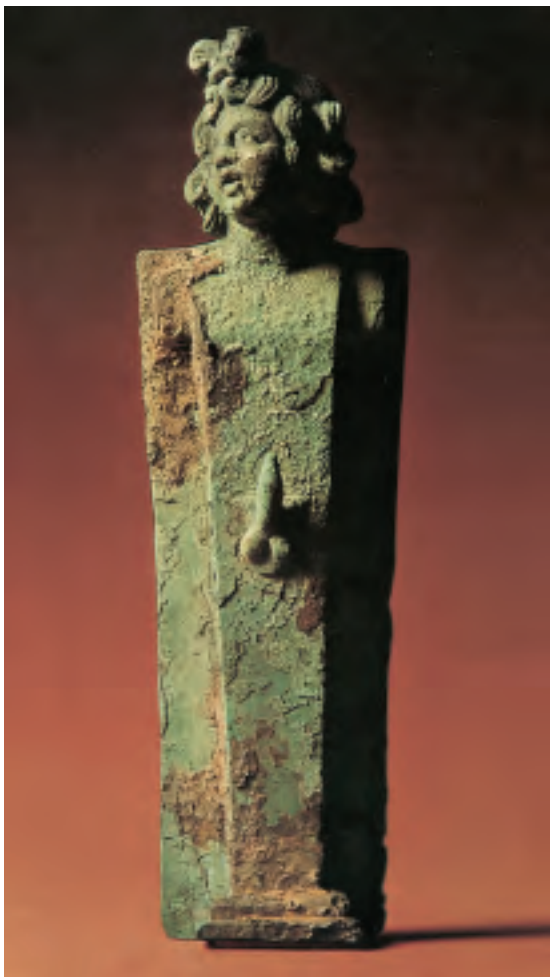
This Greek vase painting is one of many depicting pederasty in the culture. Photo courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

penis was removed from the vagina before ejaculation. In addition to the ingested and inserted contraceptives, it was not unusual for people to practice non-reproductive sex through heterosexual anal intercourse or intercourse with animals (zoophilia).^{xvi}

Graeco Culture: Homosexuality and the Heterai

While the Egyptians were expanding their knowledge on contraception, the men of Greece were satisfying their sexual urges through pederasty. Greek men found great passion in loving a boy who had not reached the full age of maturity, but had passed the age of puberty.^{xvii} As the entire notion of pederasty crosses the threshold into homosexuality, there is scholarly disagreement around the extent and quite possibly the existence of physical contact in these man-boy relationships. Those who hold tightly to their Judeo-Christian beliefs think that this relationship stemmed purely from a mental, emotional stimulation. However, Greek works of art, particularly vase paintings, depict a different story. The subject of homosexuality is illustrated in two ways — through same-sex anal intercourse and through interfemoral connection. In the latter and more prevalent example, two men (usually with a dis-

Left: A Greek Herm is a square column with a male head at the top and an erect penis in the middle. The god Hermes originally represented fertility. Photo courtesy of Johan Mattelaer, M.D.



Three classifications for Greek women existed: the wife for procreation, concubines for daily sexual gratification and heterai (sometimes called high-class prostitutes) for both sensual and intellectual stimulation.

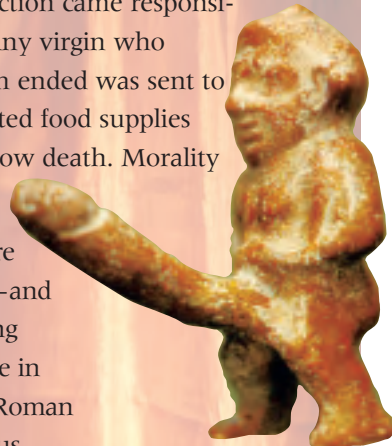
Graeco-Roman Infusion: Divine Sexuality

The Greek and Roman gods are the embodiment of humor, power, indiscretion, love and hate all integrated into one divine being. It is from these celestial creatures that we can become familiar with the many transgressions that occurred during the eras of these two great civilizations. And it is the stories of these gods that entice our imaginations about sex in the heavens above.

Early Roman gods were symbols of morality and sometimes played the role of guardian.^{xxvii} The goddess Vesta represented this protector trait. She was charged with guarding the hearth and house, and fulfilled her duties as long as her priestesses—the Vestal virgins—tended to her sacred fire. These virgins had 30 years of servitude, during which time they were required to maintain the chastity of their name.^{xxviii} The Vestal virgins were honored as being the only female priestesses in Rome, but with that distinction came responsibility—and punishment for misdeeds. Any virgin who relinquished her chastity before her term ended was sent to a small underground chamber with limited food supplies and dwindling oxygen—making for a slow death. Morality was absolute, even among the gods.

After Rome conquered Greece, the empire integrated Greek gods into their society—and not always to a moral end. One interesting match, which could only have been made in the heavens, was between Bacchus, the Roman god of drink and inebriation, and Dionysus, the Greek god of wine.^{xxix} Worship of Bacchus involved festive orgies.^{xxx} Introduced to the Romans around 200 B.C. celebrations originally took place three times a year and were initially open only to women. However, once this festival opened its doors to men, respectability became passé. Men and women discarded emotional and sexual inhibitions and participated in mass orgies.^{xxxi} The extremity of this situation led the Roman Senate to ban such displays of immorality—but not before the gods and their mortal followers had their fun.

Bacchus's legacy continued, as he coupled with Venus (Aphrodite in Greece) and she bore his two sons—Hymen (the god of marriage) and Priapus. The latter, known for his large, always-erect penis, represented lust.^{xxxii} Though considered to be repulsive in appearance, his essence—that of a sexual being—was pervasive in both societies. Priapus also lent his name to present day urology and the painful medical condition known as priapism. This problem creates a persistent penile erection that continues beyond, or is unrelated to, sexual stimulation. Clearly, Priapus and his sexual, phallic representation left an impression on not only the Graeco-Roman sexual culture but also on present day society.



Priapus was the god of lust and known for his always-erect penis.

Courtesy of Ziya Kirkali, M.D.

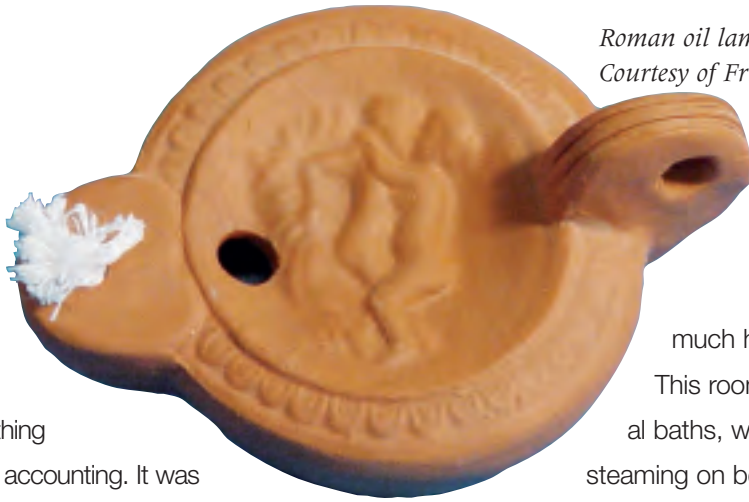


Talented Greek heterai (or courtesans) entertained men physically and intellectually. Ludovisi Throne. Courtesy of Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

parity in the ages) are seen together, with one man's penis being rubbed in the thighs of his partner.^{xxxiii} The man-boy relationships left no room for the female counterpart. In turn, Greek women found their own method of self-fulfillment—masturbation—and often turned to each other for sexual gratification. Women used a wooden or sometimes leather instrument called the *olisbo*, now commonly referred to as a dildo.^{xxxiv} This tool could be used alone or with other women while partaking in homosexual relations in groups called *tribads*.^{xxxv}

This division between men and women is clearly seen through the Greek sexual practices, as is woman's overall inferiority to man. Three classifications for Greek women existed: the wife for procreation, concubines for daily sexual gratification and *heterai* (sometimes called high-class prostitutes) for both sensual and intellectual stimulation. The *heterai* was the one group of women who had success in the man's world. While the wives of Greek men were forbidden from learning about the arts and sciences, the *heterai* made it their

Roman oil lamp with embracing figures.
Courtesy of Fritz Moll, M.D.



life's work to become well versed on everything from literature to accounting. It was this intellectual facet, not only their physical attributes, that made the *heterai* popular.^{xxi} For their uniqueness, the women asked for only one thing — financial grandeur. From gold threads to earrings, beautifully woven tapestries to coins, the *heterai* used these indicators of monetary stability to carve their niche in the world. This progression in woman's rights influenced the role of women in the next great empire: Rome.

The Roman Empire: Public Baths and Prostitutes

The grandeur of public baths, tax-paying prostitutes and mythological deities were what gave the Roman Empire the exotic distinction that it holds even today. It is also these elements that helped shape the insouciant, nonchalant attitude toward sex that permeated through ancient Rome.

Regardless of class or socioeconomic levels, men and women visited Rome's many public, co-ed baths to not only bathe, but also to visit with friends.^{xxii} Hundreds of naked bodies socializing and bathing together inadvertently produced a carefree perception towards sex. The elaborate baths, many from the 2nd century B.C., were made of granite, alabaster or basalt, and accommodated 300 to 1,500 people.^{xxiii} After undressing, a man (or woman) would enter the *tepidarium*, or the warm room, where hot-air ducts controlled the temperature. After this steaming session, he would move on to the

much hotter *caldarium*. This room housed the actual baths, where bathing and steaming on benches occurred.

After finishing, the bather would move back to the *tepidarium* before completing the regimen with a dip in the cold waters of the *frigidarium*.^{xxiv} The Diocletian, Trajan and Caracalla baths, with their artistically landscaped gardens and beautiful murals, were among the many popular baths visited daily by hundreds of patrons. While baths may not have been a hotbed for sexual trysts, it is the simple act of uninhibited nakedness in combination with the “private” act of bathing that helps illustrate the open sexual attitude the Romans held. This attitude was further reinforced by the society's business-like perception of prostitution.

As in any business, prostitution in ancient Rome required licenses for both the prostitute and the



Bronze phallus amulets were worn to protect against sickness and to ensure fertility and victory.
Courtesy of Johan Mattelaer, M.D.

Baths of Caracalla
1859–1968. Courtesy of the Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, London.





Mosaic entitled Satyr and Maenid, found at the House of the Faun, 2nd century Pompeii. Courtesy of Rainer Engel, M.D.

brothel owner and both paid a tax to operate. The legitimacy of this enterprise creates a strong perception on how sex for money and free sex was not only permissible, but also a basic facet of Roman society. The Roman *aediles* were the regulatory force when it came to prostitution. Prostitutes had to “check in” with these magistrates, and supply them with name, age, place of birth and pseudonym.^{xxxv} One might deduce that because such a well-regulated system was in place, this form of business would be well kept. However, accounts of Roman brothels describe rancid smells in dirty rooms with bad ventilation. Regardless of the decrepit conditions, men visited the brothels frequently, and in 180 B.C., Emperor Caligula instituted a prostitution tax known as *vectigal ex capturis*. In later years, this tax was used for the restoration and upkeep of state buildings, and the tax was not abolished

until the time of Theodosius in the middle of the 4th century A.D.^{xxxvi} This legalized form of sex on demand illustrates the Roman’s view that sexuality and the act of coitus was not a private, religious matter, but rather a basic commodity analogous to shopping or dining.

The fall of the Roman Empire took with it the public baths and legalized prostitution, and morality and religion lay in wait to reshape the very perception of sex. After all, keeping the opinions of outside minds from infiltrating society is not feasible, and certainly was not possible after the intrusion of one powerful force that changed sexual perceptions forever: the Christian Church.



Caligula, a 4th century A.D. Roman emperor instituted a prostitution tax. Courtesy of print collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

In 180 B.C., Emperor Caligula instituted a prostitution tax known as vectigal ex capturis. In later years, this tax was used for the restoration and upkeep of state buildings.

Domination: The Christian Church

Though historians have differing opinions on what exactly caused the fall of the Roman Empire, one thing is for certain—the Christian Church was standing by to introduce a structured, debauchery-free way of life.^{xxxiv} During this time, the Church's focus on morality brought to light two issues—sex and marriage—and the changes it strived to implement in society were on a scale never before attempted. And as these changes were successfully integrated, sexual perceptions were forever altered. The Church authoritatively stated that sex was disgusting and sinful—a vice that should be completely controlled, and went as far as equating morality with celibacy. The idea of “no sex” went against the grain of every preceding society, including the Roman culture, whose public baths, legalized prostitution and sex-crazed gods were part of the very make-up of its civilization. But in its mission to create a morally sound Rome, the Christian Church showed no reservation in making its views heard.

The Church's opinion on marriage was simple—only weak human beings who were emotionally and sexually needy subscribed to such an institution.^{xxxv} Polygamy was even worse. A second marriage was considered adultery, a third was fornication and the fourth was called “swinish.”^{xxxvi} However, procreation was necessary (for the continuation of society) and allowances were made. Sex in marriage was permissible—but only on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, unless they fell during a fasting period or on a Christian holiday.^{xxxvii} Furthermore, when a married couple did have sex, it was necessary for the couple to be a man and a woman, for them to have the idea of concep-



Ancient Christian church, Luxor, 1881. Courtesy of the Dorot Jewish Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

tion (not pleasure) in mind while having sex and for the man to be in a sexually superior, “on top” position.^{xxxviii}

Two public enemies of the Church were homosexuality and contraception. In 538 A.D., the Roman Emperor Justinian claimed that natural disasters and famines were a result of homosexuality, setting the tone for how the Church perceived fornication between men. Three years later, a catastrophic plague wiped out one-third of the population in Constantinople—further reinforcing the words of the Emperor.^{xxxix} The Church stigmatized homosexuality and viewed man-to-man relationships as sinful and threatening to the entire Christian populace. Equally as blasphemous in the eyes of the Church was contraception—whether it was used in the form of oral sex, anal intercourse or



Emperor Justinian explains the reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire in Dante's *Inferno*. Courtesy of the British Library, Yates Thompson 36.

even *coitus interruptus* — a practice utilized by the early Egyptians. Masturbation was also a common problem and perpetrators were punished by the Church. Penalties ranging from fasting for several days to seven years' penance were implemented for both homosexuality and the use of contraception. Extreme consequences for masturbators included castration and public humiliation.^{xi}

Most societies, in the pre- and post-Christian Church eras had limitations, restrictions and varying perceptions on at least one sexual issue ranging from infanticide to masturbation and homosexuality to contraception. The Christian Church, being unique in every way possible, did not have limitations on some of these issues, but rather on all — everything was sinful, everything was forbidden. The Church's perception on



Some believe that the lingam is representative of the Hindu god Shiva's erect penis.

Courtesy of Sakti Das, M.D.

sex marks one of the first and most powerful times in history where religion becomes the catalyst for changing the opinion of the masses. Not having yet spread its reach across the globe, the Christian Church would have been astonished at the events unfolding just a few seas and continental divides away. In the Asiatic and Arab worlds, sexual freedom was blossoming to climactic heights.

Exotic and Erotic: India, East Asia and the Islamic World

Land of the Kama Sutra

When people think of sexuality in India, images of tantric sex, erotic illustrations and impossibly difficult sexual positions merge to define a prevailing theme: the *Kama Sutra*. But unlike today's pornographic magazine, this classical Indian text is held in high regard and mirrors many of the class distinctions and religious implications of the predominately Hindu land.^{xii} The *Vedas*, comparable in status to the Christian *Holy Bible*, instructs Hindus of the Four Aims in life: *dharma*, meaning fulfilling moral, religious and social obligations; *artha*, meaning material well-being; *kama*, referring to pleasure and love; and *moksha*, meaning salvation and a release from the cycle of rebirth.^{xiii} As Hindus found it increasingly difficult to find success in the first and last Aim, they focused on

Unlike a lewd pornographic magazine, the Kama Sutra is held in high regard and mirrors many of the class distinctions and religious implications of the predominately Hindu land.

the *artha* and *kama* — making sex a religious duty to be treated with deference and cultivated through practice.

The *Kama Sutra* loosely translates to “aphorisms on pleasure” and includes the notion of love — a subject that sexual handbooks in other cultures avoided.^{xiii} Taking this sensitivity into account, the Indian text humanizes sex and transforms it into the emotional act of making love — thus reinforcing the third Aim. To assist men and women achieve their goal of pleasure

and love, the *Kama Sutra* is broken down by subject (embraces, kisses, nail marks and love bites, love positions, oral pleasures, etc.) and then further classified. For example, when describing oral pleasures, the text states that “there are eight techniques of fellatio” and then goes on to explain the sucking, pinching and swallowing that can be incorporated in oral sex.^{xiv} This classification system within the text replicates the applied divisions between the classes and caste system in Hindu India. The mirroring of the societal structure in this handbook (circa 2nd to the 5th century A.D.) is a clear indication of how culture and religion influenced the open and accepting sexual perceptions in India.

Other practices, ranging from using sexual enhancers to contraception, are also influenced by the



As the wife of Shiva, the Hindu goddess Kali is associated with fertility. Courtesy of Rainer Engel, M.D.

Hindu’s goal of succeeding in the third Aim. In order to maximize sexual pleasure, it was important that the man and woman — and particularly their respective sexual organs — were a good match. If however, a man’s penis, or *lingam*, was too small to satisfy a woman’s vagina, or *yoni*, the *Kama Sutra* had remedies. A man could place “armlets” of gold, silver, ivory or similar material on his penis — expanding the overall girth. Natural methods of penile enlargement included rubbing the penis with prickly insects to cause swelling.^{xv}

The *Kama Sutra* also provided recipes for aphrodisiacs to assist people with reaching their goal. And because pregnancy could interfere with pleasure, the book gave permission to use contraception, ranging from inserting salt into the vagina to ingesting palm leaf and red chalk.^{xvi}

The Indian ritual of Sati called for a widow to throw herself in her husband’s funeral pyre. Courtesy of the British Library. Add.Or.2790.



In addition to the Four Aims, Indians held the institution of marriage in high regard. One early Indian custom was *sati* (translating to “a virtuous woman”) and referred to the act of a widow throwing herself in her husband’s funeral pyre to accompany him in death.^{xvii} This custom of *sati* and the marriage between sex and religion were among the many practices that disgusted many of India’s invaders — starting with the 16th century Portuguese Christians who arrived at the end of the Crusades and ending with the British rule that spanned almost 200 years.

Erotic scenes from a South Indian temple.
Photo courtesy of Sheldon North.



“The burning of Hindu widows in [*sati*] was replaced by the roasting to death of Jews in the *autos-da-fé* celebrated at Goa,” he said.^{xviii} The Portuguese captured Goa in 1510, and had one single mission — to enforce Christianity. The ruthless Portuguese campaign was aided by the arrival of the Jesuits in 1542 and further fueled by the arrival of the Inquisition (Papal) in 1560. The invaders were relentless and attempted to erase all non-Christian elements within Goa. Where temples once stood,



Love and eroticism combine at this Indian temple in Varanasi (formerly in Nepal). Photo courtesy of Sheldon North.

Christian churches were built. Sacred books were destroyed, Christian statutes implemented and Hindu priests deported.^{xix} The pillaging of Goan villages and infiltration of Christianity forced Hindus to cease practicing their own religious and sexual beliefs.

With the Christian stronghold in place, the native sex practices and the *Kama Sutra* were scrutinized and construed as vulgar and primitive. To counteract these depravities, the Portuguese implemented their own “proper” and Christian way of having sex, commonly known as the “missionary position.” Ironically, it was at this time that the *Kama Sutra* reached the height of its popularity.¹

The Portuguese forbade the custom of *sati* and forced monogamy on the Goans — instilling Western ideologies and moral codes in the Indians — ideas further reinforced (although not as violently) by the British invaders in 1757.ⁱⁱ In their quest to improve women’s rights, the British banned *sati* and implemented the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 — giving widows the right to remarry.ⁱⁱⁱ As the British Empire expanded over the next 200 years, women’s education and other rights that present day Americans would

call “inalienable” were slowly implemented — but not without the forced assimilation of Indian into British culture. The infiltration of Christianity — and the British rule that ended in 1947 — altered the core foundation of a 2000-year-old culture, and forever changed perceptions towards women and sex. Foreign nations came and went, leaving the imprint of their views, cultures and traditions as parting gifts. During that time, India’s neighbor to the northeast — China — was practicing a similar free-sex ideology, one that wasn’t easily affected by Christianity and the Crusades.

East Asian Delight

For a man to nurture his male powers, he must nourish his yang essence by absorbing yin essence.

— *Classic of the Plain Girl (Su Nu Ching)* ^{lxiii}

The early Taoist doctrine, *Classic of the Plain Girl* or *Su Nu Ching*, epitomizes the primary reason that men and women in early China had sexual relations. “When men and women indulge freely in sex, exchanging their bodily fluids and breathing each other’s breath, it is like fire and water meeting in such perfect proportions that neither one defeats the other,” it reads. As a fundamental part of living a long, healthy life, men and women needed to spontaneously engage in sexual intercourse, complementing each other, nourishing each other and connecting on a spiritual level. The Taoist believed that women represented an inexhaustible yin essence, and it was this essence that men — represented by the easily depleted yang



The Pa Kua has eight columns that represent the eight life areas with the fundamental concept of yin-yang harmony depicted in the center. Courtesy of Rainer Engel, M.D.

Heathens to Christians: New World Exploration

When the Spanish arrived in the New World (now comprised of parts of Mexico and Central and South

America) the sodomy, homosexuality and primitive behavior of the Mayans horrified them. Although the Incas and Aztecs had strict restrictions against such acts, it was the Mayans’ view on life that the Spaniards first encountered. ^{lxvii}

^{lxviii} The Spaniards decided that these pre-Columbian tribes had no sense of morality and no fear of eternal damnation. From open

homosexuality to the erotic pottery of the Moche civilization, the inhabitants of the New World were, in all respects, heathens. And so, like the Portuguese in Goa and the Church in Rome, the Spaniards set out to reform, convert and Christianize the inhabi-

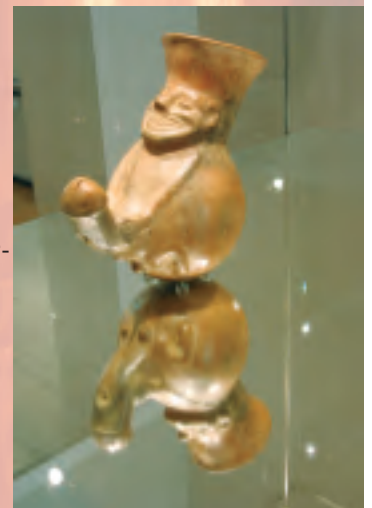
tants of the New World. The next wave of newcomers brought

*Aztec virility figurine.
1200–1400 A.D.
Courtesy of Robert
Greenspan, M.D.*

the Puritan pilgrims that inhabited what is present day Northeast United States. The rigid Puritan values, mirroring those of the Spaniards, tolerated no moral

transgressions. The

Puritans were quick to judge and even quicker to execute suspected offenders. ^{lxix}



*Moche drinking vessel
1000–500 B.C.*

Women represented an inexhaustible yin essence, and it was this essence that men — represented by the easily depleted yang essence — needed to absorb in order to achieve yin-yang harmony.

Taking liver extract from a white dog killed during the first moon and applying it to the penis three times before rinsing it off with pre-dawn well water guaranteed an additional three inches to the penis.



Woodcut with representations of dildos, artificial vulvas, penis supports and other sex aids. Japan, 1830. Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

essence — needed to absorb in order to achieve yin-yang harmony and ultimately prolong their lives.^{iv} And because men were required to stockpile yin essence, it was necessary for them to have as much sex with as many partners as possible. Although this Taoist way to longevity and healthiness could be perceived by other societies as a means of wild, carefree fornication (and likely to be classified as such by the Christian Church), the sexual prowess of Chinese men was tightly controlled. Ejaculating was not healthy for a man, for in that act, he lost part of his yang essence. To avoid this loss, he was instructed to practice *coitus reservatus* and *coitus obstructus*. The 7th century Chinese physician Master



The Yellow Emperor, also known as Huang-ti, is credited with authoring some of the old-est Chinese sex manuals. Courtesy of Rainer Engel, M.D.

Tung-hsuan gave recommendations on how to apply *coitus reservatus* prior to ejaculation: “the man closes his eyes and concentrates his thoughts: he presses his tongue against the roof of his mouth, bends his back, and stretches his neck. He opens his nostril wide and squares his shoulders, closes his mouth, and sucks in his breath. Then he will not ejaculate and the semen will ascend inward on its own account.”^{iv} *Coitus obstructus* had a similar non-ejaculatory objective, and involved redirecting the semen from the penis into the bladder.^{vi} Regardless of which method was selected, a man was instructed to prolong intercourse to gain yin essence.

These essence-preserving methods were taught in various Taoist sex manuals including the *Secrets of the Jade Chamber*, *Recipes of the Plain Girl* and *Secret Prescriptions for the Bedchamber*.^{vi} Some texts had sections on the importance of the sexual encounter, methods of foreplay, a description of intercourse — including sanctioned positions, the health benefits of sex and choosing the right partner and different tonics and mixtures to enhance sexual pleasure.^{lviii} Supplements to these manuals included techniques on how to shrink the



Confucius altered the free-sex ideology of China. Confucianism spread as a moral code throughout the country. Courtesy of the General Research Division, the New York Public Library Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

vagina or enlarge a penis for maximum sexual gratification. One method included taking liver extract from a white dog killed during the first moon and applying it to the penis three times before rinsing it off

with pre-dawn well water — a procedure that guaranteed an additional three inches to the penis. This method may even make present day charlatans of penile enlarging treatments raise an eyebrow, but offers similarities to the methodologies seen among the Hindu Indians.^{lix}

The necessity of preserving the yang essence called for strict views on male masturbation and homosexuality. The view on masturbation was simple: it was destructive. Yang essence was lost, and nothing was gained. Homosexuality was not seen as constructive, due to the lack of yin essence, but it was accepted as long as a man did not ejaculate. This concession was also given to anal intercourse and oral sex.^{lx} Masturbation and homosexuality for women was permissible. When masturbating, Chinese women — like their Greek predecessors — used dildos made from either wood or ivory and sometimes used a phallus-shaped plant that would enlarge and harden after being soaked in hot water.^{lxi} Women had no sexual restrictions, and in the eyes of the Taoist culture, as long as man's yang essence was not lost, then any sexual act was acceptable — with morality never being an influencing factor.



Chinese erotic prints instructed brides and grooms on the art of lovemaking. Ca. 1800. Courtesy of the William P. Didusch Center for Urologic History.

In the last two centuries B.C., Confucianism infiltrated the Chinese society with “moral” views. The perception on sex and women changed, and began to match the prudish ideas of other societies. Basic Confucian ideologies sanctioned marriage, though allowed men to have multiple wives, and viewed women as a means for producing sons (daughters were not desired). Confucius himself expressed his disdain for the female species when he said, “Women and servants are the most difficult to deal with. If you are familiar with them, they cease to be humble. If you keep a distance from them, they resent



Japanese couple making love. Woodcut by Moronobu, ca. 1680, Japan. Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

it.”^{lxvii} A middle class Confucius man would have an average of three to 12 wives, with an additional 30 concubines — and the man was obligated to fulfill the sexual desires of all.^{lxviii} Despite having to satiate so many women, men still utilized prostitutes, frequenting “green bowers” (named for the green lacquered wood work). These visits were not for sexual titillation but rather for food, music and conversation, and most of all, for the reprieve from sexual duties.^{lxix}

Confucianism spread over the vast regions of China, into the Ming and Ch’ing dynasties and the mid-17th century. It became a “moral code”

rather than a religious doctrine and implemented rigid regulations and censorship on sex and women’s rights, equivalent to the constraints placed on other nations by the Christian Church.^{lxx}

As China became a breeding ground for all things moral, its Pacific Rim sister resisted the constraints of morality. Visitors to Japan between the 16th and 19th centuries were surprised to find no red-light districts and seedy sex establishments.^{lxxi} They did encounter self-contained cities known as “pleasure quarters” that offered a relaxed atmosphere in a clean and well-regulated environment. The Japanese had no shame or negative views towards courtesans or prostitutes, and instead of hiding them away in dilapidated areas, they celebrated their elegance and existence. These pleasure quarters inspired great works of poetry and art, and sex handbooks including the *Forty-eight Ways of Having Commerce with Harlots*.^{lxxii} This carefree sexual



Chinese prostitutes in the red-light district. Courtesy of the Institute for the History of Medicine and Ethics, University of Cologne, Germany.



Geishas were pervasive in Japanese society. Courtesy of the photography collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, the New York Public Library Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

attitude also shaped the way newlyweds approached their wedding night. Sex manuals known as *Shunga* were created to instruct the bride on techniques and positions.^{lxviii} A popular aspect of Japanese culture were *geishas* — talented dancers, singers and musicians.^{lxix} The *geishas*, who were mostly women, provided customers with entertainment that could be found nowhere else — and made an exotic, delicate (although not completely accurate) name for themselves in Western society. Similar to these Japanese sexual muses were the concubines of the harem found in Persia.

The Islamic World

Baghdad was built in 763 A.D. on top of what some historians believe is the capital of the world's oldest civilization — Sumer, just south of the ancient city of Babylon. Women in this predominantly Muslim 8th century A.D. society were

classified as being either a respectable lady or a courtesan — and both were found in many households, regardless of socioeconomic divide. The lady was admired from afar as an idol but kept secluded with strict prohibitions.^{lxx} The courtesan was loved for her intelligence, wit and talent, and most of all, for everything her counterpart was not allowed to be. The idea of keeping a “proper” woman sheltered from the evils of society led to the creation of the *harem*. Affluent families kept women in separate rooms so that they would not have to co-mingle with the vices of the world. But, because financially disadvantaged families could not afford multi-room

Persian couple copulating. Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.



Female Genital Mutilation: From the South Pacific to Sub-Saharan Africa

The Victorian fear of venereal diseases, in combination with increased prostitution, bred a fanatical craze for chaste prostitutes—the only guarantee a man had that his pleasure didn't bring pain.^{xciii} In response to this need, sex-workers perpetually stitched together their hymens to create the illusion of virginity and indirectly imply cleanliness.^{xciv}

Delving further into the idea of surgically altering women's genitalia is the practice of female genital mutilation or female circumcision.^{xcv} The primary types of mutilation include partially or fully removing the clitoris and the labia minora, narrowing the vaginal wall and sewing the vagina shut with only small holes for urine and menstrual blood to pass through.^{xcvi}

Such mutilation is a classic example of how societal views and religious customs influence sexual practices, and even more so, sexual perceptions. Although genital mutilation has been in existence for thousands of years, and is seen across many cultures, it is prevalent in parts of the South Pacific and Africa. From Papua New Guinea to Mali to Sudan, many societies view mutilation as a method of purification. The female genitalia are considered disgusting and poisonous to select groups, and to remedy this problem, these operations are performed.^{xcvii} Girls in Africa, as young as three years of age, have had their genitals surgically altered, many times without anesthesia or trained medical professionals. Those who are fortunate to survive the procedures face lifelong medical problems, including severe complications during childbirth, chronic infections, bleeding and abscesses.^{xcviii} Many times, young girls forcibly undergo traumatizing mutilation in the tribal community's effort to minimize their sexual desires and ensure chastity.^{xcix} Vaginal walls are surgically narrowed to allow men more pleasure during intercourse. Clearly, in many of these cases, the woman's voice is not heard. A community's role in female circumcision creates the perception of societal control over a woman's sexual identity.

dwelling, they all congregated in common areas, forming a sanctuary for women and giving birth to the term *harem*.^{lxxi} However, as time progressed, the word *harem* began to identify the woman's quarters occupied by the courtesans.

As the early Muslims invaded Persia, they were exposed to professional storytellers and tales of exotic dancing and singing girls. These talented

entertainers became the object of men's desires. As willing courtesans, these women ultimately redefined the term *harem*. As men went to *harems* to seek out pleasures of the mind and body, the courtesans had only one goal—to accumulate wealth. Under Muslim law, if a woman was financially independent she was allowed to purchase her freedom, and so it was with this objective that courtesans performed—and gave the Christian crusaders an exotic image of the Islamic world.^{lxxii} The splendor of the *harems* reached its full potential in the mid-15th century, when the Ottoman Turks appeared and established the "Grand Turk"—the epitome of the a *harem*. The Grand Turk was a self-sustaining city (much like the one

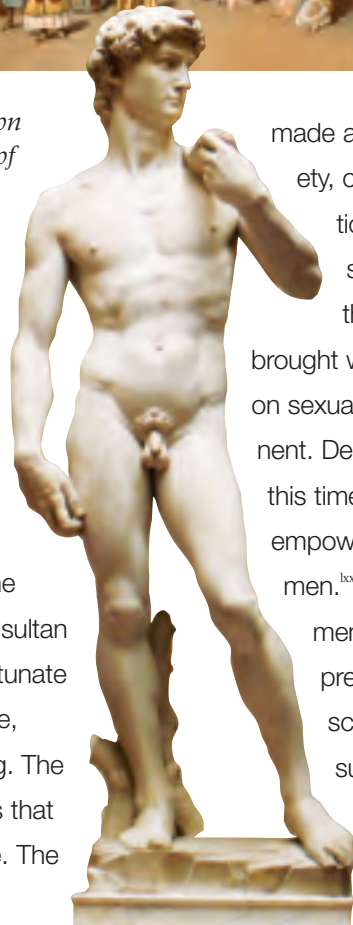


Life in the Harem. Courtesy of The Library of Congress.



Grand spectacle of Turkish harem put on by Keralfy Brothers in 1882. Courtesy of The Library of Congress.

seen in the pleasure quarters of Japan) and housed guards, jewels, a *Koran* reader and between 300 and 1,200 concubines. Most of the concubines in the Grand Turk were slaves bought or captured from the Mediterranean and Black Sea and given to the sultan (who ruled over the Grand Turk).^{lxxiii} If a girl was lucky, the sultan would invite her to his bed; the unfortunate ones spent their days in the mundane, trivial tasks of sewing or bookkeeping. The most coveted position, however, was that of “Sultan Valideh” — the sultan’s wife. The concubines practiced various sexual techniques during their sessions with the sultan. Similar to the Indian and Chinese sex manuals was the Arabic text, *The Perfumed Garden for the Soul’s Recreation*. This handbook, circa the 15th or 16th century, provided explicit and practical methods for sexual intercourse and even trouble-shot erectile dysfunction, claiming to assist “the man to whom erection offers difficulties.”^{lxxiv} Whether or not a modern-day urologist would agree to the book’s suggestion for treating erectile dysfunction is



Michelangelo’s David.
Photo courtesy of Prachi Patel.

debatable, but the attempt clearly illustrates established practices in treating sexual problems.^{lxxv}

Forward and Backward: Renaissance, Reformation and Rebellion

As world civilizations were expanding, the Christian Crusades

made a deep and violent impact on society, changing the mainstream perception of gender roles along with society’s view on sex. However, the Renaissance in Europe brought with it conflicting ideas and views on sexual attitude throughout the continent. Despite the church’s best efforts, this time of intellectual expansion empowered Italians, particularly the men.^{lxxvi} Sexuality was a dominant element of the period’s art — with nudity prevalent in paintings, murals and sculptures. The commonality of such imagery allowed the men and women of the Renaissance to maintain a sexually open attitude. While the French and Italians were quicker to accept the “immoral” changes occurring in the region, the Spaniards were more resistant to the debauchery and set out to continue expanding their morals and their stake into the New World.^{lxxvii}

The Renaissance was an ideal time for rebellion, and much of Europe moved to embrace the open attitudes and intellectual stimulation of the period. Such thinking bred malcontent with the

Ivory dildo. Courtesy of the William P. Didusch Center for Urologic History.





The renowned lover Casanova entertained guests by inflating condoms. 1872. Courtesy of The Library of Congress.

Church by many, and in the early 16th century, public opinion changed once again when Martin Luther formally rebelled against the Catholic Church and introduced Protestantism.

Luther posted *The 95 Theses* and gathered a following of people disgruntled with the Catholic

Church's rigid constraints. His actions only subtly affected sexual perceptions of the period, as some Lutheran views — including the depravity of brothels — were firmly rooted in Catholic beliefs. Marriage, however, was stripped of its sacramental value.^{lxxx} Luther

interpreted a woman's refusal to have sex with her husband as abandonment, and marriage was relegated to the secular level.^{lxxxi}

As Europe progressed, the age of marriage was increasing with life expectancy.^{lxxxii} What this

brought, however, was an increase in premarital sex and illegitimate births. In some cities in France at the end of the 1700s, 10 percent of children were illegitimate.^{lxxxiii} This, along with an increased awareness of sexually transmitted disease, ushered in yet another development that would change society's view on sex: the condom. The first condoms were made of woven fabrics and therefore were not effective. Preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases improved with the use of sheep bladders or other animal products. Mass production of the condom began after the discovery of the rubber vulcanization process in the mid-1800s. However, it wasn't until the 1930s that latex condoms were introduced, and because of their affordability and efficacy, used by the masses.^{lxxxiv}

Like it had during the Renaissance and Reformation, 18th century Europe was exploding



Anti-masturbation devices from the late 1800's. Courtesy of Fritz Moll, M.D.



Margaret Sanger was an early supporter of contraception and birth control as basic women's rights. Courtesy of The Library of Congress.

The first condoms were made of woven fabrics and therefore were not effective. Preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases improved with the use of sheep bladders or other animal products.

with intellectual growth and investigation — including ideas relating to procreation.

Though the sperm-egg fertilization link would not be discovered until the 1800s, scientists of the time became more knowledgeable on the roles of both men and women in reproduction. Anton van Leeuwenhoek, though resistant at first, had viewed and described spermatozoa in 1677.^{lxxxv} He felt that

discussing the topic of sperm and intercourse was not proper, but made great advancements after overcoming his own inhibitions.^{lxxxvi} Much like the Taoist Chinese, men of the time were urged to not “waste” seminal fluid on acts such as masturbation and homosexual intercourse. Groups including the Seventh Day Adventists further reinforced the idea of “no waste” by warning of blindness, disease and moral and physical depravity for those who engaged in such acts.^{lxxxvii} Though the community as a whole became more liberal, society’s restrictive parameters did not.

The 1800s ushered in the days of Queen Victoria, the 18-year-old royal who weathered the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny and the Chartist Movement. As the Industrial Revolution began, society was culturally expanding. Under her reign, Queen Victoria established the 1851 Great

Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in London’s Hyde Park. This event showcased artistic, scientific and industrial advancements from around the world.^{lxxxviii} The second

half of the 19th century brought tremendous shifts to European thought, as art and music shifted from the social norm to become more avant-garde. Nudity became prominent and blatant once again, most notably with Edouard Manet’s showing of his infamous *Le*

Déjeuner sur l’Herbe (*The*



This anti-masturbation ring was sold in the Sears catalog in the 1920s. Courtesy of the William P. Didusch Center for Urologic History.



Pornographic cards were sent to Civil War soldiers to keep up morale in the fields. Courtesy of Waltraut Reuter.

*Nudity became prominent and blatant once again, most notably with Edouard Manet's showing of his infamous *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (*The Picnic*), rejected by the Salon of 1863.*

*Edouard Manet's painting, *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* created a stir due to its provocative subject matter. Courtesy of the Samuel Courtauld Trust, Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, London.*

Picnic). Rejected by the Salon of 1863 because of its scandalous subject matter — a nude woman accompanied by two fully-dressed men — Manet presented his work at the Salon des Refusés, along with others such as Paul Cézanne, Camille Pissarro and J.A.M. Whistler.^{lxxxix} The idea of social pleasure permeated through society — and with it came a negative consequence of carnal pleasure — a rise in sexually transmitted diseases.

Victorian ideals perceived women as delicate beings who needed to be sheltered from the world's vices. They also were considered prudish

and unenthusiastic as related to sex, an idea that led husbands to fulfill their sexual desires elsewhere — most notably with the increasing number of prostitutes.^{xc} From New Orleans to Paris and Chicago to Manchester, prostitution flourished, as did the spread of gonorrhea and syphilis. Diseases were passed from prostitute to man to wife to unborn child, and the medical world was powerless.^{xcii} In 1850s London, 30,000 cases of venereal disease were reported, and in 1914 America, one source claimed that half the male population was infected with gonorrhea and by 1970, 100 million cases were treated.^{xciii} The



British and American governments responded by forming prostitution statutes — creating a permissible yet regulated attitude toward the late 19th century sex-for-sale commodity.

Modern Day: Evolution into Revelation

Sex, in its basic, primitive act, is no different in the past century than it was thousands of years ago. Perceptions and dictating forces exist even today. Even though today's sexual culture retains many of the same ideologies as preceding civilizations, the past 100 years have seen tremendous advances. The vehicles of women's movements and medical breakthroughs transported the early 20th century liberal attitudes towards sex into modernity.

The collective energy garnered through thousands of years of female advances climaxed to assist the women of the 20th century take a pivotal stand for women's rights. Feminism, in various forms, has existed for hundreds of years, and gained strength through the first- and second-wave feminism movements during the early and mid 20th century, respectively.^c The first wave concentrated on a woman's right to vote, and in the United States, initiatives crested with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution — banning gender discrimination among voters.^d Second-wave feminism during the 1960s focused on the rights of female minority groups including lesbians.^e Although this era was seen as a time for the advancement of Western, white, middle-class women, the overall goal was to eradicate gender inequality and promote women's rights and interests. The feminist revolution also had impli-



cations for the liberal attitude toward sex as old barriers were shed — including restrictive undergarments in bra-burnings. In a survey conducted by *Time* magazine in the United States, data illustrated people's view that laws around sexual practices should be nonexistent. Furthermore, many felt that virginity at the time of marriage was overrated, and the populace overall felt that the line between what was morally "right" and "wrong" was blurred.^f And from this mix of women's liberation and the free-sex mode of thought emerged birth control.

Poster promoting testing for venereal diseases. Courtesy of The Library of Congress.

In a survey conducted by Time magazine in the United States, data illustrated people's view that laws around sexual practices should be nonexistent.

Contraceptive methods ranging from crocodile dung to *coitus interruptus* have existed since the first thoughts of procreation. But it was not until the early 1960s when the progesterone-only pill was made available to the masses that women became truly empowered with a safe and efficacious method of preventing pregnancy.^{iv} This method of birth control was further supplemented by medical advancements that introduced the women's intrauterine device and the minimally-invasive procedure for men known as the vasectomy.^v All three forms of contraception allowed for sexual freedom without complicated or messy methods of birth control. By the 1970s, sexual liberation and freedom had ascended to great heights.

The introduction of the progesterone-only pill revolutionized safe, efficacious birth control. Courtesy of the William P. Didusch Center for Urologic History.

Despite an almost 100 percent effectiveness rate in preventing pregnancy, these new contraceptive methods also came with a 0 percent effectiveness in preventing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. After decades of sexual evolution and revolution, the human race and its sexually

liberal society faced an unparalleled threat to human existence in the 1980s — Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

When the AIDS virus first appeared, its origins, methods of transference and fatal consequences were unknown.

Cases appeared in the United States around 1981 and it was another two years before the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) was discovered. Because many early victims were homosexual, the disease was labeled the "Gay Plague."^{vi} This classification had tremendous, negative implications for the homosexual community. It was eventually determined that the sexual orientation of a person had no bearing on contracting the disease, and that the most common way to get HIV was having intercourse with an infected person.

As the HIV virus rapidly found its way into the bloodstream of human existence, it wrought devastating effects. This non-discriminating disease traversed international waters, broke down socioeconomic barriers and relegated cultural and religious perceptions on sex as inconsequential. As of December 2005, more than 40 million people worldwide were living with HIV or AIDS — 25.8 million of whom reside in sub-Saharan Africa.^{viii} As of December 2005, 3.1 million people have died. Countries from around the globe have banned



"Rubbers" have been in use for centuries. Courtesy of the Dittrick Medical History Center.



The vehicles of women's movements and medical breakthroughs transported the early 20th century liberal attitudes towards sex into modernity.

As of December 2005, more than 40 million people worldwide were living with HIV or AIDS — 25.8 million of whom reside in sub-Saharan Africa.

together to fight this common enemy. In July 2005, the Ugandan government offered university scholarships to girls who could verify their virginity and would vow to remain chaste.^{cx} Condom use has become commonplace among the sex workers in many Chinese provinces.^{cx} On World Aids Day in 2005 the president of the second-highest AIDS infected country in the world — India — asked his constituents to shed their inhibitions and start talking about sex.^{cxii} The sexual highlife of the 1970s has been replaced with awareness around the deadly consequences of unsafe sex. This powerful, devastating disease stigmatized the reign of sexual freedom well into the 21st century.



Condom use prevents pregnancy and the spread of STD's.

From Climactic Peak to the Final Release

The influential, and at times restrictive web woven by religion, morality and societal views, creates a profound effect on the way sex and sexuality are perceived in any given era.

From the framework of the first civilizations, to the advent of the

Christian Church, through the pages of the *Kama Sutra* and into the present day, sexual performance and perceptions have constantly evolved. However, “evolution” does not infer

the emergence of unique, new views on sex. Instead, a cyclical pattern on

India is taking measures to educate people about AIDS prevention. Condom/AIDS post in Kochi, India. 2005. Courtesy of Prachi Patel.



The Dalkon Shield intrauterine device was a female birth control device. Courtesy of the Dittrick Medical History Center.



Widespread fear of AIDS led to a worldwide burst of awareness campaigns. Images courtesy of the National Institutes of Health.

sexual perceptions materializes. The comparison between the constraints set by the Christian Church post-Roman Empire and present day controversies (including homosexuals in the Vatican) illustrates that even 1,500 years later, societal views and public influencers remain consistent.

Elements of the sexual subculture, ranging from masturbation to sexual diseases and contraception to procreation are also susceptible to being entangled in the web of external forces. At times, these outside views are dominant enough to create a shift in paradigm and reshape the ultimate perception of sex. One thing that remains constant, however, is our infallible certainty that sex, can never be, just sex.

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