

The **SEX** Essay

by Alan Ilagan

Sex. With that one simple word a thousand conflicting ideas, thoughts, and visions are conjured. With a single syllable the entire earth was populated, wars were fought, and our president was impeached. With those three tiny letters we find an underlying common desire as human beings, along with a division between differing sexualities. And because of that little word you and I came into existence.

Along the way, sex evolved as we did. In the beginning it was simply a term for gender. 'Sex' was either male or female. It retains this definition ~ on many forms and questionnaires the boxes for 'Sex' refer to whether you are a boy or a girl. Immediately 'sex' was an 'either/or', leaving no room for transgendered folk or other distinctions. Bound by this delineation, sex was becoming strictly a biological label, and as such it rebelled.

Sex did not like being contained or limited or defined. It morphed its meaning into something more, and soon enough sex became a word for our genitalia, again depending on gender differences. "The smooth foreskin of his sex" or the "softness of her sex" refer to the penis and vagina respectively. Still, sex was not satisfied ~ there were still too many limitations placed on it, and again it shifted form to encompass more of what it wanted to be.

In its most drastic transformation to date, sex became an act ~ the term which resonates so strongly today. "Sex" was the new word for "intercourse", the dirty word for intercourse (despite the fact that "intercourse" is a horrendously ugly word, completely ill-conceived for what it defines.) So, sex finally meant sex as most of us now know it. There were other terms and word associations ~ sexual intercourse, making love, fucking, doing the nasty, knockin' da boots, getting it on, fill-in-the-blank-with-more-foolishness ~ but it all came under the heading of Sex.

Despite the newly created terms, and the proliferation of sex mags, videotapes, and all types of erotica-themed media, sex was rarely talked about. Even in the era of

“free love” in the 60’s, and the reckless disco-ball inferno of the 70’s, sex wasn’t as much discussed as it was done. And up until the 70’s gay sex was rarely brought up in the popular media.

After the 60’s and 70’s, things changed. In the aftermath of Vietnam, Woodstock, JFK, Martin Luther King Jr., Watergate, Stonewall, and the “sexual revolution”, sex got fed up and came out of the dark. Suddenly it demanded discussion ~ in the newspapers, on the talk shows (remember Phil Donahue?), in books (*The Joy of Sex* anyone?) and in our homes. All aspects of sex came into the light ~ the most explosive being homosexuality.

Sex reveled in the spotlight. Finally, and righteously, it was receiving the attention and forthright honesty it deserved. Not only were we still engaging in it, we were talking about it and communicating in an effort to understand it more and shed some of its sticky mystery. But as soon as the work was begun, the inevitable backlash was set into motion as well. It was this backlash that would lead to the perceived downfall of sex, and once again relegate it to the darkness.

In the early 80’s, perhaps tired and a little scared of the events of the previous years, America conspired to return to a conservative mode of living. Thanks to the leadership of former-actor-turned-President Ronald Reagan and his henchmen of the Republican party, sex was being made a scapegoat. When AIDS reared its ugly head, sex ~ particularly among homosexuals ~ took the blame.

It was a seminal moment for the conservative “thinkers” and the religious hypocrites: finally, this was the sign from God that homosexuality, and indeed all sex to some extent, was morally wrong, and those who engaged in it would be punished. To this day, it was an irrevocable blow to sex, a completely undeserved attack that succeeded in making sex bad and returned us to the ideal sterility of the 50’s.

With that victory, sex stopped being celebrated and acknowledged, and was instead deformed into something you did not admit to doing for fear of being judged and condemned, but something which everybody continued to do subversively. Relegated to secrecy and shunned from a healthy existence, sex suffered. As popular opinion equated sex with AIDS, and AIDS with death, it followed that sex would equal death. In the

money-hungry, numbers-fueled decade of the 80's, it boiled down to a mathematical concept:

Sex = AIDS

AIDS = Death

Therefore, Sex = Death

In such terms, there was no room for disagreement ~ it was in a mathematical formula for God's sake ~ you can't argue with math. Of course, as this was so easy to digest, no one bothered to mention that sex did not always result in AIDS, or that AIDS was spread through infected drug needles and a number of other ways. AIDS became a "gay disease", and as such had great difficulty in getting funding and help from Presidents Reagan and Bush. The religious zealots put their propaganda machine on in full force and a country was left frightened and confused in the wake of these forces. Sex was officially bad ~ you shouldn't do it, you shouldn't even talk about it. And those who did have the guts to admit to having healthy, safe sex lives were tramps, sluts, whores, harlots, tarts ~ sleazy, cheap, easy ~ the list of words went on ad nauseam, a symptom of how far sex had fallen.

But sex would not be kept down. It defies containment and limitations and labels. By the 90's, sex resurfaced. Coming out of the muddy waters left by the likes of Jerry Falwell, Newt Gingrich, and other atrocities, people sorted out the duping they had been put through. Sex had to become safe to do so, but it rose again into an integral part of our existence as humans. Sex could still get you killed, but so could driving a car, riding a plane, or crossing the street. And unlike cancer or diabetes or multiple sclerosis or Alzheimer's disease, AIDS did not originate from within the body, it had to be contracted, and could be prevented, a fact which was lost upon people for so many years.

Even with these simple realizations, sex retained a nasty stigma. Today there are events which serve to cloud and mask the reality of sex. Most people assume President Clinton was impeached for having sex with Monica Lewinsky. (The testimony of all involved hinged tellingly on what the exact definition of "sex" was ~ and not surprisingly, there was little agreement.) The President was NOT impeached for engaging in sexual acts with an intern ~ he was impeached for lying under oath and to the American people. In other words, President Clinton is a sleazy prick because he cheated

on his wife and lied to everyone in the world, NOT because he enjoys oral sex. Who doesn't? But we can't have a President who likes sex, because that would imply he is dirty in some way, or morally lacking. Don't misunderstand ~ President Clinton is indeed morally lacking, but only because he can't fess up to his sexuality, be honest with himself and those around him, and dump Hillary and lead the swinging sex-filled life he so clearly desires.

Now, I have had a boyfriend for over a year. We have sex regularly and are a monogamous couple. What most people would like me to do is just shut up about that and pretend that I am celibate. They inquire as to how my boyfriend is doing, but I can hear in their voices that they don't really want any details, and certainly not any information on the previous evening's sexual escapades. In a way, we are back where we were fifty years ago ~ we are all doing it, but no one is acknowledging it.

This is dangerous territory. If we continue to deny sex its natural place in the world, then homosexuality will never be fully accepted, and hate will never be eradicated. You see, sex is inherent to homosexuality. It's there in the word - homosexuality - and it cannot be separated or distilled. The fact that we have sex with men is what makes us gay. And (in another mathematical formula for the algebra-inclined) if we deny sex its existence we are denying our own existence. Figure it out.

For the moment, sex will content itself with living solely in the minds and lives of enlightened people like myself and anyone who agrees with this essay, and in the underground societies where all unmentionable acts thrive. Unfortunately, I believe that there is more open honesty and forthrightness in any single red light district than there is in the entire Bible Belt of America. They know it's true, but they don't want anyone else to know. Don't be misled or forced into the dark. As the once-closeted George Michael sang well before his time, "Sex is natural, sex is good. Not everybody does it, but everybody should. Sex is natural, sex is fun..."

Don't deny it.