

➤ **A Brief History of Human Sex**

Introduction

Sex hasn't always been painted as an act of sin and corruption. In fact, pre-Christian religions and civilisations all over the world saw it as an act of worship and celebration

Influence of Religion

While religion has influenced the attitudes of society towards sex and love throughout history, the relationship between them has not followed a consistent path.

In Ancient times, sexual love was viewed as being divine. This arose from the perception that the Gods possessed a sensual power. Poems contained in the Bible told of the love affairs of the Gods. The joy of sexual love was central to Judaism and expressing it was regarded as imitation of the Gods' behaviour.

The union of the Classical and Jewish worlds saw a significant transformation. Distinct from Paganism, the Christian world regarded sex as a deadly sin, as opposed to a life-giving act. The Book of Genesis tarnished views of sex, instigating shame of nakedness.

Paul, the disciple, delivered a powerful message by excluding homosexuals or prostitutes from the Kingdom of God. Through his vision, any unmarried sex was considered sinful. Control of sexual attitudes by the Church was reinforced in the fourth century AD, when priests were given the power to forgive confessed sins.

The aversion to sex by early Christian leaders extended to marriage being viewed as a crime against God. Opposition to marriage diminished in the Middle Ages, as the Church grew more secure. But sex was still viewed with disapproval, even within marriage. It was not until the mid 16th century that marriage was recognised as a church ritual.

Men and Women

The position of men and women in relation to sex and love has fluctuated. The mythology of Ancient Egypt was based on equilibrium between two forces, such as day and night, or men and women. With such equality, sexual love was viewed positively for both genders.

As sex was seen as a mirroring of the sexual acts of the Gods, there had to be one or more female god, yet she was removed and denied existence, initiating the sexual suppression of women.

The words of the Book of Genesis negatively impacted on women, with their role as life-giver no longer celebrated. Instead, they were condemned as the cause of evil.

Men dominated during the Iron Age, with sexual relations characterised by masculine power. Christians regarded the world as belonging to men, with females inferior; the property of males. Intriguingly, it was the influence of Islam, concealing and yet honouring women, which improved European attitudes.

In the 15th century, the untamed sexual desires of women were blamed for the appearance of syphilis. In 1495, a German prostitute was savagely whipped and her fingers were chopped off as punishment for her lustful activities.

While the church continued to reinforce the sinful stereotype of Eve, Elena emerged to threaten these ideals. With the realisation that sex and power were intertwined, Elena had a love affair that led to her marrying the King of England. She strived to achieve a status beyond equality

for women; desirable and yet slightly out of reach. Noble men still undertook violent physical contact with other men, and yet their objective changed. They now fought in order to win a lady's heart.

Traditions and Customs

Pyramids and temples were built long ago, in the context of sexual activity. The Gods were said to maintain the world through sex, while the Creator God had actually formed the world through masturbation.

At a remote sight in Northern India, temples dating back to 1000 AD challenge current values. They feature erotic sculptures, showing women undressing and sexual acts. The temple is the location for a "wedding of the Gods" held annually on the dark night before the full moon. This tradition has continued, despite such customs being contrary to current sexual attitudes in a nation where kissing publicly is illegal.

Currently accepted values are also overtly contrasted to past United States legislation, which was not altered until 1889. The age of consent in most states was as young as ten, with Delaware stipulating a mere age seven. Some laws still in force today show an unusual attempt to control sex lives, with Washington DC prohibiting sex in any position other than missionary.

In the past, the Roman State also had an interest in the sex lives of the people. Men were encouraged to marry Italian women. Perceived as a duty, this lost its appeal, causing the blonde slave girls to appear more attractive. Many women aspired to this common perception of sexiness by dyeing their hair. This is one ideal that has been somewhat perpetuated to this day.

In Pompeii, a sculpture adorning a tomb depicts an erect penis. Representative of good luck and fertility, such a sight was common in Roman cities. Italy is also the birthplace of a significant trend in the history of love. The literary movement of romance originated from the language of the Romans, and tales of love replaced heroic battles during the supremacy of Elena.

Domination by the Romans was preceded by the decline of the Greek Empire. In Ancient Greece, love and sex were completely separate. Greek men kept their wives in the respectability of home, while seeking fulfilment of their sexual needs through slaves and courtesans.

Love was more closely linked to sex in a sacred band of homosexual thieves, who fought alongside their lovers. They were defeated in 338 BC by Alexander the Great and his father, Philip of Macedon. Philip wept over their dead bodies, having been overcome by the bravery they displayed, willingly rushing towards danger in an attempt to protect their lovers. A monument was constructed in honour of their courage, representing the love between the men. These men were recognised for their masculinity, unlike the perceived stereotype of gay men today.

Commercialization of Sex

Despite the sexual repression that exists today, we are constantly surrounded by images of sex. Large corporations and marketing departments utilise it as a manipulative selling device.

The aim of sexual advertisements is to create dissatisfaction; wanting something that we cannot have. While the item being marketed is within our grasp, the glamorous life that is portrayed may not be.

The commercialization of sex has occurred throughout history and the licensing of brothels was initiated in 1161 in order to regulate the trade in Britain. The Bishop of Winchester owned

many brothels, despite his disapproval of sex - his religious convictions were seemingly not strong enough to prevent the pursuit of profit

Falsifying Sex

Erotic objects from the ancient past have been hidden away since their discovery. These sealed collections are only now being opened to the public.

The Naples National Museum features a secret chamber. Remains from Pompeii found on street corners, in bars and as garden ornaments are exhibited. Dating back to 1752, a marble garden statue shows a God fornicating with a goat.

Items contained in the Classics collection of the British Museum are only viewable by appointment. It was felt that they were too sensitive and delicate to be publicly displayed. The ruling class were concerned with the adverse effects of having the general population view pornography, such as the statue of a god with an excessively large penis. In the 19th century, sex was perceived as a threat to law and order and even to the British Empire itself.

With sexual desire being viewed as an illness, an attempt to quash sexual appetites was made by Dr. Kellogg, who invented cornflakes. They were initially lacking in popularity due to the anti-libido effect resulting in little taste. Improving the flavor inevitably sacrificed the intended result.

Birds do it, bees do it, humans since the dawn of time have done it.

But just how much has the act really changed through the millennia and even in past decades? Are humans doing it more? Are we doing it better? Sort of, say scientists. But it's how people fess up to the truth about their sex lives that has changed the most over the years.

Humans have basically been the same anatomically for about 100,000 years—so what is safe to say is that if we enjoy it now, then so did our cave-dwelling ancestors and everyone else since, experts say.

"Just as our bodies tell us what we might like to eat, or when we should go to sleep, they lay down for us our pattern of lust," says University of Toronto psychologist Edward Shorter. "Sex has always offered pleasure."

Hard wired

Sexuality has a lot to do with our biological framework, agreed Joann Rodgers, director of media relations and lecturer at Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions.

"People and indeed all animals are hard wired to seek out sex and to continue to do so," Rodgers said in a recent interview. "I imagine that is evidence that people at least like sex and even if they don't they engage in it as a biological imperative."

It is nearly impossible to tell, however, whether people enjoyed sex more 50 years ago or 50,000 years ago, said David Buss, professor of psychology at the University of Texas and author of "The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating" (Basic Books, 2003).

There is "no reason to think that we do more now than in the past, although we are certainly more frank about it," Buss told *LiveScience*.

Indeed, cultural restraints—rather than anything anatomical—have had the biggest effect on our sexual history, Shorter says.

"To be sure, what people actually experience is always a mixture of biological and social conditioning: Desire surges from the body, the mind interprets what society will accept and

what not, and the rest of the signals are edited out by culture," he writes in his book, "Written in the Flesh: A History of Desire" (University of Toronto Press, 2005).

That's not to say that cultural norms keep people from exploring the taboo, but only what is admitted to openly, according to archaeologist Timothy Taylor of Great Britain's University of Bradford.

"The idea that there is a sexual line that must not be crossed but in practice often is, is far older than the story of Eve's temptation by the serpent," he writes in "The History of Sex: Four Million Years of Human Sexual Culture" (Bantam Books, 1996).

Modern advances

Religion especially has held powerful sway over the mind's attitude towards the body's carnal desires, most sexual psychologists agree. Men and women who lived during the pious Middle Ages were certainly affected by the fear of sin, Shorter said, though he notes there were other inhibiting factors to consider, too.

"The low priority attached to sexual pleasure by people who lived in distant times is inexplicable unless one considers the hindrances that existed in those days," Shorter writes. He points especially to the 1,000 years of misery and disease—often accompanied by some very un-sexy smells and itching—that led up to the Industrial Revolution. "After the mid-nineteenth century, these hindrances start to be removed, and the great surge towards pleasure begins."

Many historians and psychologists see the late 1800s as a kind of watershed period for sexuality in the Western world. With the industrial revolution pushing more and more people together—literally—in dense, culturally-mixed neighborhoods, attitudes towards sex became more liberal.

The liberalization of sexuality kicked into high gear by the 1960s with the advent of the birth control pill, letting women get in on the fun and act on the basis of desire as men always had, according to Shorter.

"The 1960s vastly accelerated this unhesitant willingness to grab sex for the sheer sake of physical pleasure," he said, noting that the trend of *openly* seeking out sex just because it feels good, rather than for procreation alone, has continued on unabated into the new millennium.

Global variations

But despite the modern tendency towards sexual freedom, even today there are vast differences in attitudes across the world, experts say.

"Cultures vary tremendously in how early they start having sex, how open they are about it, and how many sexual partners they have," said Buss, noting that Swedes generally have many partners in their lifetime and the Chinese typically have few.

An informal 2005 global sex survey sponsored by the condom company Durex confirmed Buss' views. Just 3 percent of Americans polled called their sex lives "monotonous," compared to a sizable 26 percent of Indian respondents. While 53 percent of Norwegians wanted more sex than they were having (a respectable 98 times per year, on average), 81 percent of the Portuguese were quite happy with their national quota of 108 times per year.

Though poll numbers and surveys offer an interesting window into the sex lives of strangers, they're still constrained by the unwillingness of people to open up about a part of their lives that's usually kept behind closed doors.

And what if we weren't bound by such social limitations? Taylor offers the promiscuous—and very laid-back—bonobo chimpanzee as a utopian example.

"Bonobos have sex most of the time ... a fairly quick, perfunctory, and relaxed activity that functions as a social cement," he writes. "But for cultural constraints, we would all behave more like bonobos. In physical terms, there is actually nothing that bonobos do that some humans do not sometimes do."

➤ **An Illustrated History of Sex Toys**

<http://www.sloshspot.com/blog/09-28-2009/An-Illustrated-History-of-Sex-Toys-220>