

One of the reasons why monogamy is so still so popular is that the revolution in sexual relationships has done nothing to help the fundamental human search for love, indeed it has made finding secure love far more difficult in a fractured world.

It is important for us to understand this need because it lies at the very heart of the changes we are beginning to see today. The fact is that having several sexual partners a year does little to fill the empty void, often leaving it even emptier than it was before.

Unlike sex drive which is temporary, erratic, affected by age, circumstances and illness, the need to be loved is a basic instinctive desire in every person as every psychologist knows.

This need to be valued, affirmed, cared for and understood appears on the day of birth and remains until the day of death. It is therefore a more constant drive than sex alone, yet often muddled with it. This search for love can drive some people to have more sexual partners but a far greater number to have less, and is the force behind popular monogamy.

When sex can destroy long term love

In contrast teenagers looking for love do often have sex as a result. It is one of the commonest reasons they give. They hope sex will make love last. Unfortunately experience is often the opposite. One way to make long term love less likely is to have sex with the person before marriage

- and the quickest way to destroy the relationship completely is to have sex with someone else when you are.

Sex outside of marriage may be common and so is cohabitation - almost one in five between sixteen and fifty nine were living this way in the UK in 1992. However co-habiting couples are 50% more likely to divorce after five years, 60% more likely to be divorced after ten years, compared to those who wait until marriage . A very big risk.

When you have enjoyed some of the rewards of marriage without the cost of commitment, later marriage

is almost certain to feel less special. A honeymoon becomes an anticlimax, if it happens at all, and everything else just carries on as before. So much for sex leading to lasting love.

The reality is that sex outside of marriage can wreck a marriage and divorce is often a catastrophe. The search for love is particularly acute after the loss of a relationship, perhaps why those separated, divorced or widowed are twice as likely as those single or cohabiting to have two or more sexual partners each year.

So what do people dream of when it comes to sex? That will tell us what they want for their lives tomorrow. The answer is that there are two different dreams, one driven by pleasure and the other by the search for love.

The sexual revolution tells us people's dreams should be of free sex, wandering from one relationship to another; probably enjoying a full sex life by the age of sixteen; feeling free in adultery without guilt or disapproval from others; seeing lifetime commitment as unrealistic and boring.

However the reality of our dreams is a little different. The dreams are confused, and we can listen in to them through the media which is market led, providing images, sounds and words that people are willing to spend time and money consuming.

Torn between two fantasies

They show a schizophrenic hope, torn between two fantasies: the first, particularly for men, is exhilarating, boundless, endless sex in as many exciting situations as possible with lots of different people. This is the fantasy of pornography.

The second is an amazing person who walks into your life, you fall in love with and have a passionate, beautiful, fulfilling, exciting, life-changing, perfect relationship that goes on and on forever. This is the fantasy of the romantic ideal.

Between the two can be the dull reality of a neglected relationship which is no longer fulfilling nor exciting. No wonder so many are confused. Surely there is something better? In my own experience I know that there is.

So which of the two will survive the conflict? Romantic love or sensation seeking? Which will drive tomorrow's people the most?

Attempts have been made recently by the entertainment industry to fuse the two together: both sex pleasure and romantic love. In "The Getaway" released in 1994, screen co-stars Kim Basinger and Alec Baldwin performed some of the most explicit sex scenes since Basinger appeared in the film "9 1/2 weeks". Yet in a clear sign of changing culture, they exploited the fact that in real life they are married, to help allay public doubts about sex on the screen.

At a time when the US film industry is facing legislation to curb sex and violence, Basinger and Baldwin became the leading ambassadors of "hot monogamy", a new formula for a post-AIDS world combining elements of safe sex, eroticism and family values.

Other monogamy orientated films include "Far and Away" (Tom Cruise and wife Nicole Kidman), "Flesh and Bone" (Dennis Quaid and Meg Ryan, also married) and "Love Affair" (Warren Beatty and Annette Benning, married).

Romance is big business

Romance is a powerful force. The last five decades or more have been filled by millions of romantic dreams. Romance is a money spinner. Look at Mills and Boon, publishing new titles every couple of weeks. Barbara Cartland is said to finish a new romantic book every month to satisfy an almost insatiable demand for a female audience who like to dream.

Literature has fed off romance for hundreds of years - and romantic heroes have sometimes died for it. Annabel Heseltine wrote in the Sunday Times:

"Sex is wonderful. Without romance though it is like vanilla ice cream without chocolate sauce - nice but not delicious. Without romance there would be no surf on the waves, no fire in the volcano and the champagne would be flat.... Those everyday experiences - whose turn it is to do the washing up or change the nappies, her face packs and nanny problems, his fag ends and whisky-tainted friends - hardly make for exciting literature or deep pillow talk."

In the influential opinion of Dr Masters, women may be more romantically inclined than men:

"Men usually have affairs to find sexual variety and excitement, while women are more apt to have affairs looking for emotional returns. To put it another way, men have affairs seeking genital strokes, women have affairs to get ego strokes."

Finding the ideal partner

Romance drives partner selection and the hopes for a relationship. I have an advertisement before me for a book: "How to find your ideal partner", aimed at the millions each year who scan personal ads columns or lonely heart sections.

The book promises to "reveal how single people of all ages can find an ideal partner for a loving permanent relationship". Then there are dating agencies. Hundreds of them across Europe, Australia and America.

Dateline is the world's largest computerised database, matching tens of thousands of people every year with an advertising budget of £2.5 million and a membership of over 35,000 - out of thirteen million single people in the Britain between the ages of sixteen and sixty. Dateline succeeds with slogans like "Finding your Perfect Partner".

Or if you are already in a relationship, you could always rate your future chances with a special questionnaire used by 750,000 couples throughout the world, designed in the sixties by David Olson, also used by Relate and other marriage organisations. The "marriage and partnership"

charity One Plus One has also produced a resource for engaged couples.

We can also see romantic ideals in the marriage statistics. The number of marriages in Britain is the second highest in Europe. The vast majority of those getting married will tell you they hope the relationship works. Their idea is to be happily married for many years to come. Otherwise what is the point of all the expense and bother - not to mention possible legal or financial hassle in the future?

Perhaps this dream of long term marriage is why three times as many adults in the UK said in 1993 that divorce should be made more difficult rather than easier.

Most marriages still last a lifetime

Romance has protected marriage as an institution from rapid destruction. In 1927 the Chicago Tribune ran an article predicting marriage would be "Kaput" in fifty years. Not much sign of that today in America or anywhere else: in 1984 it was predicted that 96% of those born in the US in the 1930s would be married at some point in their lives. The figure today is still 90%.

Despite the divorce figures, the fact is that most marriages last a lifetime. Lifelong commitment can and does work - and it will not do to dismiss the majority in long term marriages as though they are all unhappy but trapped.

I have seen the long term happiness and mutual fulfilment of marriage more vividly than most, through looking after those who are dying. Time after time I have seen retired people preparing to lose husbands or wives through cancer, utterly devastated by bereavement after twenty, thirty, forty or more years of happy life together. I have also seen many people who have reached the end of their lives as single people, happy to be so, with years of warm memories and achievements they look back on.

The commonest sexual pattern is monogamy. For example someone might say:

"This is the one relationship I believe in. I am not sure how long it will last but it could last a lifetime and because the relationship is important to me I am not going to chuck it all away by risking an affair or even a one night stand."

Ten minutes can be enough. A British survey in 1993 of women found two thirds would not forgive a single act of infidelity by their partners, so the quickest and easiest way to wreck a relationship is to have sex with someone else - just once will suffice in most cases. Men are slightly more tolerant of unfaithfulness. Just over half would forgive one act of infidelity, but three out of four would walk out if it happened again.

There are huge differences between men and women when it comes to relationships generally though. For example, if it came to conflict between job and relationship, only 6% of women would put the job first and almost six out of ten would choose the relationship as the priority.

Looking for unspoilt goods

The conflict between romance and pleasure seeking can mean double standards. A friend of mine took school lessons in Germany on sex and AIDS. At first the class said they all wanted to enjoy having many different partners. Then they were asked what they were hoping for later on. Many expected to get married. They were asked which they would prefer: to get married to someone who has had many partners - or perhaps to someone who has had none?

They thought for a while, caught between the search for pleasure and the search for love. Both sexes decided in the end that while they wanted to enjoy a lot of sexual experience now, they were hoping very much to marry someone later on with very few previous partners, if any at all.

This double-think is common. "Have a good time now" yet "everything must feel very special when I get married".

At its extreme we see the double think in the case of women who are paying cosmetic

surgeons large sums to repair their hymens so that they will feel virgins again.

Jane Alexander writes in *New Woman*:

"So you're proud to be a mature, sexually experienced woman? Watch out. Celibacy and saving yourself for Mr Right are the new guidelines for Nineties sexuality. Women embarking on new relationships are now making a bid to regain their lost innocence - with the help of a cosmetic surgeon's knife....

"In the Seventies and Eighties virginity was a nuisance, a frontier to be crossed to move from adolescence to womanhood...But now sex is an altogether different ball-game. Whether it's the all-too-real threat of AIDS or the fashionable interest in "Back to Basics" family values, the new morality is everywhere. Suddenly it's cool to be celibate. Women can announce they are saving themselves without being laughed out of the bedroom."

People may need to choose: do you want to invest all future sexuality in a "big" relationship with long life appeal, or scatter experiences around? One may exclude the other.

Pairing instinct is strong and good for you

The sexual revolution never managed to alter the basic pairing instinct and this is driving change now. For both sexes this instinct is powerful: as Desmond Morris reminds us it is basic to the social conditioning of many mammals. Pairing begins to happen at an early age. A study of 29,000 eleven to sixteen year olds by Exeter University found nine out of ten teenagers said they had had a steady boy friend or girl friend by the age of sixteen.

With a continued emphasis on the romantic dream of a perfect long term relationship, the recent public trauma over the separation of the Prince and Princess of Wales is more understandable. They were our models: the hope of many for their own lives became focused on these two fallible human beings who quaked under the strain of so much vicarious living.

We all like to believe it is possible. And we go on believing. Just around the corner could be the right man or woman for me or for my friend. That is one of the pulls towards infidelity and divorce, the ever-living hope of life beyond the current relationship.

Therefore high divorce rates themselves can be a product of romantic idealism. The very hopes we have for a better future may only serve to destroy a stable partnership leaving us with nothing.

We want love because love makes us feel good about ourselves - and that feeling is healthy too. Every month our understanding grows from medical research that secure love is good for you as well as enjoyable, double bonus. This is hardly a surprise since the opposite is so obvious to anyone who cares for people, whether a doctor, social worker, health visitor, teacher or pastor.

Studies show people in stable relationships stay healthier physically and emotionally, with greater resilience to stress and change than if they are on their own. Divorced or separated people are four times as likely to need psychiatric help, while single people are twice as likely to need it. Married people also tend to adjust to illness or disability better. All this adds fuel to the fire which is consuming the old values which have tended to poke fun at permanent relationships, as boring, old-fashioned or worse.

Married people live longer

Married people live longer too. The average risk of dying each year is lower if you are married - the effect is greater for men. A national US survey of in the late 1980s of 6,484 people suggests one reason could be that many spouses "monitor and attempt to control their spouse's health behaviours" - encouraging them to go for health checks, take medication, lose weight, exercise, go easy on alcohol. Women are more likely to take responsibility for their spouses' health.

A Scottish study in 1992 found a different explanation for the "health benefit" of marriage. Researchers wanted to find out how marriage kept so many of 1,042 55 year olds healthy. Was it because spouses tend to take better care of

their health? Was it because married people are more likely to be better off? Divorce and separation creates poverty as we will see later. Was it because of lower stress levels or better social support within marriage

? They found evidence that better material resources, lower stress levels and how supported people felt could affect health.

Remarriage can also be good for health - especially if the marriage is happy and decision making is shared. The fewer children there are involved in the new household, the healthier a remarried woman will tend to be, most of all when all the children at home are her own.

Not all researchers have found all these benefits. For example, a study of 21 and 24 year olds found no link between marriage and emotional or physical well-being, so perhaps it takes some years for effects to show.

So then we have seen that the dream of lifelong happiness with a faithful partner is very much alive and if anything becoming stronger. As it does, so the pressures against the sex revolution continue to grow. Long term relationships become even more important the older you get, and our population is getting older.

Older people gaining in numbers and influence

So much of the 1960s to 1990s sexual culture has just been a culture of the young. Yet there is more to adulthood than the aspirations of those in their twenties, and older people are making their presence felt. They also are a force for change. They have sex lives too and values which are more restrained.

Those of retirement age have always been more conservative while as we have seen the next layer down are altering their views as they live long enough to count the cost.

There is a lack of youth in many developed nations. Europe has the lowest birth rate of its entire history - only 1.48 children per woman in a lifetime. At the same time there is a big bulge

of 55-70 year old men and women with fewer dependants, yet with time, money and influence.

Five years ago a company wanting to sell vacuum cleaners on television would show a young and glamorous woman - not wearing a wedding ring. If there was a man in the ad he would be portrayed as her live-in partner.

Now the woman is likely to be in her fifties, married, with a husband portrayed as a "new man", retired, at home, sharing household duties, enjoying a new lease of life together. Our culture is a collection of the images it invents for itself. Here is a dramatic change of image as companies fall over themselves to court this growing market.

The cult of youth is likely to fade over the next two decades, replaced by a growing recognition of the value of wisdom, experience and a certain "gravitas" which comes through years. If this fails to happen, the result will be a monumental waste, because people are living longer, more active at older ages, yet often retiring in their mid fifties, only half way through adult life.

This will profoundly affect sexual culture as we have seen happening with sex education policy in schools. Older parents also have views on the media which they feel can be an unhelpful influence.

Older people have their own needs

Neugarten writes of those in middle years:

"They are the norm-bearers and the decision-makers, and they live in a society which while it may be orientated towards youth, is controlled by the middle aged". They are often looking for help in marriage at a time when pressures are easing, children have grown up and the style of living is becoming more comfortable.

Agony columns have yet to catch up. They are still full of "my boyfriend is 25 and I am 17,

should I have sex with him?" or "my girlfriend says if I won't marry her, she's going to leave me for another man."

They are likely to be replaced by columns in new-style upmarket magazines with such questions as: "my wife has severe arthritis of the hips but we have an active sex life - what positions do you recommend?" or "my husband had a coronary three weeks ago after having sex - I'm afraid to touch him but we both want to have sex again."

There is a whole new world out there of middle to later years couples who are not interested in the latest adolescent titillations - they may have been enjoying orgasms for years and may be far more expert than many young agony aunts themselves. What they want is advice on keeping marriage happy and sex life fulfilling. Agony grandparents, here we come.

How to enjoy sex with angina or arthritis, asthma, bronchitis, diabetes, epilepsy, hernias, hormone deficiency, hypertension, kidney failure, multiple sclerosis, obesity, prolapse, prostatectomy, psychiatric illness, stroke, thyroid problems or urinary tract infections - to name but a few.

Older sex therapists point the way

The advice of sex therapists Masters and Johnson is "aging" too, changing with the years to target older people. Virginia Johnson was asked what happens if you are married and do not want sex any more: is it possible to have a healthy, happy and contented marriage? She replied "Sure! Why should any experts be the arbiters... That's like telling someone they can't be a vegetarian."

Therefore the aging population is another pressure point as a new era dawns where people still want long term romantic happiness, rejecting the view that it is unrealistic, because they have older friends for whom it is a living, daily reality, they read success stories in the media and are increasingly familiar with ways to make it more likely.

And increasingly they are aware of the power of sex to destroy, the plague of sexual ill health,

the pain of parting, the devastation of splitting up, and the problems for children left behind.

So then, we have seen the pendulum is swinging again: sexual culture is changing, driven by many things including the search for romantic love. I now want to look at the so-called freedom promised by the sexual revolution, how it has led to abuse of sexual power, as well as impossible pressures to perform, and how both these things are likely to make sexual restraint seem more and more attractive, rather than further relaxation.

* Rising Price of Love - book by Patrick Dixon - published 1995