

Understanding the Opposite Sex
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[In this essay I make the binary assumption, overlooking all statistical variations and all LBGTQMF's. I may deal with these in another essay.]

It all begins with the mystery, and may well end with the mystery.

Exhibit A.

“Mommy, where’s her penis?”

Our son, Evan, not quite 3, watched in frightened astonishment as his infant sister, Elise was being cleaned and changed. We told him that boys have a penis and girls have a vagina. We just stated the facts. We didn’t bother to explain them, or tell the what, when, why, and how the lock and key fit together – all that would come later.

Exhibit B.

I hadn’t locked the bathroom door and our youngest granddaughter, Charlotte, not quite two years old if I remember accurately, opened the door and headed directly into the bathroom while I was peeing. She walked right past me, squeezing between the shower and the side of the toilet and looked with amazement and curiosity at how I peed. She never said anything and I didn’t either.

Curiosity waxes and wanes in the early years but separation abides. At an early age, boys and girls largely segregate for play. They are not told to – they just do. And this is not nurture although nurture often reinforces the separation. It is nature out and out. Girls are sissies. They play with dolls. They love dressing up. They love babies. They can sit quietly for hours. Boys are tough rascals. They love sticks and stones. They run around ceaselessly. They can’t sit still for a minute, and fidget when they are ordered to. The only thing I remember about nursery school was the mandatory rest period on one day. I didn’t need to rest. I didn’t want to rest. I wasn’t tired at all, not a bit. I wanted to run and play. At about the age of four I went down the block from my apartment building to a private house where a girl had a large outdoor dollhouse or playhouse. There were several kids, boys and girls. The girls led the playing of house. I was bored. Playing house was dull. I never went again.

As a kid I had only some secondary interest in girls. There were a few I really liked, a few early crushes, but the idea of playing with girls or maybe even kissing them was something secondary and how to arrange it was an insoluble mystery.

The mystery never entirely disappears. Along with the mystery, there are the abiding conflicting drives, desires, and orientations, with all the resulting attendant frustrations. Men get married and have kids in order to get laid; women get laid in order to have kids and get married. Men get physical about emotional beings; women get emotional about physical beings. Women are shy and reserved and push men away in order to entice and arouse them and bring them closer for the consummation.

The problem lies not in the understanding but in the satisfaction. Throughout my adult life I have ‘understood’ and liked women when I was sexually satisfied and have not understood, and not liked women when I was sexually frustrated.

Love is intertwined with sex and cannot be separated, despite all the attempts at denial by our virginal priests and pietists. Women complain about being objectified. I confess. I objectify women and I always have. What I see first and foremost is the beauty and the allure. Therein lies the unattainable mystery for me.

Stop to consider that we need have intercourse only twice to continue the species. This may account for the unconsummated daydreams remembered for a lifetime and the brevity of passionate affairs, so well told in heart-wrenching myths and tales that may be among the greatest romances – Siegfried and Brunhilda, Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet, Heathcliff and Catherine in Wuthering Heights, Cyrano de Bergerac, Dr. Zhivago and Lara, and Roman Holiday. It may also account for and certainly prods much of our artistic and even scientific creativity, a sublimation from the sexual moment, so difficult to attain and sustain. Our desires, yearnings, and dreams live on even as our outlets for satisfaction and fulfillment fade.

We are designed to preserve and propagate the species or the gene, and the time span has been long enough so that the solution has evolved to that which is near the best possible for that purpose. Sex guarantees variations needed for optimal evolution and survival. That doesn’t merely fail to maximize satisfaction or happiness – it casts it aside or even violates and banishes it. Too fucken bad for all of us.

Understanding is not the point. Fulfillment is. When you are confined to passionate yearning for the unattainable you crave understanding; when you are fulfilled you don’t need and may not care one wit for the feeble thing that is understanding.

Through all, the mystery abides. Fulfillment determines only how we prioritize our attempts to understand the eternal mystery.

And let's face it – we don't understand ourselves any more than we understand the opposite sex. We just are built to live with ourselves.