

CHAPTER 1

Toward A Science of Sex

The illustrations on the cover of this book are taken from *Window on Love: the Ultimate Guide to Sexual Fulfilment* by Dr Lasse Hessel (ISBN 1 86333 053 4). The one at the top is an ultrasound derived from a woman holding the instrument to her body while having sex; the bottom is a drawing of the structures shown. While Dr Hessel's claim to have produced the ultimate guide to sexual fulfilment by means of these ultrasounds embodies more than a little advertising hype, his ultrasounds did enhance our knowledge to a degree and provided information that couples can use to enhance their sex lives.

To some, this work provides a small example of the way in which science applied to sex can be expected to benefit us. To others, it is a perfect illustration of science sticking itself (or its tools) where it shouldn't ought to go. It is true that sex is largely a matter of feeling and that over-analysis can interfere with emotional enjoyment. Most of us would rather sit back and watch and enjoy the movie than analyse every word, gesture and photographic angle; but without a knowledge of how these elements work, great movies would not be made. Again, the fact that man has walked on the moon and we know the sea is basically salty water does not destroy our sense of mystery as we look upon the moonlit sea. So it will ever be with sex.

What science can do is to dispel some of the myths which still surround sex:

- ? Our sexual organs are dirty and sex is somehow shameful.
- ? Sex should always be completely natural and spontaneous and no lessons are required.
- ? Sex consists of getting an erection and having intercourse which ends in orgasm.
- ? There is only one right way to make love and (especially for a woman) to have orgasm.
- ? Sex is a man's responsibility; the woman should just lie back and enjoy (or suffer) it.
- ? Men are always ready, willing and able when it comes to sex.
- ? Women have to be in love to enjoy sex; if they aren't in love and still enjoy sex (or even, perhaps, if they are in love and enjoy sex) they are promiscuous.

Most of these myths are folk lore - which, despite the modern romantics, is by no means always right. Unfortunately, some are also the promulgations of supposed experts. These include:

- ? Freud, whose theories are completely unscientific, being based on speculation rather than experiment and being completely unproven and unprovable;
- ? Kinsey, whose data were based on an extremely biased sample;
- ? and even Masters and Johnson, whose methods were, by and large scientific, but who misinterpreted some of their observations.

William Masters, author (together with Virginia Johnston) of the massive tome, *Human Sexual Response*, said this of his work: 'It doesn't even scratch the surface...No one really knows anything about sexual functioning.'

The work of these pioneers in trying to identify and explain every aspect of sexual activity suffered from the fact that their methods were often those applied to the study of human disease but their efforts did at least combat the prevailing ignorance and prejudice

and offer people freedom from guilt and shame.

Unfortunately, the liberalisation spurred by these studies has tended to reduce sex to mere mechanics and given sex an importance even beyond its due.

Despite recent vigorous and imaginative studies by biologists, psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists, the whole subject remains clouded in controversy and mystery. Much of this clouding has been caused by a politically motivated concentration on gender at the expense of sex. It is time to put biology back into sex.

Advances have been made and are being made:

- ? We have at least the beginnings of an understanding of the biological usefulness of sex.
- ? We are beginning to draw a clearer, more realistic picture of the range of sexual behaviour, its causes and consequences.
- ? We are beginning to glimpse the causes and results of varying attitudes to sex.
- ? The interactions of love, relationships and sex are being explored.
- ? We are learning more and more of the mechanics of reproduction - conception, pregnancy, birth, contraception, abortion, fertility and infertility, cloning.
- ? We are discovering more and more of what makes us male or female, masculine or feminine.
- ? We are slowly beginning to determine how much of our sexual behaviour is biologically determined, and how much sociologically.
- ? We are slowly coming to a fuller realisation of what sexuality, in all its forms, truly means, how it is determined, how it develops and what are its effects.
- ? We are beginning to learn what, when, where and how we should teach our children about sex.
- ? Even in anatomy and physiology, basic knowledge of the mechanics of sex are still being discovered. Menstruation may soon no longer be a mystery.
- ? Fascinating details of the process of the sex act are still being discovered, with the very real prospect of increasing pleasure and potency.
- ? The health benefits and costs of sex (and means of ensuring the benefits while decreasing the costs) are being established.
- ? Better therapies for all kinds of sexual problems are being developed.
- ? The bases of sexual deviations are finally being scientifically investigated, with some promise of better understanding and better ability to manage them.
- ? The terrors of menopause are being tamed.
- ? The interrelationships of sex and aging are being explored.

Hopefully, from all this will come a true science of sex which will contribute greatly to our happiness and welfare. It may never explain the wonder of having my wife's body lying next to mine, but perhaps it will help keep that wonder alive through all of our lives. And perhaps it will reduce the percentage of Britons who would rather shop than have sex (quoted at 83 percent in one recent survey).