

## Review of Sexually Transmitted Diseases 4<sup>th</sup> Edition

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How does one review the new edition of the 'Bible' of sexually transmitted disease (STD) knowledge? Weight training might be a good start. The current edition weighs in at 5.7 kg so perhaps it is time to consider dividing into two volumes for ease of use. The list of contributors still reads like the who's who of the discipline with 210 individual contributors obviously well chosen to write about their particular field of expertise. Thus we have Larry Corey and Anna Wald writing about herpes, Sharon Hillier about vaginal flora, Jorma Paavonen about pelvic inflammatory disease and Jack Sobel about candidiasis as just a few examples of this editorial policy.

The introduction provides a table of the 'good, bad and ugly' in the STD/HIV field since the last edition, which provides an excellent overview of the field and how rapidly knowledge is advancing in this branch of medicine. It also underlines the rationale for including HIV in such a text given the intimate relationship between HIV and STIs. Of necessity the HIV management section is not totally up to date (raltegravir too new for example) but provides an excellent overview of the management of this infection. There is also an interesting discourse on the terminology regarding STDs versus sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and transmitted as opposed to transmissible.

Essentially the previous parts of the text are retained for the new edition with some useful rearrangement and grouping of related topics and some new chapters on the interplay between STDs and other conditions. Those familiar with the previous edition will find it easy to navigate through the text which proceeds logically from history to epidemiology, through social and psychological aspects, to immunology and microbiology and then onto clinical care and then prevention and public health issues.

This edition makes excellent use of colour with the various parts being colour coordinated for easier finding. It would have been useful for those same colours to have been replicated in the contents headings. This use of colour has allowed the clinical pictures to be integrated into the text rather than in a separate plates section as previously. This is particularly useful in the dermatological section and the graphs are easier to interpret in their new colourful versions. This is certainly a clear enhancement on previous editions.

It must be difficult to write and edit a textbook now as some of the data is outdated by the time of publication and new information is always being presented. The latest references date

from 2006 but the extent of the literature review for each chapter is laudable and provides an excellent starting point for research of any of the topics. Essentially each chapter is an extensive review article on the chosen topic and information within it could be updated as necessary by a very narrow time defined search on Medline for example.

It was surprising to see penile cancer related to human papillomavirus being included in the section on STD syndromes in women. Perhaps male cancers including the information about the increased risk of anal cancer in men who have sex with men, could be included in the STD syndromes in the section on men. On some occasions the index is not particularly helpful. Under syphilis for example there is no reference to lumbar puncture which is an area of debate and an index reference would be helpful. However these are minor quibbles.

Because it will be used by both students and teachers, use of summaries and tables ensures that the important information is usually readily found. This aspect is varied through the text, presumably reflecting the different authors' styles. There are excellent graphs and tables in the epidemiology section, allowing data to be retrieved easily and there is an excellent relative risk table with regard to HIV acquisition for example, whereas in the condom chapter there is no table about the effectiveness of condoms in preventing various STIs, necessitating reading through the text to gain the information. Perhaps authors could be instructed to provide summary tables where possible to summarise the available data. The provision of the drug interactions and management guidelines as appendices is very useful.

This text's major strength is that it brings all branches of science relating to STDs together, so that there can be a better understanding of all aspects that need to be considered. To have a 'one stop shop' to review the microbiology, immunology, sociology and public health aspects as well as the clinical care is invaluable and the current edition certainly retains its reputation as the 'Bible'. This should be an essential purchase for any medical library, either in hard copy or on line.

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## **Bonk: the Curious Coupling of Sex and Science**

Mary Roach

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Paperback, 319 pages, including bibliography

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This paperback takes the reader on a journey through the world of sex and science. Written for a lay audience, it nonetheless offers up many useful insights and facts for professionals working in sexual health, particularly regarding some of the greats of sexual research, such as Alfred Kinsey who was a biologist and an expert on gall wasps (he collected more than 5 million of them during his time as an entomologist) and Masters and Johnson (whose pioneering laboratory research discovered that the best sex was to be had by committed gay and lesbian couples who displayed what the researchers termed 'gender empathy').

Mary Roach writes about other researchers who are perhaps less well known and include Dr Ahmed Shafik from Egypt who published a paper on the effects of polyester on the sexual activity of laboratory rats (rats wearing polyester pants don't have as much sex as those wearing cotton or wool), or Ernst Boas and Ernst Goldschmidt (the two Ernies?) who discovered in 1932 that when a heterosexual man dances with another man his heart rate may rise 20 beats per minute less than when he dances with a woman. The latter researchers also documented a woman's multiple orgasms, and found that their subject's heart rate went up to a shocking 146 beats per minute during her third of four orgasms.

The author is a published science writer and has a light-hearted and witty style; she also gives numerous insights into her own nature by bravely taking part as a subject in some research herself, sometimes with her long-suffering husband in tow. Her flippant tone, though, can be a little grating after a while. At times I wished she would just tell the story (which, after all, is often times funny enough without any embellishments!), rather than subject us to her first person, breathless commentary.

This is a minor quibble, however, and the tour through the laboratories of the last century that have devoted themselves to understanding more about humans (and small woodland animals, not to mention polyester-pants-wearing rodents) and our singular sexual responses is quite fascinating. With 15 chapters including, 'Dating the Penis-Camera', 'The Upsuck Chronicles', 'The Lady's Boner', and 'Mind over Vagina', there is more than enough material to keep one's interest aroused throughout this book.

It is hard not to read through *Bonk* without smiling, and even chuckling, at the efforts of researchers to understand more about sex, but the reader also gains respect and admiration for the pioneers who went out on a limb, both personally and professionally, to observe and study sexual behaviour. Many such researchers were met with scorn or opprobrium, or at the very least a faint air of distaste for their research activities, but we have them to thank today for our current state of knowledge. Roach also introduces us to current researchers, who, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are seen as undertaking research that is really beyond the pale. She also makes it abundantly clear that much more research is needed into understanding us weird humans and our sexual responses. This will hardly come as a surprise to the readers of *Sexual Health*.

I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in sex, and would suggest it be mandatory reading for anyone *without* an interest in sex! Vividly written, entertaining, and thought-provoking, *Bonk* is a romp!

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