

STUDIES IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SEX, VOLUME IV

Sexual Selection In Man

I. Touch. Ii. Smell. Iii. Hearing. Iv. Vision.

By HAVELOCK ELLIS

1927

PREFACE.

As in many other of these Studies, and perhaps more than in most, the task attempted in the present volume is mainly of a tentative and preliminary character. There is here little scope yet for the presentation of definite scientific results. However it may be in the physical universe, in the cosmos of science our knowledge must be nebulous before it constellates into definitely measurable shapes, and nothing is gained by attempting to anticipate the evolutionary process. Thus it is that here, for the most part, we have to content ourselves at present with the task of mapping out the field in broad and general outlines, bringing together the facts and considerations which indicate the direction in which more extended and precise results will in the future be probably found.

In his famous Descent of Man, wherein he first set forth the doctrine of sexual selection, Darwin injured an essentially sound

principle by introducing into it a psychological confusion whereby the physiological sensory stimuli through which sexual selection operates were regarded as equivalent to æsthetic preferences. This confusion misled many, and it is only within recent years (as has been set forth in the "Analysis of the Sexual Impulse" in the previous volume of these Studies) that the investigations and criticisms of numerous workers have placed the doctrine of sexual selection on a firm basis by eliminating its hazardous æsthetic element. Love springs up as a response to a number of stimuli to tumescence, the object that most adequately arouses tumescence being that which evokes love; the question of æsthetic beauty, although it develops on this basis, is not itself fundamental and need not even be consciously present at all. When we look at these phenomena in their broadest biological aspects, love is only to a limited extent a response to beauty; to a greater extent beauty is simply a name for the complexus of stimuli which most adequately arouses love. If we analyze these stimuli to tumescence as they proceed from a person of the opposite sex we find that they are all appeals which must come through the channels of four senses: touch, smell, hearing, and, above all, vision. When a man or a woman experiences sexual love for one particular person from among the multitude by which he or she is surrounded, this is due to the influences of a group of stimuli coming through the channels of one or more of these senses. There has been a sexual selection conditioned by sensory stimuli. This is

true even of the finer and more spiritual influences that proceed from one person to another, although, in order to grasp the phenomena adequately, it is best to insist on the more fundamental and less complex forms which they assume. In this sense sexual selection is no longer a hypothesis concerning the truth of which it is possible to dispute; it is a self-evident fact. The difficulty is not as to its existence, but as to the methods by which it may be most precisely measured. It is fundamentally a psychological process, and should be approached from the psychological side. This is the reason for dealing with it here. Obscure as the psychological aspects of sexual selection still remain, they are full of fascination, for they reveal to us the more intimate sides of human evolution, of the process whereby man is molded into the shapes we know.

HAVELOCK ELLIS.

Carbis Water,

Lelant, Cornwall, England.

CONTENTS.

SEXUAL SELECTION IN MAN.

The External Sensory Stimuli Affecting Selection in Man.
The Four Senses
Involved.

TOUCH.

I.

The Primitive Character of the Skin. Its Qualities.
Touch the Earliest
Source of Sensory Pleasure. The Characteristics of
Touch. As the Alpha and
Omega of Affection. The Sexual Organs a Special
Adaptation of Touch.
Sexual Attraction as Originated by Touch. Sexual
Hyperæsthesia to Touch.
The Sexual Associations of Acne.

II.

Ticklishness. Its Origin and Significance. The
Psychology of Tickling.
Laughter. Laughter as a Kind of Detumescence. The Sexual
Relationships of
Itching. The Pleasure of Tickling. Its Decrease with Age
and Sexual
Activity.

III.

The Secondary Sexual Skin Centres. Orificial Contacts.
Cunnilingus and
Fellatio. The Kiss. The Nipples. The Sympathy of the
Breasts with the
Primary Sexual Centres. This Connection Operative both
through the Nerves
and through the Blood. The Influence of Lactation on the
Sexual Centres.
Suckling and Sexual Emotion. The Significance of the
Association between
Suckling and Sexual Emotion. The Association as a Cause
of Sexual
Perversity.

IV.

The Bath. Antagonism of Primitive Christianity to the
Cult of the Skin.
Its Cult of Personal Filth. The Reasons which Justified

this Attitude. The
World-wide Tendency to Association between Extreme
Cleanliness and Sexual
Licentiousness. The Immorality Associated with Public
Baths in Europe down
to Modern Times.

V.

Summary. Fundamental Importance of Touch. The Skin the
Mother of All the
Other Senses.

SMELL.

I.

The Primitiveness of Smell. The Anatomical Seat of the
Olfactory Centres.
Predominance of Smell among the Lower Mammals. Its
Diminished Importance
in Man. The Attention Paid to Odors by Savages.

II.

Rise of the Study of Olfaction. Cloquet. Zwaardemaker.
The Theory of
Smell. The Classification of Odors. The Special
Characteristics of
Olfactory Sensation in Man. Smell as the Sense of
Imagination. Odors as
Nervous Stimulants. Vasomotor and Muscular Effects.
Odorous Substances as
Drugs.

III.

The Specific Body Odors of Various Peoples. The Negro,
etc. The European.
The Ability to Distinguish Individuals by Smell. The
Odor of Sanctity. The
Odor of Death. The Odors of Different Parts of the Body.
The Appearance of
Specific Odors at Puberty. The Odors of Sexual

Excitement. The Odors of Menstruation. Body Odors as a Secondary Sexual Character. The Custom of Salutation by Smell. The Kiss. Sexual Selection by Smell. The Alleged Association between Size of Nose and Sexual Vigor. The Probably Intimate Relationship between the Olfactory and Genital Spheres. Reflex Influences from the Nose. Reflex Influences from the Genital Sphere. Olfactory Hallucinations in Insanity as Related to Sexual States. The Olfactive Type. The Sense of Smell in Neurasthenic and Allied States. In Certain Poets and Novelists. Olfactory Fetichism. The Part Played by Olfaction in Normal Sexual Attraction. In the East, etc. In Modern Europe. The Odor of the Armpit and its Variations. As a Sexual and General Stimulant. Body Odors in Civilization Tend to Cause Sexual Antipathy unless some Degree of Tumescence is Already Present. The Question whether Men or Women are more Liable to Feel Olfactory Influences. Women Usually more Attentive to Odors. The Special Interest in Odors Felt by Sexual Inverts.

IV.

The Influence of Perfumes. Their Aboriginal Relationship to Sexual Body Odors. This True even of the Fragrance of Flowers. The Synthetic Manufacture of Perfumes. The Sexual Effects of Perfumes. Perfumes perhaps Originally Used to Heighten the Body Odors. The Special Significance of the Musk Odor. Its Wide Natural Diffusion in Plants and Animals and Man. Musk a Powerful Stimulant. Its Widespread Use as a Perfume. Peau d'Espagne. The Smell of Leather and its Occasional

Sexual Effects. The Sexual Influence of the Odors of Flowers. The Identity of many Plant Odors with Certain Normal and Abnormal Body Odors. The Smell of Semen in this Connection.

V.

The Evil Effects of Excessive Olfactory Stimulation. The Symptoms of Vanillism. The Occasional Dangerous Results of the Odors of Flowers. Effects of Flowers on the Voice.

VI.

The Place of Smell in Human Sexual Selections. It has given Place to the Predominance of Vision largely because in Civilized Man it Fails to Act at a Distance. It still Plays a Part by Contributing to the Sympathies or the Antipathies of Intimate Contact.

HEARING

I.

The Physiological Basis of Rhythm. Rhythm as a Physiological Stimulus. The Intimate Relation of Rhythm to Movement. The Physiological Influence of Music on Muscular Action, Circulation, Respiration, etc. The Place of Music in Sexual Selection among the Lower Animals. Its Comparatively Small Place in Courtship among Mammals. The Larynx and Voice in Man. The Significance of the Pubertal Changes. Ancient Beliefs Concerning the Influence of Music in Morals, Education and Medicine. Its Therapeutic Uses. Significance of the Romantic Interest in Music at

Puberty. Men
Comparatively Insusceptible to the Specifically Sexual
Influence of Music.
Rarity of Sexual Perversions on the Basis of the Sense
of Hearing. The
Part of Music in Primitive Human Courtship. Women
Notably Susceptible to
the Specifically Sexual Influence of Music and the
Voice.

II.

Summary. Why the Influence of Music in Human Sexual
Selection is
Comparatively Small.

VISION.

I.

Primacy of Vision in Man. Beauty as a Sexual Allurement.
The Objective
Element in Beauty. Ideals of Feminine Beauty in Various
Parts of the
World. Savage Women sometimes Beautiful from European
Point of View.
Savages often Admire European Beauty. The Appeal of
Beauty to some Extent
Common even to Animals and Man.

II.

Beauty to Some Extent Consists Primitively in an
Exaggeration of the
Sexual Characters. The Sexual Organs. Mutilations,
Adornments, and
Garments. Sexual Allurement the Original Object of Such
Devices. The
Religious Element. Unæsthetic Character of the Sexual
Organs. Importance
of the Secondary Sexual Characters. The Pelvis and Hips.
Steatopygia.
Obesity. Gait. The Pregnant Woman as a Mediæval Type of
Beauty. The Ideals

of the Renaissance. The Breasts. The Corset. Its Object. Its History.

Hair. The Beard. The Element of National or Racial Type in Beauty. The

Relative Beauty of Blondes and Brunettes. The General European Admiration

for Blondes. The Individual Factors in the Constitution of the Idea of

Beauty. The Love of the Exotic.

III.

Beauty Not the Sole Element in the Sexual Appeal of Vision. Movement. The

Mirror. Narcissism. Pygmalionism. Mixoscopy. The Indifference of Women to

Male Beauty. The Significance of Woman's Admiration of Strength. The

Spectacle of Strength is a Tactile Quality made Visible.

IV.

The Alleged Charm of Disparity in Sexual Attraction. The Admiration for

High Stature. The Admiration for Dark Pigmentation. The Charm of Parity.

Conjugal Mating. The Statistical Results of Observation as Regards General

Appearance, Stature, and Pigmentation of Married Couples. Preferential

Mating and Assortative Mating. The Nature of the Advantage Attained by the

Fair in Sexual Selection. The Abhorrence of Incest and the Theories of its

Cause. The Explanation in Reality Simple. The Abhorrence of Incest in

Relation to Sexual Selection. The Limits to the Charm of Parity in

Conjugal Mating. The Charm of Disparity in Secondary Sexual Characters.

V.

Summary of the Conclusions at Present Attainable in Regard to the Nature

of Beauty and its Relation to Sexual Selection.

APPENDIX A.

The Origins of the Kiss.

APPENDIX B.

Histories of Sexual Development.

SEXUAL SELECTION IN MAN.

The External Sensory Stimuli Affecting Selection in Man--
-The Four Senses
Involved.

Tumescence--the process by which the organism is brought into the physical and psychic state necessary to insure conjugation and detumescence--to some extent comes about through the spontaneous action of internal forces.

To that extent it is analogous to the physical and psychic changes which accompany the gradual filling of the bladder and precede its evacuation.

But even among animals who are by no means high in the zoölogical scale

the process is more complicated than this. External stimuli act at every

stage, arousing or heightening the process of tumescence, and in normal

human beings it may be said that the process is never completed without

the aid of such stimuli, for even in the auto-erotic sphere external

stimuli are still active, either actually or in imagination.

The chief stimuli which influence tumescence and thus direct sexual choice come chiefly--indeed, exclusively--through the four senses of touch, smell, hearing, and sight. All the phenomena of sexual selection, so far as they are based externally, act through these four senses.[1] The reality of the influence thus exerted may be demonstrated statistically even in civilized man, and it has been shown that, as regards, for instance, eye-color, conjugal partners differ sensibly from the unmarried persons by whom they are surrounded. When, therefore, we are exploring the nature of the influence which stimuli, acting through the sensory channels, exert on the strength and direction of the sexual impulse, we are intimately concerned with the process by which the actual form and color, not alone of living things generally, but of our own species, have been shaped and are still being shaped. At the same time, it is probable, we are exploring the mystery which underlies all the subtle appreciations, all the emotional undertones, which are woven in the web of the whole world as it appeals to us through those sensory passages by which alone it can reach us. We are here approaching, therefore, a fundamental subject of unsurpassable importance, a subject which has not yet been accurately explored save at a few isolated points and one which it is therefore impossible to deal with fully and adequately. Yet it cannot be passed over, for it enters into the whole psychology of the sexual instinct.

Of the four senses--touch, smell, hearing, and sight--with which we are

here concerned, touch is the most primitive, and it may be said to be the most important, though it is usually the last to make its appeal felt. Smell, which occupies the chief place among many animals, is of comparatively less importance, though of considerable interest, in man; it is only less intimate and final than touch. Sight occupies an intermediate position, and on this account, and also on account of the very great part played by vision in life generally as well as in art, it is the most important of all the senses from the human sexual point of view. Hearing, from the same point of view, is the most remote of all the senses in its appeal to the sexual impulse, and on that account it is, when it intervenes, among the first to make its influence felt.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Taste must, I believe, be excluded, for if we abstract the parts of touch and smell, even in those abnormal sexual acts in which it may seem to be affected, taste could scarcely have any influence. Most of our "tasting," as Waller puts it, is done by the nose, which, in man, is in specially close relationship, posteriorly, with the mouth. There are at most four taste sensations--sweet, bitter, salt, and sour--if even all of these are simple tastes. What commonly pass for taste sensations, as shown by some experiments of G.T.W. Patrick (Psychological Review, 1898, p. 160), are the composite results of the mingling of sensations of smell, touch, temperature, sight, and taste.

TOUCH.

I.

The Primitive Character of the Skin--Its Qualities--
Touch the Earliest
Source of Sensory Pleasure--The Characteristics of
Touch--As the Alpha and
Omega of Affection--The Sexual Organs a Special
Adaptation of
Touch--Sexual Attraction as Originated by Touch--Sexual
Hyperæsthesia to
Touch--The Sexual Associations of Acne.

We are accustomed to regard the skin as mainly owing its existence to the need for the protection of the delicate vessels, nerves, viscera, and muscles underneath. Undoubtedly it performs, and by its tough and elastic texture is well fitted to perform, this extremely important service. But the skin is not merely a method of protection against the external world; it is also a method of bringing us into sensitive contact with the external world. It is thus, as the organ of touch, the seat of the most widely diffused sense we possess, and, moreover, the sense which is the most ancient and fundamental of all--the mother of the other senses.

It is scarcely necessary to insist that the primitive nature of the sensory function of the skin with the derivative nature of the other senses, is a well ascertained and demonstrable fact. The lower we descend in the animal scale, the more varied we find the functions of the skin to

be, and if in the higher animals much of the complexity has disappeared, that is only because the specialization of the various skin regions into distinct organs has rendered this complexity unnecessary. Even yet, however, in man himself the skin still retains, in a more or less latent condition, much of its varied and primary power, and the analysis of pathological and even normal phenomena serves to bring these old powers into clear light.

Woods Hutchinson (Studies in Human and Comparative Pathology, 1901, Chapters VII and VIII) has admirably set forth the immense importance of the skin, as in the first place "a tissue which is silk to the touch, the most exquisitely beautiful surface in the universe to the eye, and yet a wall of adamant against hostile attack. Impervious alike, by virtue of its wonderful responsive vitality, to moisture and drought, cold and heat, electrical changes, hostile bacteria, the most virulent of poisons and the deadliest of gases, it is one of the real Wonders of the World. More beautiful than velvet, softer and more pliable than silk, more impervious than rubber, and more durable under exposure than steel, well-nigh as resistant to electric currents as glass, it is one of the toughest and most dangerproof substances in the three kingdoms of nature" (although, as this author adds, we "hardly dare permit it to see the sunlight or breathe the open air"). But it is more than this. It is, as Woods

Hutchinson

expresses it, the creator of the entire body; its embryonic infoldings form the alimentary canal, the brain, the spinal cord, while every sense is but a specialization of its general organic activity. It is furthermore a kind of "skin-heart," promoting the circulation by its own energy; it is the great heat-regulating organ of the body; it is an excretory organ only second to the kidneys, which descend from it, and finally it still remains the seat of touch.

It may be added that the extreme beauty of the skin as a surface is very clearly brought out by the inadequacy of the comparisons commonly used in order to express its beauty. Snow, marble, alabaster, ivory, milk, cream, silk, velvet, and all the other conventional similes furnish surfaces which from any point of view are incomparably inferior to the skin itself. (Cf. Stratz, Die Schönheit des Weiblichen Körpers, Chapter XII.)

With reference to the extraordinary vitality of the skin, emphasized by Woods Hutchinson, it may be added that, when experimenting on the skin with the electric current, Waller found that healthy skin showed signs of life ten days or more after excision. It has been found also that fragments of skin which have been preserved in sterile fluid for even as long as nine months may still be successfully transplanted on to

the body.

(British Medical Journal, July 19, 1902.)

Everything indicates, remark Stanley Hall and Donaldson ("Motor Sensations in the Skin," Mind, 1885), that the skin is "not only the primeval and most reliable source of our knowledge of the external world or the archæological field of psychology," but a field in which work may shed light on some of the most fundamental problems of psychic action. Groos (Spiele der Menschen, pp. 8-16) also deals with the primitive character of touch sensations.

Touch sensations are without doubt the first of all the sensory impressions to prove pleasurable. We should, indeed, expect this from the fact that the skin reflexes have already appeared before birth, while a pleasurable sensitiveness of the lips is doubtless a factor in the child's response to the contact of the maternal nipple. Very early memories of sensory pleasure seem to be frequently, perhaps most frequently, tactile in character, though this fact is often disguised in recollection, owing to tactile impression being vague and diffused; there is thus in Elizabeth Potwin's "Study of Early Memories" (Psychological Review, November, 1901) no separate group of tactile memories, and the more elaborate investigation by Colegrove ("Individual Memories," American Journal of Psychology, January, 1899) yields no

decisive results under this head. See, however, Stanley Hall's valuable study, "Some Aspects of the Early Sense of Self," American Journal of Psychology, April, 1898. Külpe has a discussion of the psychology of cutaneous sensations (Outlines of Psychology [English translation], pp. 87 et seq.)

Harriet Martineau, at the beginning of her Autobiography, referring to the vivid character of tactile sensations in early childhood, remarks, concerning an early memory of touching a velvet button, that "the rapture of the sensation was really monstrous." And a lady tells me that one of her earliest memories at the age of 3 is of the exquisite sensation of the casual contact of a cool stone with the vulva in the act of urinating. Such sensations, of course, cannot be termed specifically sexual, though they help to furnish the tactile basis on which the specifically sexual sensations develop.

The elementary sensitiveness of the skin is shown by the fact that moderate excitation suffices to raise the temperature, while Heidenhain and others have shown that in animals cutaneous stimuli modify the sensibility of the brain cortex, slight stimulus increasing excitability and strong stimulus diminishing it. Féré has shown that the slight stimulus to the skin furnished by placing a piece of metal on the arm or elsewhere suffices to

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

