

Sex and the curious behaviour of the dog



Martin Jelfs

I remember a few years after starting as a psychotherapist, walking downstairs behind a client after a session and getting a strong smell of tobacco. I realised that I had no idea that this client, or any of my clients smoked. I suppose if I had a structured questionnaire as part of my assessment I might know this, but I didn't have one – and still don't. It intrigued me: what I don't know about my clients even after years of working with a person. Jung said that the unconscious is infinite but here I am not thinking of the unconscious. I didn't know what any friend of the client knew: that he was a smoker. It is curious what we don't know, what is missing, like Sherlock Holmes' dog that didn't bark. I worked with a client for over a year before I found out that she made herself sick a couple of times a day or more. For her, bulimia wasn't a problem, it simply wasn't worth mentioning. I think of the female clients I have worked with for some years where, in talking about how they feel emotionally or physically have never mentioned their menstrual cycle as if it doesn't exist or have any influence on how they are. Similarly, considering the number of prostitutes in Britain, it is strange that as far as I can recall in twenty five years I have only every once had a client who mentioned visiting one, except in their distant past. The window we have on our clients, whether from their narrative or from our countertransference, is such a small part of who they are.

I had virtually no idea of the sexual behaviour of my clients. They may mention if they had sex, mostly they didn't mention it. But it is not just the fact which is important, it is the meaning and, as a body psychotherapist the experiencing, of it which is important. It is curious that therapists may be very interested in the dreams of their clients but often know little of their sexual fantasies which surely are as telling as dreams.

I can of course easily put this down to my issues, my countertransference which blinds me to these issues or put it on to the client as issues connected to trauma or that under-researched feeling, shame. Shame is intimately connected in childhood at least, to our embodied self. Ask almost anyone to describe a shaming experience from childhood and it will probably involve the body; wetting oneself in infant school is a common one. Most women's closer identification with the body at puberty means that the opportunities for shame, in a culture which doesn't mark and celebrate the transition to womanhood expand enormously. With shame we wish to hide and may then remain hidden perhaps for the rest of our lives. It is no wonder that for many, Nelson Mandela's quoting of Marianne Williamson's words struck such a chord a few years ago;

'Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us. ...Your playing small doesn't serve this world.'

Sigmund Freud was a brave man in many respects. An outsider for much of his life he was able to speak about what others couldn't particularly in his early life. Wilhelm Reich, who died fifty years ago was similar. They both spoke about sex. This was revolutionary then. The idea that sexual abuse was widespread from Freud, and from Reich that sexual behaviour gave important information about clients, was a bombshell to pre-war Vienna and well beyond.

Curiously, although humanistic therapy took from Reich an interest in the body, usually via others who were inspired by him such as Alexander Lowen with bioenergetics and Fritz Perls with Gestalt, somehow sex has again mysteriously disappeared. As Petruska Clarkson bemoaned in *Therapy Today* a few years ago, sex had disappeared from much of the teaching on counselling and psychotherapy trainings. If you look up the word 'sexual' in the index in most therapy books it will be coupled with the word 'abuse' and virtually never with the word 'pleasure' or 'orgasm' or even 'behaviour'. Sex has become the dog that didn't bark, notable by its absence. I have been curious about this for many years as I tried to understand why. A hundred years ago in Vienna it was easier to explain. Sex was deemed not to exist, particularly for 'good' women. Today, advertising uses sex on every street corner, the television is full of programmes on sex and all boundaries have been crossed in film and literature. How can something which so universally present in society, be so unspoken in therapy?

I think there are several pieces of the jigsaw needed to answer this puzzle. In Britain, unlike continental Europe, the body got handed over to the alternative therapists so that massage, acupuncture, Reiki etc took it on, and couldn't afford to be too concerned with sex for their developing reputation. Also in society, discussion of sex became a discussion on sexualities and sexual orientation as social issues of freedom and equality took over. Discussion of sex came to be about sexual minorities.

Essentially, heterosexual people gave up on the debate. The therapy world has always tended to try and get to the normal from the edges and it is one of the criticisms of psychoanalysis from the humanistic tradition of Abraham Maslow that, like the NHS, therapists have an idea of sickness but not of health.

For the first thirty years Freud based his ideas on the idea, common in most systems of thought, that there was a drive in people towards life; a sex/life/creative drive which was an energy called libido. Much later, before he abandoned this, he posited an opposing drive, Thanatos, which was a destructive drive. Probably his failure to successfully treat masochists, plus his reflections on the massive destruction of the Great War led to this. The development of object relations starting with Freud's daughter Anna, put libido into the basket of quaint historical theories. Instead of a drive, like sex towards another person, object relations, suggested that internal objects in the psyche were primary. These objects may be derived from real external people, like the good experiences with mother becoming the good mother or be part objects, in the Kleinian narrative, such as the good or bad breast. Object relations theory became dominant. Later, in the 70's, self psychology from Kohut grew, giving the self a central importance. Ego psychology, self psychology and object relations dominated the psychoanalytic discourse and, I believe in an attempt to become respectable, were adopted wholesale by the humanistic therapy world. Drives have been relegated to the same

place as the horse and cart and zeppelins; quaint and irrelevant. But can you see what we have here? We have the self, or the ego which is subject 'I' and we have objects 'you'. We have two parts of grammar, subject and object. But to make a sentence we need a third fundamental part of grammar; a verb, a 'doing word' as my old teacher used to say. It is what links subject and object. I love you or I hit you or I desire you. To try and have a psychology without drives is like trying to speak a language without verbs! It would just be a sort of soup of nouns and pronouns, subjects and objects.

In other words sex disappeared because drive theory disappeared and even attachment theory from Bowlby and others failed to make the point that there has to be a drive to attach. It requires direction and energy: we are not magnets. Also, there is another dog which has curious behaviour, and that is the disappearance of the word 'energy'. Reich talked a great deal about energy. Freud's libido was energy. At a recent body psychotherapy conference the body was feted but mostly in the form of embodied countertransference and the relational body, not in its connection to the flow of energy. In the UK, energy has been passed over to the alternative therapists where Reiki, acupuncture, Chi Kung, massage, all gladly lay claim to working with energy. Now in Britain it is still the alternative medicine world rather than the psychotherapy world which is most involved in the latest developments in energy psychology with EFT and TAT and now Seemorg Matrix (see <http://theamt.com/>). Although the origins twenty years ago were in

acupuncture, in America it is part of the psychotherapy world. In Britain it is only thanks to an analyst, Phil Mollon, that anyone in the therapy world has heard of it.

Meanwhile in the real world people have a sense that sex is important and somehow unaddressed. Perhaps the increasing incidence of self-harm and eating disorders is an inchoate attempt to put the body and its drives back at the centre. I could have written the body and its needs. But 'needs' is a passive form and 'drives' is an active force that seeks the satisfaction of needs. So sex, drives and energy are the dog that didn't bark, the missing part of most current psychotherapy. The reification of the relationship as the whole of the therapy process rather than the container of the therapy process is surely connected to this. It is not surprising that when sex is considered as a problem it is behaviour therapy and CBT which is the treatment of choice – at least they acknowledge sex as a behaviour that can be practised, like any other skill which has been neglected. While this is reasonably successful at treating some sex problems there is a sense that much is missing from its formulations. This is partly because it is normative. From Masters and Johnson in the 1950's there is a sense of how to do sex properly and if you can't then you have a 'dysfunction'. 'Properly' means in the four stages they identified; desire, arousal, orgasm and release. But somewhere we get the sense that sex is more than this performance, and humanistic therapists in particular have a sense of potential, what we may be, as well as how to fix a problem. So what is sex and what is it for?

I'd like to suggest that there are four functions of sex which I think of as the four 'R's'; reproduction, recreation, relationship and religion.

Reproduction

The growth of evolutionary psychology and some experimental results have shown the importance of this. The 'selfish gene' says that the aim of life is to put as much of its DNA into the next generation as possible with the greatest chance of further diffusion. At this level sex is clearly aimed at maximising the chance of pregnancy. Men tend to equate orgasm with ejaculation and see it as essential to successful sex. Even orgasm in women slightly increases the chance of pregnancy as the cervix dips into the top of the vagina. At this level men want fertile partners and women want men who will maximise their chances of producing successful offspring; not just men rich enough to provide or protect but who have DNA which will succeed. Fidelity is not the only issue and now with DNA testing it is discovered that even in supposedly monogamous creatures like swans about 20% of offspring are not from the apparent male mate.

This is sex as a way to get babies. It is what is sometimes called friction sex based on genital friction to maximise orgasm/ejaculation. Until the recent inventions of contraception, it is not very different from most mammals and has probably not changed much in the last million years. There are problems with this type of sex which have long been recognised. It may not be advantageous for this sort of sex, the 'hot and sweaty' sex, to produce long term

bonds; genetic diversity and group childcare may be more important. Recent advances in neurochemistry seem to suggest that such orgasms produce strong shifts in the dopamine levels in the brain which lead to destructive behaviour. Brain scanning confirms that such orgasms fire in the same region of the brain as a heroin hit. In other words such sex is addictive. Couples early in a relationship may have a lot of sex like this; frequent, highly orgasmic and after a short time needing to be repeated. As we know it usually doesn't last and other factors come in. When the frequency of sex goes down, the destructive aspects come. There is no space to enlarge on this but see www.reuniting.info for more information. You could also in your own relationship keep a diary and see if a couple of days after good, orgasmic sex you get more arguments and disharmony.

Evolutionary psychology is dangerous if you take it as providing some sort of justification or norm. It is just saying that this seems to be how nature operates. Now we have got over the 70's belief that political, social and economic equality means sameness, and recognise that men and women are fundamentally different, we can see that some of the different attitudes and behaviours may be at this biological level, because women may produce 400 viable eggs in their entire reproductive life and men produce 10,000 sperm every second. MRI scanning now shows some of the brain differences.

This sort of sex is not so different from masturbation. It will also be part of the same addictive process

that without the constraints of needing a partner can, become excessive. We have been so busy saying that masturbation is OK, not harmful, good practice and so on, that we have overlooked its downsides. It can lead to addictive withdrawal and depression. This is well-researched. Even if this is not the case, sex for reproduction is a clear example of a drive: the drive to reproduce, the drive to fuck, to unite genitals with the chance of procreation. Of course gay sex has a zero pregnancy risk, but there is still usually a division, an asymmetry, and it still often still involves a masculine and a feminine energy.

Recreation

Play is generally reckoned to be a good thing for children: it teaches them to interact with others, follow their curiosity, develop their creativity and sometimes relax into a place of just being. By definition play is not a goal-directed activity: the pleasure is in the doing not in the outcome. There is no obvious reason why the needs for play shouldn't be there in adult life; some people have hobbies, play sport or play a musical instrument. They derive pleasure from the process; you may enjoy a good game of golf even if you don't win. Sex is a form of adult play. It is fun, relaxing, and pleasurable and connects you, like most sport, to the body. There must be a reason why we use the term 'foreplay' or in the coded world of small discreet adverts talk of 'adult fun'. Clearly some people's sexual activity seems to have sex as a sort of hobby or a lifestyle activity. This

may be more obvious in the gay world than the heterosexual world where there is a tacit assumption that we are really seeking true love and relationship, but it certainly counts as one of the functions of sex. How do we re-create ourselves in a world of stress, time pressure and the dominance of the thinking mind? Sex is a powerful way back in to the body, to the world of the senses, moving out of the mind and into the body. Sex in this mode can be less driven by the need for orgasm, and perhaps more from the desire for fun, relaxation and the pleasure of bodies dancing together in the dark. If we can free ourselves from the judgements we may experience that in a one-night stand, we can be freer sexually than in a long term relationship. Of course this may be due to shame issues: I can leave the next day and not have to face again what I have said and done. Generally the gay world has been more comfortable with sex as recreation than the heterosexual world. If you break one taboo you might as well break a few more.

There is a darker side of course to both sex as reproduction and sex as recreation. Both are connected closely to our basic ego needs and therefore to our insecurities. We can use sex to prove something. 'I am powerful, I can make you come or make you beg or make you cry out in ecstasy.' We can use it to reinforce a shaky sense of identity. 'Look at me I really am heterosexual, I am having sex with a woman', or 'Look, someone wants me, at least for tonight, I must be desirable'. We can use it for barter or as a weapon or as a way of getting some sort of body contact and holding. We can use it as a way of distancing and avoiding real intimacy with the false idea that

physical intimacy equates to emotional intimacy. We can fuck someone but can we really look into their eyes? This brings us onto the third use of sex, one that is rather more socially approved of than sex as recreation: relationship.

Relationship

There is a basic human need at birth for containment and attachment to another human. It is probably lifelong and the release in sex of the 'cuddle hormone' oxytocin helps bonding and relationship. Sex may bring people together and hold them together long enough for other factors to come in to play – you may actually like them and enjoy their company, even become good friends. In this way sex can build the relationship. The evidence is much less clear that sex usually maintains the relationship, indeed the evidence cited above suggests otherwise. Many well bonded couples in long term relationships have become sexless.

This rather bleak statement needs to be qualified. Sex can open the heart and open us to love for the other person. Love is simply what is there when the heart opens. This is sex as an expression of love and a gateway to love, but it is very different sort of sex from the biologically driven sex for reproduction. The energy of sex can open the heart when it moves upwards from the pelvis with that intention. The heart is a transformer, and stands between the lower energy centres or chakras of the base, sex and solar plexus on the one side and the throat, third eye and crown above. The opening of the throat chakra also seems to be very important

as an energy centre; hearing or saying 'I love you' is different to receiving it as a text message! This map of energy centres, the chakras is found in many cultures beyond India, including South America. The map of personal and spiritual development is literally within our bodies.

Throughout history, it has been known how to use the power of sex to build the heart-space and open us to blissful connection with a partner. In the West more in the last two centuries these techniques have generally been known as Karezza and involve using sex as an electrical connection rather than a physical and genital one and then deeply relaxing while connected. They were re-discovered in the early nineteenth century and have been published and practiced ever since, including an edition by Tolstoy in Russian. When we deeply relax in a state of higher energy and excitement we open deeply at an energetic level, usually after about thirty minutes. Ordinary sex for reproduction is based on tension with the hope that orgasm will produce relaxation; sex for the heart is based in deep relaxation. However for most people in our society with its pressures, being relaxed leads to a low energy, sleepy state. It is the techniques of tantra and Karezza which produce a state of relaxed excitation. If we dwell in that state with a connection with the other, the connection with the beloved becomes a connection with the divine. This is true in all religions and spiritual traditions, including Christian, in the intense erotic longing of the Song of Solomon. It is present in the passionate poetry of Rumi and Kabir. With the development of patriarchy, the problem for

religions was how to keep the connection between sexual and divine passion and ecstasy yet avoid putting women at the centre of life. In Christianity such writings were not allowed into the Gospels and were in the Gnostic writings, others were heavily disguised in the mediaeval alchemical texts, in Judaism in the Cabbala and the Tree of Life. Some of Karezza was present in Courtly Love practices of the Middle Ages.

Religion or spirituality

Somewhere, deep inside, many people know that sex is sacred, the body a temple and a gateway to the divine. This is embedded in language. For example, the traditional seat of sexual energy as kundalini is the *sacrum* at the base of the spine which is from the same root as the word *sacred*. Breath, spirit and soul all have the same roots in most languages, *nephesh* in Hebrew, *nawa* in Javanese, *prana* in Sanskrit.

In India, the practical knowledge of the connection between sex and spirituality reached a very high point by twelfth century (C.E). Then Moslem invaders and a few hundred years later, puritan British colonisers, destroyed and drove underground much of the remaining tantric teachings. Within Tibet, the blending of the earlier shamanistic Bon religion and Buddhism resulted in the extraordinary richness of Tibetan Buddhism, but its monastic preservation meant that actual sexual teachings tended to be replaced by symbolic visualisations of deities. The most profound teachings were preserved in places like Kashmir, a crossroads for many cultures. Essentially the

view of practically all mystical spiritual traditions is that of oneness and absorption into the divine or the realisation that all separation is an illusion. These non-dual or *advaita* teachings within sexual practices use slow, meditative connection to reach profound states, generally after preparation and ritual. Such states are a taste of union with the divine which as Ken Wilber's work shows, gives us a taste of a continuing state of bliss which is our true state and our true nature. To be at this level, his third tier, is to live in bliss (see <http://www.integralinstitute.org>).

So in moving through these four functions of sex we have moved from fucking to playing to making love to becoming love. At the level of reproduction, our primary feeling is of tension, seeking relief. This is similar to much masturbatory sex. The drive is for release, and the relief is presumably that our biological duty has been done and tension primarily in the genitals has been reduced. At the level of recreation the primary feeling is a desire for connection, a temporary end to isolation, play and an easy flowing with others: social as much as sexual intercourse. I suspect that this is often more present in the gay than the heterosexual world as the social demands of heterosexuality are for privacy, commitment, and fidelity. This doesn't stop at least two million adults in Britain engaging in swinging! At the level of relationship, the desire is for a loving heart connection with another: not just attachment, but passionate attachment. At the level of the spiritual, the desire is to relax once more in the arms

of the goddess/god: to come home. This desire is similar to the desire for death, an end to all separation, and is why in India and in the Tibetan tradition tantra is seen as connected with death. We have a sense of this in the French for orgasm, *la petite mort*, the little death. Sex, at least momentarily, kills the ego.

People live in gendered bodies, (putting aside the intersexual minority) and sex amongst other things is a meeting of same or opposite genders – matching or contrasting genitals. The last twenty years has seen a virtual consensus that differences are socially constructed and are the results of culture and nurture: there is nothing that is essentially different. We have mixed up social, economic and political equality with sameness, and this has tended to block all real discussion with the accusation that a normative tyranny is being established. However, anyone who has brought up children notices that overwhelmingly boys and girls are different, and that starts from very young. I have seen many children, including my own, brought up in a community or with the man as main caretaker and without early influences of the conventional culture through television. Boys and girls are still usually different with one of the most striking differences being that girls are more chatty and orientated towards people and communication for its own sake; boys orientate more towards things and communicate if they need to (if then!). We have to deal with notions of the masculine and the feminine without imprisoning any individual in such a cage of

definition. Until recently it seems to be only the Jungians who have stayed with these terms and the animus and anima, the internal opposite. This allows us to have a mixture of masculine and feminine within any individual. Some women have a great deal of masculine in them and that is OK, as is the converse for men. There are some people who are fairly balanced and for them all this may not be an issue. For most people, it is differences that tend to attract; the otherness of the other. Romance, at least, depends on not knowing. In stable gay couples there is also usually quite a difference in the partners. The masculine essence seems to be connected to intention, purpose, authenticity and a quality of unwavering presence; the feminine essence seems to be connected to radiance, change, moving energy and the desire to open to love. This observation from 25 years of running workshops on relationships for women and men by David Deida (www.bluetruth.org) reflects the tantric understanding of the nature of the dance of energy and consciousness, wisdom and method in the masculine and feminine.

'We need to understand the nature of sexual passion and spiritual openness. Sexual attraction is based on sexual polarity, the force of passion that arcs between masculine and feminine poles. All natural forces flow between two poles. The north and south poles of the earth create a force of magnetism. The positive and negative poles of your electrical outlet or car battery create an electrical flow. In the same way, masculine and feminine poles between people

create the flow with sexual polarity.' (from website)

For many people their connection to their feminine or masculine essence has been damaged in various ways; the feminine, often through the process of shaming mentioned earlier; and the masculine by the distortions of the masculine in our culture, the lack of mentoring, rites of passage or a sense of purpose for boys. In part this is also due to the lack of appropriate sexual mirroring in childhood by the opposite sex parent in the crucial Oedipal phase of three to five years old. Parents and therapists are fine about mirroring and validating the oral needs; *'it's fine to feed and be nurtured'*. We are OK at mirroring and validating what a Freudian might call the anal needs; *'it's fine to produce and control and be proud'*. But when it comes to genital needs or drives, *'put it away, better not do that here'* and shame and embarrassment take over. We are denied grounding and validating at the core of our body and of our energetic life force. Two generations ago for girls even the facts of menstruation or sex were often hidden. Now sex is allowed as a biological function at the level of reproduction – the 'facts' of life but not at the level of the pleasures of life. How many children are shown how to pleasure themselves or given real knowledge of orgasm or of, for example the G spot and female ejaculation? Willem Poppeliers has written about this with his Sexual Grounding Therapy (www.sexualgrounding.com). In writing about needs we are again writing about drives and in writing about sex, we are writing

about energy. Where has all this gone in most of the therapy world?

In trying to prevent 'Sex in the Forbidden Zone' we have also banished Eros from the therapy room. The growth of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy helps to keep away anything as messy as bodies, desire and sexuality. Object relations has left us only with objects who may or may not attach to each other. Therapy without desire, drives and energy is like writing without verbs; using only nouns and pronouns. The sense that therapy is a passionate activity, playing with fire, is too dangerous for a risk-averse society, even though that is precisely what many clients are desperate for. They need their sexual essence to be mirrored and really appreciated. If it is not, then shame is subtly reinforced. This is hard, as the erotic threatens the asymmetry of the therapy relationship. It can come as a pre-Oedipal desire for erotic closeness in which I am not really seen other than as a provider. It can come with the dramas of the Oedipal period with desire, envy and manipulation. Or it can come as a post-Oedipal request for a response to adult sexuality. At this point it is very tempting for therapists to want to keep it infantile; regression is easier to handle than adult sexuality. If this happens yet again the client is not allowed to grow up and feel their real power. We re-traumatise by sexual denial rather than by sexual invasion and abuse.

It is sometimes instructive to think of all therapy as sex. What form of sex will this next therapy session be? Who will be seen naked and with desire and being

desired? We need very good boundaries; but boundaries are made from clarity not distance and are maintained by energetic connection not the denial of what is real and essential and alive in the moment. What we do not actively allow and even seek to welcome in therapy further builds shame.

Meanwhile outside the therapy room in the culture, the biggest part of the internet is to do with porn sites and chat rooms. The former are used more by men and the latter have a high proportion of women. 40% of cybersex is by women according to one study. The problem with porn is not that it is to do with sex - it is simply that the images go straight to the addictive centres in the brain and it desensitises us. Such stimulation of the reward centres in the brain, which is also there in genital sex, creates addiction. Sex addiction is an under-recognised problem in Britain. In some studies (USA, 2003) about 10% of adults have a sexual addiction and of those 28% were women. Porn is invariably sex for reproduction or recreation, to use the scheme I have outlined. Relational and heart-centred sex looks rather boring from the outside! The problem with chat-rooms is, of course, that it is pseudo-intimacy. You can be whoever you want to be, the lack of information feeds fantasy and you can log off at any time.

In London recently, a male massage therapist with thirteen years' experience, qualified in many varieties of massage and postural integration, has just come out of prison after a three year sentence following two full

body massages. In neither did he touch the nipples or genitals and both clients had their underwear on. He was locked up with sex offenders and paedophiles. In the Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham full

body massage on the opposite sex is limited to below the knee and above the neck! Perhaps we as therapists and our theories, devoid of sex, passion, and energy do the same? This is the dog that didn't bark.

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