

Letters, a blog: Let sex talk continue



**Faye
Flam**
*Carnal
Knowledge*

At one point or another, I've written on particle physics, cosmology, chemistry, nanotechnology, molecular biology and nuclear proliferation. Those were all easy compared to sex. But a little more than two years ago sex was the topic that was available if I wanted my own column.

And as you might have noticed, in all that time I have yet to offer one iota of advice on how to have a better sex life. I feel a little regretful about that, but it doesn't feel like the right thing to do for a journalist, especially one with a degree in geophysics from Caltech.

So instead I made it a science column about sex. I'm still not sure science and sex go together, or whether it's appropriate to write about sex in a newspaper. Many readers hate the whole idea. Some don't like the sex. Some don't like the science. Some don't like my name. The hate mail has reduced me to tears more times than I can count, but

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Let the sex talk continue

READERS from C1

then a day or two go by and it starts to seem almost funny.

So I've included a few letters in today's column and begun a blog, just launched today, called "Sex, Science and Voice Mail," where I hope you readers and I can continue to talk about the column, and science, and sex, as civilly as possible.

About two-thirds of my mail comes from fans, and about one-third comes from critics like this gentleman:

Once again, I was fooled into reading one of your recent columns, "Condoms: A look at their place in history" (Monday, Aug. 20), believing that perhaps its author, Faye Flam (is that her theatrical name?), would mesmerize us with a spellbinding tale on par with Nathaniel Philbrick's "Mayflower" or Walter Isaacson's "Franklin." Alas, it was not to be. Ms. Flam continues to be merely a run of the mill sex columnist, writing under the guise of educating us and our children on the history and science of sex. Her column could just as easily appear, and perhaps it does, in those out of reach, plasti-wrapped sex magazines we encounter in book shops — the difference being that your newspaper gets dropped on our lawn every day, finding its way eventually to our family's coffee table.

Tom Ikeler
Berwyn

Then there was this from another unsatisfied reader:

Ms. Flam — Once more you provoke a negative reaction. I am so tired of your fascination with and presentation of topics usually revered by middle school students. I wish you would find some other outlet for your interests rather than my breakfast table reading.

Your topics have little connection with Health or Science, at least in ways beneficial to the reading public. Is there no other place for you at the newspaper? Surely your talents could be put to better use.

I hope that you will either find better topics to write about or stop writing for The Inquirer.

Sincerely,
G.R. Payne

Many readers are troubled by my frequent references to evolution, which for me are often the most interesting parts of the column:

Ms. Flam,

I enjoy your column and your opinions on various carnal topics. However, your repeated references to evolution irritate me to no end. I have to remind you that evolution is just a theory, it is not a proven fact as you constantly reference. Being an obviously open minded educated individual you should really explore the idea of intelligent

design. I'm sorry but I do not have any relatives that are apes. Man did not evolve from monkeys by genetic mutations.

I wasn't sure whether the writer was more upset to be related to the cute primates that climb trees in the jungle or the cuter primates that played a boy band on the '60s television show. Either way, I've got bad news.

Intelligent design won't help you buy your way out of the primate class. For that you will need old-fashioned industrial-strength creationism. In order to obtain a veneer of newfangledness, the intelligent-design movement had to make certain concessions to science, including the general phylogenetic relationships between species. We're still related to apes.

Then the world brightens again when a letter like this comes in.

Dear Ms. Flam,

I've loved your Carnal Knowledge column for years — and was sad when it slipped from weekly to bi-monthly — but never got around to offering a word of encouragement until now. I'm sure your frankness must provoke some heckling email from the anti-science side, so I want to counter that. I really enjoy the humor you bring to your subject. Carnal Knowledge is my favorite part of The Inquirer. When I come back from vacation, and the newspapers are piled up on the counter, the one thing I root through them for is a Monday issue with your column.

Thank you,
Richard Everill

Contact staff writer Faye Flam at 215-854-4977 or fflam@phillynews.com.

Read Faye Flam's new blog, "Sex, Science and Voice Mail," about reader reaction to "Carnal Knowledge," at <http://go.philly.com/sexscience>.

Health & Science

Columns

■ Anthony R. Wood writes about atmospheric conditions in "Weather or Not." **Next week.**

Blogs

■ Anthony R. Wood reports daily about the weather at <http://go.philly.com/weatherornot>

■ Faye Flam offers reader reaction to her column "Carnal Knowledge" at <http://go.philly.com/sexscience>

■ Sandra Long discusses her experience fighting breast cancer at <http://go.philly.com/sandra>