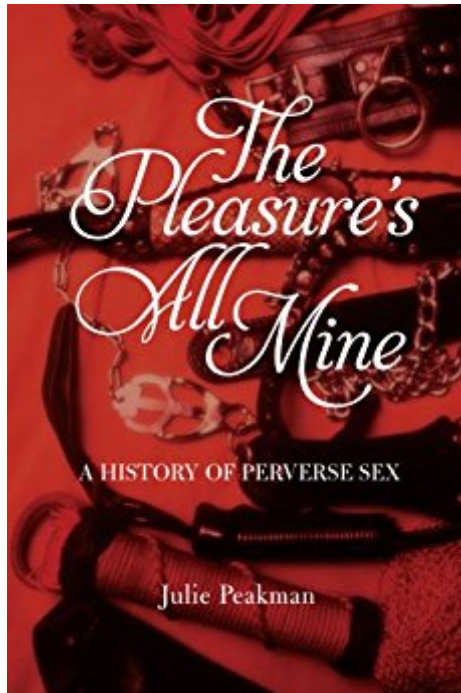


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The Pleasure's All Mine: A History Of Perverse Sex



Synopsis

Homosexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, sado-masochists, necrophiliacs – all of these have been, or still are, considered deviants. Concomitantly there has been almost universal acceptance that unembellished vaginal penetration, performed by one man and one woman, is normal sex. This is now contested. But what is perverse sex and what isn't? The Pleasure's All Mine explores the gamut of sexual activity that has been seen as strange, abnormal or deviant over the last 2,000 years. This first comprehensive history of sexual perversion examines an abundance of original sources – letters, diaries, memoirs, court records, erotic books, medical texts and advice manuals – and shows how, for ordinary people, different kinds of sex have always offered myriad different pleasures. There never was a normal. Almost all sexual behaviours have travelled to and fro along a continuum of proscription and acceptance. Attitudes have changed towards masturbation, leatherwear, golden showers and sado-masochism. From the specialized cultures of pain, necrophilia and bestiality to the social world of plushies and furies, and lovers of life-sized sex dolls, some previously acceptable behaviour now provokes social outrage, while activities as diverse as sodomy and wife-swapping have moved on the spectrum of acceptance from sin to harmless fun. Each perversion is explored from the time it was first visible in history, to how it is viewed today, and along the way the book asks why we can be so intolerant of other people's sexual preferences. Carefully researched as well as a fascinating read, and featuring a wide array of illustrations, The Pleasure's All Mine reaches conclusions that are surprising, and sometimes shocking. This is an essential volume for anyone interested in the art, history and culture of sex.

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Customer Reviews

Peakman discusses the delightful and the disturbing sides of sexual practice. She reminds us of both the diversity of sexual behavior and the essentially arbitrary nature of past and present limitations on it. She concludes with an ethical approach to sexual practice: consent, protection of the vulnerable, and consistency with regard to age of consent. This is a refreshing review of these intriguing issues.

I always ask my patients what they do for fun, and in thousands of visits I have had exactly one person reply, "Sex." I assume that at least some of the others are having sex for fun, but it isn't something we acknowledge freely, even if the fun is confined (as it was in his particular case) to marriage. Much less do we acknowledge fun in sexual subcategories like masturbation, cross-dressing, or flogging. People have been having sex in such non-procreative and "abnormal" ways for as long as we have records, so that what might be "normal" takes in a lot of territory in the historical view. It is this historical view that historian Julie Peakman has taken in *The Pleasure's All Mine: A History of Perverse Sex* (Reaktion Books), a substantial, well-illustrated, funny, and thoughtful work that shows how changeable through the times are our discomforts that "other" people are enjoying sex in the wrong way. The classic example of such a change is masturbation. Ancient Greeks and Romans may have been disgusted by anyone masturbating in public (as that provocative pedagogue Diogenes was said to have done), but both Galen and Hippocrates thought that men and women needed regular orgasms. Coitus with a member of the opposite sex was the best way to get them, but if that wasn't available, masturbation was thought to be healthful. This changed when the Fathers of the Christian Church took up the issue. Medical experts joined in, blaming masturbation

for asthma, liver damage, insanity, and more. The anti-masturbation and pro-purity campaigns continued into the twentieth century. Scientific and sociological study of masturbation over the past decades has shown it to be universal, enjoyable, and healthful, although moralists may still rail against it. "Such is the life cycle of a sexual perversion," reflects Peakman. A similar cycle can be seen in the degree of perversion humans assign to homosexuality, with relative acceptance by the ancients, condemnation by the church, and although there some resistance to homosexual relationships within America, and in many countries, Peakman is able to conclude her chapter listing advances since Stonewall, including the removal of homosexuality from any medical definitions of illness. Peakman addresses in chapters here plenty of other perversions, some of which were yucky in the olden days and still are. Necrophilia is one, and bestiality, and pedophilia. The point she makes about these are the same as with the others: there is a degree of distaste or acceptance given a particular society and a particular time. Her intent is to show "how different sexual behaviors were constructed as perverse - by religion and society, in law and medicine - and argues that sexual behaviour is not in itself perverse, but only becomes so when perceived as such by certain groups in society, and that this perception changes over time. Given that this is the case, Peakman argues, despite acts deemed taboo by the church (and not just the Christian church), a rational society needs to evaluate such taboos and see if there is any reason for acts between consenting adults to be criminalized. "Where acts are not harmful to others," she writes, "there is no reason for legislation. If societies are arbitrary and changeable about what they consider perversions, there is good reason to rely on the rule about harm to determine what is actually perverse and what is not. Peakman's book is a good step toward this understanding.

First, this really is a history, with a lot of thoughtful comment on changing times, changing mores. Illustrations quite good, but not pornography. And unlike a lot of academic work, this is extremely readable. Extremely high publishing quality, superb paper and binding. A book to read, enjoy, and then pass on to a friend with an open mind.

Very well written, researched and organized. Every thing you wanted to know about sex from the beginning of time and more.

What's natural and what's unnatural, after all, when sex is the issue? The standards deviate over

time, and the historical struggle in the West to define what is acceptable and what is deviant comprises this study, promoted as the first one-volume summary of "perverse sex". Following Peakman's scholarship on eighteenth-century British prostitution and pornography, this European-centered presentation peers beyond English shores to look back to classical and biblical reactions to varieties of sex, and--given the limits of firsthand evidence for much of history, often relying upon court testimony and scientific or religious examination--personal accounts when a few dare or boast or are coerced into admitting their own indulgences. Peakman's argument remains clear throughout a dozen thematic chapters. "Normal" does not always equate with heterosexual, male-dominated activities. Standards keep changing. The abnormal alters over time and space. Despite the unreliability of much of ancient literary or artistic evidence, and the scarcity of trustworthy medieval and early modern accounts for, understandably, a topic prone to secrecy more than display by many of its adherents, the sexual practices uncovered do reveal a similar pattern. For instance, as Peakman lists early on, "oral sex, masturbation, homosexuality, lesbianism, transvestism, flagellation, exhibitionism, voyeurism" all have been accepted by ancient peoples, then condemned by Christian societies, and denigrated by those who in recent centuries began to replace the labels attached to such behaviors. As Western culture secularized, these actions were not so much "sinful" as "irrational"

WOW! Way to go, Ms. Peakman! This is one of the most meticulously researched, comprehensive and entertaining read I have had in a very long time! She absolutely knows what she is talking about, and her passion for the subject is admirable and infectious. I wish there were more authors like her who had the ability to sift through the cultural and religious baggage surrounding the delicate topic of human sexuality and were able to produce works of such academic integrity and solid prose. I absolutely loved the glossy pages and helpful illustrations scattered throughout the text. You can never hide real talent and solid authorship, and Julie Peakman has produced a masterpiece in every sense of the word. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!

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