

# Why Is Sex So Complicated?

Bruce Ashford

If there's one thing about sex just about everyone can agree on, it's that sex is complicated. But complicated doesn't mean (as some assume) that sex is bad. Quite the contrary: sex is complicated precisely because it is so good, valuable, and powerful.

According to the creator of sex, God, sex has deep meaning and purpose because it points to something higher than itself. It points to love.

Sexual activity is a way of loving another person with our body. At its best, sex is a type of body language that signifies to the other person that we love them with all our heart. Our society knows, at a visceral level, that sex and love should go together. Try as we may to say sex is only physical, deep down we know it's bigger than that. Even our popular music describes sex in terms that are spiritual, transcendent, and even holy.

At its worst, though, sex is the opposite of love; it is an act in which we use another person merely for our own pleasure or power. Because it is so powerful, it can be powerfully destructive.

Consider the powerfully negative effect of abusive sex. Abusive sex hurts the victim holistically—in mind, body, and soul. Similarly, sex work; even if the sex work is consensual, the sex worker is being used rather than loved, which degrades the sex workers in ways that he or she may not be aware. The same goes for cohabitation before marriage, which increases the chance of divorce and negatively affects children.

The great novelist and professor C.S. Lewis famously related sexual activity to four kinds of love. He did so by focusing on ancient Greek literature and its use of four different words, each of which described a type of love. When sex is done right, all four of these kinds of love are involved. To the degree that each element becomes missing—three, or two, only one, or none—that sex becomes negative—even toxic, cruel, and abusive.

The first kind of love, *Storge*, is translated in English as affection. It is the way we find ourselves drawn to familiar people or things in our lives. Affection can be directed toward a person, a pet, or even a favorite type of food.

The second kind of love, *Philia*, refers to friendship. Friendship is a type of camaraderie we have with another person, usually developed over something we have in common. It is probably the least-celebrated form of love in the modern world, not least because good friendships take time. Good friendships develop over many years.

The third kind of love, Eros, is romantic love. This is the one we normally associate most naturally with sex—and rightly so. Unlike the other types of love, those experiencing Eros “are normally face to face, absorbed in each other,” writes Lewis. At its best, romantic love is directed toward one’s spouse in a committed marriage over the span of many years.

The fourth kind of love, agape, is self-giving, sacrificial love. Agape is best explained as the unconditional love God shows toward his people. It is the sort of reckless love God showed when he took on human flesh as Jesus of Nazareth and was crucified and resurrected for the forgiveness of our sins.

Lewis’ exploration of these four types of love is helpful in exploring why sex is so complicated. Sex is so complicated because of its goodness, value, and power. In general, the more value something has, the more we should expect it to be multi-faceted and complex. God designed sex with an array of beauties, using it to cement the four types of love a husband and wife have for one another.

God also designed sex to create children. When God created the first couple, he told them to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). That’s the human side of things. But every time a couple conceives a baby through sexual activity, God supernaturally causes that baby to have a soul. Whenever we procreate, God works a miracle!

But more than babies and more than love, sex is ultimately about God. Incredibly, sexual faithfulness in marriage reminds the world of God’s faithfulness to his people. This is the main reason God gives us rules pertaining to sex. He’s not trying to ruin our fun. He’s ensuring that we know the truth about his love for us—a love that is multi-faceted, creative, and everlasting.

God wants sexual activity to be a powerful force for good in our lives, not a weapon with which to wound ourselves and others. He knows that sex operates best within the bounds of a loving, self-giving, lifelong, faithful marriage between a husband and wife.

Sex is complicated. Powerful, valuable, good, miraculous, and complicated. And that’s a good thing.