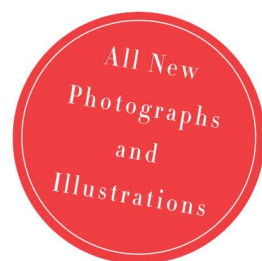


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The
Joy of
SEX

DR. ALEX COMFORT



THE TIMELESS GUIDE TO LOVEMAKING

• THE
joy of sex



For Cambria, whence it all began

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Published in the United States by Three Rivers Press, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc., New York.

www.crownpublishing.com

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Originally published in Great Britain by Modest Securities, Ltd., London, in 1972. Updated and reillustrated editions were published in 1991, 1996, and 2002 by Mitchell Beazley, an imprint of Octopus Publishing Group Ltd., London. This current edition was originally published in hardcover in Great Britain as *The New Joy of Sex* by Mitchell Beazley, an imprint of the Octopus Publishing Group Ltd., London, in 2008, and was subsequently published in hardcover in the United States by Crown Publishers, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, in 2009.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Comfort, Alex, 1920–2000.

The joy of sex / Alex Comfort, Susan Quilliam.—Rev. ed.

Originally published: New York: Crown, 1972; 1st American ed. of revision originally published in Great Britain in 2008 by Mitchell Beazley.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Sex instruction. 2. Sex customs. I. Quilliam, Susan. II. Title.

HQ31.C743 2008

613.9'6—dc22 2008017531

ISBN 978–0–307–58778–7

Printed in Hong Kong

Commissioning Editor Hannah Barnes-Murphy

Senior Editor Leanne Bryan

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Art Director Tim Foster

Senior Art Editor Juliette Norsworthy

Proofreader Salima Hirani

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Indexer Diana Lecore

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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preface by Alex Comfort

I am a physician and human biologist for whom the natural history of human sexuality is of as much interest as the rest of human natural history. As with the rest of human natural history, I had notes on it. My wife encouraged me to bring biology into medicine, and my old medical school had no decent textbook to teach a human sexuality course.

Joy was compiled and, very importantly, illustrated, just after the end of that daft and extraordinary non-statute in Western society, the Sexual Official Secrets Act. For at least two hundred years, the description, and above all the depiction, of this most familiar and domestic group of activities, and of almost everything associated with them, had been classified. When, in the sixteenth century, Giulio Romano engraved his weightily classical pictures showing sixteen ways of making love, and Aretino wrote poems to go with them, a leading ecclesiastic opined that the artist deserved to be crucified. The public, apparently, thought otherwise (“Why,” said Aretino, “should we not look upon that which pleases us most?”) and *Aretino’s Postures* have circulated surreptitiously ever since, but even in 1950s Britain pubic hair had to be airbrushed out to provide a smooth and featureless surface.

People today, who never experienced the freeze on sexual information, won’t appreciate the propositions of the transformation when it ended – it was like ripping down the Iron Curtain. My immediate predecessor in writing about domestic sex, Dr. Eustace Chesser, was (unsuccessfully) prosecuted for his low-key, unillustrated book *Love Without Fear*, and even in 1972 there was still some remaining doubt about whether *Joy* would be banned by the Thought Police.

The main aim of “sexual bibliotherapy” (writing books like this one) was to undo some of the mischief caused by the guilt, misinformation, and lack of information. That kind of reassurance is still needed. I have asked various people – chiefly older couples – whether *The Joy of Sex* told them things they didn’t know, or reassured them about things they knew and already did or would like to do. I have had both answers. One can now read books and see pictures devoted to sexual behavior almost without limitation in democratic countries, but it takes more than a few decades and a turnover of generations to undo centuries of misinformation; and of this material, much is anxious or hostile or over the top. People who worried, when the book first came out, if they did some of the things described in it may now worry if they don’t do all of them. That we can’t help, nor the fact that the same people who went to doctors because of sexual fear and inhibition under the old dispensation now go complaining of sexual indigestion under the new.

Sexual behavior probably changes remarkably little over the years – sexual revolutions and moral backlashes chiefly affect the degree of frankness or reticence about what people do in private; the main contributor to any sexual revolution in our own time, insofar as it affects behavior, has not been frankness but the advent of reliable contraception, which makes it possible to separate the reproductive and recreational uses of sexuality. Where unanxious books dealing as accurately as possible with the range of sexual behaviors are most valuable is in encouraging the sexually active reader – who both wants to enjoy sex and to be responsible about it – and in aiding the helping professions to avoid causing problems to their clients. It is only recently, as ethology has replaced psychoanalytic theory, that counselors have come to realize that sex, besides being a serious interpersonal matter, is a deeply rewarding form of play. Children are not encouraged to be embarrassed about their play; adults often have been and are still. So long as play is not hostile, cruel, unhappy, or limiting, they need not be.

One of the most important uses of play is in expressing a healthy awareness of sexual equality. This involves letting both sexes take turns in controlling the game; sex is no longer what men do to women and women are supposed to enjoy. Sexual interaction is sometimes a loving fusion, sometimes a situation where each is a “sex object” – maturity in sexual relationships involves balancing, rather than denying, the personal and impersonal aspects of arousal. Both are essential and built-in to humans. For anyone who is short on either of these elements, play is the way to learn: men learn to stop domineering and trying to perform; women discover that they can take control in the give-and-take of the game rather than by nay-saying. If they achieve this, Man and Woman are one another’s best friends in the very sparks they strike from one another.

This book has changed considerably since its first edition and it will be revised again in the future as knowledge increases. What will not change is the central importance of unanxious, responsible, and happy sexuality in the lives of normal people. For what they need – in a culture that does not learn skills and comparisons in this area of living by watching – is accurate and unbothered information. The availability of this, and public resistance to the minority of disturbed people who for so long limited it, is an excellent test of the degree of liberty and concern in a society, reflected in the now-old injunction to make love, not war. It is a socially relevant test today.

Alex Comfort, M.B., D.Sc., 1991

preface by Susan Quilliam

I am a relationships psychologist and sexologist whose lifetime aim, through a variety of expert roles, has been to help people enhance their emotional and sexual partnerships. So when the publishers of *The Joy of Sex* approached me to “reinvent” the book for the twenty-first century, it seemed to me the fulfillment of everything I have been working for.

I well remember the original publication of *Joy*, and the awed giggles with which I and my friends read, discussed, and then put into practice its suggestions. So I know firsthand what over the decades proved to be true: *Joy* is an astonishing and inspirational child of its age, born not only out of social but also political changes that irreversibly altered the sexual landscape for individuals, couples, and society. Barely a decade before the book’s 1972 publication, the contraceptive pill had, for the first time in history, enabled women to have control over their own fertility. In its wake came increased female education, emancipation, and self-belief, as well as a whole host of liberalizations, sexual and social – increasing permissiveness, more frequent cohabitation, easier divorce, more available erotica, and gay rights.

Joy was not only a product of this revolution, it also helped create it. Dr. Alex Comfort’s aim was to write the first book that gave readers accurate knowledge about sexuality, and permission to use that knowledge. The text and illustrations were designed to both reassure the reader that their sexuality was normal and to offer further possibilities with which to expand their sexual menu. He was hugely effective in his intention – 8.5 million copies of *The Joy of Sex* have been sold to date and it has been translated into fourteen languages. More than that, it was a key influence on the social changes of the late twentieth century and has been a byword for sexual vision ever since.

Why, then, reinvent? There have already been content revisions, in the author’s lifetime and after his death in 2000, the most recent being the highly successful thirtieth-anniversary edition by Alex’s son Nicholas Comfort. But the very changes that *Joy* itself wrought in society have meant that the book has come to need updating in a more fundamental way. This was my task – to re-create *The Joy of Sex* for the contemporary world; to do what Alex Comfort would have done had he been writing today.

The majority of the text remains the same, but substantial additions have been made. Many of these are informational; there have been countless key scientific discoveries in recent years in the fields of physiology, psychology, psychotherapy, and medicine, while the advent of sexology – the specialist study of sexual matters – has resulted in both rigorous academic research and a more widespread public awareness of, and skill in, sex.

Alongside these informational updates, a great deal of refocusing has been necessary to reflect social shifts. An intimate relationship is a very different animal from what it was in 1972. It's now largely expected that sex will be part of every love partnership, that bedroom activity will include practices previously considered outrageous, and that these practices will be informed and often suggested via a new raft of technological advances. It's acknowledged that a woman can lead just as much as a man, both in bed and out of it – one reason why the publisher chose a woman to reinvent the book. And it is, albeit slowly, now acknowledged that a couple's sex life lasts well into their later years and increases, rather than decreases, in quality.

Yet along with all these positive developments has come a flurry of problems that weren't predicted in the heady days of 1972. Pressure to have sex; regret that one has had sex; worry that one isn't sufficiently beautiful to deserve sex; worry that one isn't having enough sex or enough good sex. And all that is set beside high rates of pregnancy, abortion, and sexually transmitted infections. In the twenty-first century, as we hastily adapt to a society arguably more sexualized than any previous one, it's a wild world out there.

All of which is why the many changes made to *Joy* have been underpinned by what remains the same – an absolute yet pragmatic optimism around sexuality and its place in our lives. Running throughout the original book was a rock-solid seam of positivity that sex is a good thing and that mature adults, given the right information and inspiration, can be trusted to treat it as such. Despite the headlines and scare stories, I still deeply believe in what Alex Comfort proposed – that sex should be and can be a total joy.

I have loved reinventing the book because Alex Comfort's values and aims are also mine. I too want to present knowledge in an accessible form. To encourage mature decision-making and offer the skills and strategies to do it. To protest attempts to enforce inhibitions on human sexuality. To see sex as the ultimate in human play, but at the same time a developmental essential that helps us grow as people and partners. Above all, to give people not just the technicalities, the fripperies, or the “junk food” of sexual literature, but an intelligent, thoughtful, and “gourmet” treatment of the topic.

In the end I return to, and repeat in my own voice, Alex Comfort's words from his first preface. My intention and my hope is that this book will “benefit . . . the ordinary, sexually active reader – eager to both enjoy sexuality and to be tender and responsible with it.” True in 1972. Just as true today.

Susan Quilliam, 2008



i like my body when it is with your
body. It is so quite new a thing.
Muscles better and nerves more.
i like your body. i like what it does,
i like its hows. i like to feel the spine
of your body and its bones, and the trembling
-firm-smooth ness and which i will
again and again and again
kiss, i like kissing this and that of you,
i like, slowly stroking the, shocking fuzz
of your electric fur, and what-is-it comes
over parting flesh. . . . And eyes big love-crumbs,

and possibly i like the thrill

of under me you so quite new

e. e. cummings



on gourmet lovemaking

All of us, barring any physical limitations, are able to dance and sing – after a fashion. This, if you think about it, summarizes the justification for learning to make love. Love, in the same way as singing, is something to be taken spontaneously. On the other hand, the difference between Pavlova and the Palais de Danse, or opera and barbershop singing, is much less than the difference between sex as our recent ancestors came to accept it and sex as it can be.

At least we recognize this now (so that instead of worrying if sex is sinful, most people now worry whether they are “getting satisfaction” – one can worry about anything, given the determination). And there are now enough books about the basics; we are largely past the point of people worrying about the normality, possibility, and variety of sexual experience. This book is slightly different, in that there are now enough people who have those basics and want more depth of understanding, solid ideas, and inspiration.

To draw a parallel, chef-grade cooking doesn’t happen naturally: it starts at the point where people know how to prepare and enjoy food, are curious about it and willing to take trouble preparing it, read recipe hints, and find they are helped by one or two techniques. It’s hard to make mayonnaise by trial and error, for instance. Gourmet sex, as we define it, is the same – the extra one can get from comparing notes, using some imagination, trying way-out or new experiences, when one already is making satisfying love and wants to go on from there.

This book will likely attract four sorts of readers. First, there are those who don’t fancy it, find it disturbing, and would rather stay the way they are – these should put it down, accept our apologies, and stay the way they are. Second, there are those who are with the idea, but don’t like our choice of techniques – remember, it’s a menu, not a rulebook.

Third, most people will use our notes as a personal one-couple notebook from which they might get ideas. In this respect we have tried to stay wide open. One of the original aims of this book was to cure the notion, born of non-discussion, that common sex needs are odd or weird; the whole joy of sex-with-love is that there are no rules, so long as you enjoy, and the choice is practically



unlimited. We have, however, left out long discussion of very specialized sexual preferences; people who like these know already what they want to try.

The final group of readers are the hardy experimentalists, bent on trying absolutely everything. They too will do best to read this exactly like a cookbook – except that sex is safer in this respect, between lovers, in that you can't get obese or atherosclerotic on it, or give yourself ulcers. The worst you can get, given sensible safety precautions, is sore, anxious, or disappointed. However, one needs a steady basic diet of quiet, loving, night-and-morning intercourse to stand this experimentation on, simply because, contrary to popular ideas, the more regular sex a couple has, the higher the deliberately contrived peaks – just as the more you cook routinely, the better and the more reliable banquets you can stage.

One specific group of readers deserves special note. If you are disabled in any way, don't stop reading. A physical disability is not an obstacle to fulfilling sex. In counseling disabled people, one repeatedly finds that the real disability isn't a mechanical problem but a mistaken idea that there is only one "right" – or enjoyable – way to have sex. The best approach is probably to go through the book with your partner, marking off the things you can do. Then pick something appealing that you think you can't quite do, and see if there is a strategy you can develop together. Talking to other couples where one partner has a problem similar to yours is another resource.

In sum, the people we are addressing are the adventurous and uninhibited lovers who want to find the limits of their ability to enjoy sex. That means we take some things for granted – having intercourse naked and spending time over it; being able and willing to make it last, up to a whole afternoon on occasion; having privacy; not being scared of things like genital kisses; not being obsessed with one sexual trick to the exclusion of all others; and, of course, loving each other.

As the title implies, this book is about love as well as sex: you don't get high-quality sex on any other basis – either you love each other before you come to want it, or, if you happen to get it, you love each other because of it, or both. Just as you can't cook without heat, you can't make love without feedback. By feedback, we mean the right mixture of stop and go, tough and tender, exertion and affection. This comes by empathy and long mutual knowledge. Anyone



who expects to get this in a first attempt with a stranger is an optimist, or a neurotic – if they do, it’s what used to be called love at first sight, and isn’t expendable: “skill,” or variety, is no substitute. Also, one can’t teach tenderness.

The starting point of all lovemaking is close bodily contact; love has been defined as the harmony of two souls, and the contact of two epiderms. At the same time, we might as well plan our menu so that we learn to use the rest of our equipment. That includes our feelings of identity, forcefulness, and so on, and all of our fantasy needs. Luckily, sex behavior in humans is enormously elastic (it has had to be, or we wouldn’t be here), and also nicely geared to help us express most of the needs that society or our upbringing have corked up.

Elaboration in sex is something we need rather specially and it has the advantage that if we really make it work, it makes us more, not less, receptive to each other as people. This is the answer to anyone who thinks that conscious effort to increase our sex range is “mechanical” or a substitute for real human relationship – we may start that way, but it’s an excellent entry to learning that we are people and relating to each other as such. There may be other places we can learn to express all of ourselves, and do it mutually, but there aren’t many.

Those are the assumptions on which this book is based. Granted this, there are two modes of sex – the duet and the solo – and a good concert alternates between the two. The duet is a cooperative effort aiming at simultaneous orgasm, or at least one orgasm each, and complete, untechnically planned release. This, in fact, needs skill, and can be built up from more calculated “love-play” until doing the right thing for both of you becomes fully automatic. This is the basic sexual meal.

The solo, by contrast, is when one partner is the player and the other the instrument. The aim of the player is to produce results on the other’s pleasure experience as extensive, unexpected, and generally wild as his or her skill allows – to blow them out of themselves. The player doesn’t lose control, though he or she can get wildly excited by what is happening to the other. The instrument does lose control – in fact, with a responsive instrument and a skillful performer, this is the concerto situation – and if it ends in an uncontrollable ensemble, so much the better. All the elements of music and dance are involved – rhythm,

mounting tension, tantalization, even forcefulness: “I’m like the executioner,” said the lady in the Persian poem, “but where he inflicts intolerable pain I will only make you die of pleasure.” There is indeed an element of infliction in the solo mode, which is why some lovers dislike it and others overdo it, but no major lovemaking is complete without some solo passages.

The antique idea of the woman as passive and the man as performer used to ensure that he would show off playing solos on her, and early marriage manuals perpetuated this idea. Today, she is herself the soloist par excellence, whether in getting him excited to start with, or in controlling him and showing off all her skills. Solo recitals are not, of course, necessarily separate from intercourse. Apart from leading into it, there are many coital solos – for the woman astride, for example – while mutual masturbation or genital kisses can be fully fledged duets. Solo response can be electrifyingly extreme in the quietest people. Skilfully handled by someone who doesn’t stop for yells of murder but does know when to stop, a woman can get orgasm after orgasm, and a man can be kept hanging just short of climax to the limit of human endurance. The solo-given orgasm, whether from her or from him, is unique – neither bigger nor smaller in either sex than a full duet but different; sharper but not so round. And most people who have experienced both like to alternate them. Trying to say how they differ is a little like describing wine. Differ they do, however, and much depends on cultivating and alternating them.

Top-level enjoyment doesn’t have to be varied, it just often is. In fact, being stuck rigidly with one sex technique usually means anxiety. In this book we have not, for example, focused on coital postures to the exclusion of all else. The common positions are now familiar to most people from writing and pictures if not from trial – the more extreme ones, as a rule, should be spontaneous, but few of them have marked advantages. This explains the apparent emphasis in this book on extras – the “sauces and pickles.” That said, individuals who, through a knot in their psyche, are obliged to live on sauce and pickle only are unfortunate in missing the most sustaining part of the meal – exclusive obsessions in sex are very like living exclusively on horseradish sauce through allergy to beef; fear of horseradish sauce, however, as indigestible, unnecessary, and immature is another hang-up, namely puritanism.



One of the things still missing from the essence of sexual freedom is the unashamed ability to use sex as play. In the past, ideas of maturity were nearly as much to blame as old-style moralisms about what is normal or perverse. We are all immature, and have anxieties and aggressions. Coital play, like dreaming, may be a programmed way of dealing acceptably with these, just as children express their fears and aggressions in games. Adults are unfortunately afraid of playing games, dressing up, and acting scenes. It makes them self-conscious: something horrid might get out. In this regard, bed is the place to play all the games you have ever wanted to play – if adults could become less self-conscious about such “immature” needs, we should have fewer deeply anxious people. If we were able to transmit the sense of play that is essential to a full, enterprising, and healthily immature view of sex between committed people, we would be performing a mitzvah: playfulness is a part of love that could be a major contribution to human happiness.

But still the main dish is loving, un-self-conscious sexual pleasure of all kinds – long, frequent, varied, ending with both parties satisfied, but not so full they can’t face another light course, and another meal in a few hours. The *pièce de résistance* is good old face-to-face matrimonial, the finishing-off position, with mutual orgasm, and starting with a full day or night of ordinary tenderness. Other ways of making love are special in various ways, and the changes of timbre are infinitely varied – complicated ones are for special occasions, or special uses like holding off an over-quick male orgasm, or are things that, like pepper steak, are stunning once a year but not staples.

There are, after all, only two “rules” in good sex, apart from the obvious one of not doing things that are silly, antisocial, or dangerous. One is: “Don’t do anything you don’t really enjoy,” and the other is: “Find out your partner’s needs and don’t balk at them if you can help it.” In other words, a good giving and taking relationship depends on a compromise (so does going to a show – if you both want the same thing, fine; if not, take turns and don’t let one partner always dictate). This can be easier than it sounds, because unless their partner wants something they find actively off-putting, real lovers get a reward not only from their own satisfaction but also from seeing the other respond and become satisfied. Most wives who don’t like Chinese food will eat it occasionally for the pleasure of seeing a Sinophile husband enjoy it, and vice versa.



Partners who won't do this over specific sex needs are usually balking not because they have tried it and it's a turnoff (many experimental dishes are nicer than you expected), but through ignorance of the range of human needs, plus being scared if these include things like forcefulness, cultivating extragenital sensation, or role-playing, which previous social mythology pretended weren't there. Reading a full list of the unscheduled accessory sex behaviors that some normal people find helpful might be thought a necessary preliminary to any extended sexual relationship.

Couples should match up their needs and preferences (though people don't find these out at once); you won't get to some of our suggestions or understand them until you have learned to respond. It's a mistake to run so long as walking is such an enchanting and new experience, and you may be happy pedestrians who match automatically. Where a rethink really helps is at the point where you have gotten used to each other socially (sex needs aren't the only ones that need matching up between people who live together), and feel that the surface needs repolishing. If you think that sexual relations are over-rated, the surface does need repolishing, and you haven't paid enough attention to the wider use of your sexual equipment as a way of communicating totally. The traditional expedient at the point where the surface gets dull is to trade in the relationship and start all over in an equally uninstructed attempt with someone else, on the off chance of getting a better match-up by random choice. This is emotionally wasteful, and you usually repeat the same mistakes; better by far to repolish.

As to practicalities, we suggest couples either read the book together or (perhaps even better) read it separately, marking passages for the other partner's attention. This works wonders if – as is often the case – you don't really talk easily about sexual needs, or are afraid of sounding tactless.

Finally, if you don't like the repertoire or if it doesn't square with yours, never mind; the aim of *The Joy of Sex* is to stimulate your creative imagination. Sex books can only suggest techniques in order to encourage you to experiment. You can preface your own ideas with "this is how we play it," and play it your own way. But by that time, when you will have tried all your own creative sexual fantasies, you won't need books.



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The Joy of Sex

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