

Dr. Tatiana's Sex Advice

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Don't deny that you've recently picked up the latest issue of *People Magazine* yearning to know how Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's dramatic life relates to yours. Problems with the Mrs.? Can't find Mr. Right? The problems we humans face unquestionably rule our everyday lives, but whatever you thought true about sex and love before, throw it all out the window. The biological evolution of sex is far more complicated than many of us perceive. Olivia Judson, an evolutionary biologist from the Imperial College in London, personifies different organisms on earth as sexually confused and frustrated individuals who write to Dr. Tatiana for sex advice. Dr. Tatiana responds to the desperate calls of sex, courting, and everything in between through her own sex advice column. In Dr. Tatiana's Sex Advice to All Creation, many of these seemingly bizarre acts of sex and adoration are explored in the lives of different organisms on earth. From worms to elephants, Dr. Tatiana's Sex Advice to All Creation does not skip out on the dirty details on how certain organisms "get it on" and the ways in which they tactfully pass along their genes. Never before has sex education been told with such clarity and wit.

Love is everywhere – between our sheets, in the forests, and in the dirt. For us, it is often all we humans think about. Our lives revolve around sex, yet we know nothing of the complexities that surround us, though we often pretend that we do. Dr. Tatiana's Sex Advice For All Creation is neatly split into three parts: "Let Slip the Whores of War!" "The Evolution of Depravity," and "Are Men Necessary? Usually, But Not Always." Within each part of the book, readers are swept into the bizarre sex lives of organisms and are taught science more than relationship advice. "Let Slip the Whores of War," for example, addresses the misconception about the chastity of women. Stereotypically and culturally, female promiscuity is often forbidden in our societies, and as our pop-culture, chick-flick movies depict, it is usually the men who cheat and the women who cry over broken hearts. Dr. Tatiana busts this myth by explaining how in nature, females are the ones who have sex with as many males as they possibly can in order to have the highest potential of producing favorable offspring. For example, Judson, in the guise of Dr. Tatiana, explains "female rabbits and Gunison's prairie dogs both show higher rates of conception if they mate with several partners while they are in heat" (p. 13). In response to this, males in nature have evolved to use different tactics in hopes to keep up with these saucy ladies.

What is wonderful about Judson's book is that through the use of humor and sincere stories of these sexual species, readers (whether they know it or not) are learning the inner-workings of biological instances in nature. Judson introduces the idea of sexual selection, a scientific term defined by Robert E. Ricklefs, stating that "the intense competition among males attributes for use in combat with other males or in attracting females. Such selection by one sex for specific characteristics in individuals of the opposite sex is referred to as sexual selection" (Ricklefs, p. 175). Sadly, Judson explains, the males must chase females, yet females are promiscuous, so the males attempt to devise ways to counteract this promiscuity of females. It's a dizzying frenzy of sex and it only gets more intense!

Judson exemplifies males counteracting females' need to mate with multiple males, as male rodents "have enormous glands to secrete tough, rubbery corks that they place deep in their partners' reproductive tract as they finish copulating" (p.19) in order to prevent the further copulating of other males with this particular female. Yet, this does nothing for the male's security. Often, when the male leaves a cork described above in the female's reproductive track, she simply pulls it out! This way of interaction in nature is commonly known as the "Red Queen Hypothesis," another concept introduced by Judson, in which "males evolve to control, females evolve to resist" (p. 19). To explain this concept further, the "Red Queen Hypothesis" is described such that "sex and genetic recombination could provide a moving target for the evolving pathogens and keep them from getting the upper hand" (Ricklefs, p. 164).

In Dr. Tatiana's Sex Advice For All Creation, nothing seems to make sense, especially as you venture further and further into these perplexing stories. A common theme that cannot be missed is that nature is full of catch-22's. There are many instances in which females are violent to males and other females, and visa versa, simply in the acts of courting and leadership, in which individuals are often killed in the process of mating or courting. These tactics seem to make sense when both males and females partake in violent activities because their chances of mating are higher if they fight for it as opposed to letting a potential mate escape with the possibility of their genes passing. Judson exemplifies these ideas using the Praying Mantis and the Hawaiian Monk Seal, both extremely violent lovers and courtiers. The Hawaiian Monk Seal is an especially strange case, seeing that it is a species near extinction due to all the males killing one another, and even the females, in the process of courtship.

All-in-all, Judson's national bestseller proves how sex in nature is indeed very strange to the human world but beautifully describes and explains that sex, whether it be sneaky, violent, or asexual, is all very normal. I personally enjoyed Judson's book greatly, although at times I found it a little repetitive in the sense that there were so many examples of different organisms. I often found myself getting lost in the book even though it was split into three sections. However, each of these examples was more than entertaining and gave me new insights into the world of nature that I could never have fathomed before.

If you're looking for a book that will disgust you, make you laugh, and make you think about how the world ticks through the different species on earth, I highly recommend this book. A fast read that never gets boring, you can find Judson's book in stores now for \$16.

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