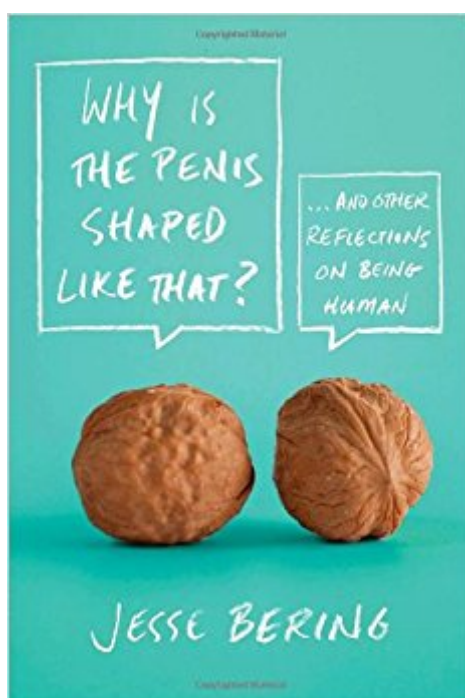


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# Why Is The Penis Shaped Like That?: And Other Reflections On Being Human



## Synopsis

Why do testicles hang the way they do? Is there an adaptive function to the female orgasm? What does it feel like to want to kill yourself? Does "free will" really exist? And why is the penis shaped like that anyway? In *Why Is the Penis Shaped Like That?*, the research psychologist and award-winning columnist Jesse Bering features more than thirty of his most popular essays from *Scientific American* and *Slate*, as well as two new pieces, that take readers on a bold and captivating journey through some of the most taboo issues related to evolution and human behavior. Exploring the history of cannibalism, the neurology of people who are sexually attracted to animals, the evolution of human body fluids, the science of homosexuality, and serious questions about life and death, Bering astutely covers a generous expanse of our kaleidoscope of quirks and origins. With his characteristic irreverence and trademark cheekiness, Bering leaves no topic unturned or curiosity unexamined, and he does it all with an audaciously original voice. Whether you're interested in the psychological history behind the many facets of sexual desire or the evolutionary patterns that have dictated our current mystique and phallic physique, *Why Is the Penis Shaped Like That?* is bound to create lively discussion and debate for years to come.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“This book could fuel a score of dinner-party conversations—this is more than some scientific stocking-filler: it uses science to unsettle our most embedded assumptions. It is deeply

thought-provoking. [Sunday Times \(UK\)](#) “Excellent in its entirety, woven of Bering’s rare tapestry of scientific rigor and a powerful, articulate social point of view.

[Brain Pickings](#) “You must buy [Bering’s book] to be both entertained and the life and soul of cocktail parties from now Ætil the end of the world.

[Jezebel](#) “Bering’s jokes about the things that make us most squeamish invite us to share his joyful curiosity about human sexuality, to see the world through his eyes...As Bering describes it, the complex interplay between biology, psychology, and culture suggests that what makes us most human--empathy--is also what makes us the most complicated beast of all.

[Bookforum](#) “While remaining strictly true to the scientific facts of any given issue, Bering keeps readers on their toes with his signature salacious quips and stray, juicy peeks at his personal life.

[Carl Hays, Booklist](#) “Anyone familiar with [Bering’s] columns knows the goofy, self-deprecatory way he has of digesting lofty concepts. This book . . . is a prime specimen.

[Newcity Lit](#) “These entertaining essays offer a cornucopia of ideas that will reward readers with hours of conversational gambits.

[Publishers Weekly](#) “Anyone interested in reading about the latest developments in sex research told with a generous dose of self-deprecating humor will enjoy this essay collection.

[Library Journal](#) “An accessible, lively, thought-provoking book for anyone curious about what it means to be human.

[Kirkus](#) “Bering has a well-researched, erudite response that teaches more about whatever sex-related topic is at hand than quite a few books I’ve come across. I have yet to come away from reading one of his essays or responses to reader questions and not feel considerably better informed than I was just minutes before. Be sure to also check out his latest book [|](#)

[David DiSalvo, "Six Writers Who Know More About Sex Than You Do \(So Read Them\)" on Forbes.com](#) “Jesse Bering is the Hunter S. Thompson of science writing, and he is a delight to read--funny, smart, and madly provocative.

[Paul Bloom, Professor, Yale University, and author of How Pleasure Works](#) “Jesse Bering is the intellectual spawn of Helen Fisher and Oliver Sacks, and *Why Is the Penis Shaped Like That?* is brainy, informative, compassionate--and hilariously naughty.

[Amy Dickinson, New York Times bestselling author and NPR personality](#) “If David Sedaris were an experimental psychologist, he’d be writing essays very much like these. Bering’s unique blend of scientific knowledge, sense of humor, intellectual courage, and pure literary skill is immediately recognizable; no one writes quite the way Bering does. Read this book. You’ll learn, laugh, and then learn some more.

[Christopher Ryan, co-author of the New York Times bestseller Sex at Dawn](#) “Nothing sacred is spared in Jesse

Bering's deft, rivetingly informative, and relentlessly hilarious new book. Bering's addictive curiosity and wry, dexterous humor make this a collection that's as funny as it is impossible to put down. *Violet Blue*, award-winning author and sex educator "Bering has an uncanny way with words, an incisive capacity for logical thinking, and a stunning talent for breathing new life and enthusiasm into science." *Gordon Gallup*

Jesse Bering, Ph.D. is a frequent contributor to *Scientific American* and *Slate*. His writing has also appeared in *New York* magazine, *The Guardian*, and *The New Republic*, among others, and has been featured by NPR, *Playboy Radio*, and more. The author of *The Belief Instinct*, Bering is the former Director of the Institute of Cognition and Culture at the Queen's University, Belfast, and began his career as a professor at the University of Arkansas. He lives in Ithaca, New York.

Why is the Penis Shaped Like That? And Other Reflections on Being Human by Jesse Bering "Why is the Penis Shaped Like That?" is the irreverent, thought-provoking and rather sensational book of essays on human sexuality. Dr. Jesse Bering takes us on a journey of surprising and even shocking peculiarities of being human. Using the latest of scientific research in psychology, neuroscience, biology and a naughty sense of humor Bering succeeds in enlightening the public on fascinating issues pertaining to human sexuality. This entertaining 320-page book is broken out into the following eight parts: Part I. Darwinizing What Dangles, Part II. Bountiful Bodies, Part III. Minds in the Gutter, Part IV. Strange Bedfellows, Part V. Ladies' Night, Part VI. The Gay Science: There's Something Queer Here, Part VII. For the Bible Tells Me So and Part VIII. Into the Deep: Existential Lab Work.

Positives:

1. A fun and informative book for the masses.
2. The fascinating topic of human sexuality in the irreverent hands of Jesse Bering.
3. A frank conversational tone. Bering holds nothing back to the point of being uncomfortable but when it is all said and done you are thankful that he did.
4. This book is anything but boring. The pages turn themselves. The ability of Bering to immerse science, anecdotes, sound logic, personal experiences, pop culture and humor into an engaging narrative is what makes this work.
5. This book will at times surprise, inform, disgust and educate you. In short, it's thought provoking.
6. Understanding the male reproductive anatomy. The activation hypothesis and yes an evolutionary-based explanation for the title of the book.
7. Interesting facts and findings throughout the book. Let me share one because I can't contain myself, "In fact, frequency of erotic fantasies correlates positively with intelligence".
8. Curious oddities of the human body.
9. Cannibalism...bite me.
10. The correlation between brain damages and behavior. One of my favorite essays.
11. Dirty brain science. Some very uncomfortable topics...but I couldn't

look away. Fetishes...12. Understanding the female anatomy. It's the ladies turn.13. Unflattering stereotypes...understanding straight women who gravitate toward gay men.14. Interesting studies on homosexuality. The differences between men and women. The roles and preferences. Educational.15. Wonderful use of evolution. "Right is irrelevant. There is only what works and what doesn't work, within context, in biologically adaptive terms..."16. Burial practices that need to change. A very interesting essay.17. A hard look at suicide and a unique take regarding suicide as adaptive and from an evolutionary perspective.18. A look at free will and one of the most thought-provoking statements, "If exposure to deterministic messages increases the likelihood of unethical actions, then identifying approaches for insulating the public against this danger becomes imperative". In general, I disagree with the statement but talk about a conversation ice breaker.19. Comprehensive notes section.

Negatives:

1. I didn't like the title of this book. Sure, it reflects the author's irreverent and humorous side but for one I can never remember the title. It's like an entertaining commercial where you can never remember the product being promoted. Secondly, the title alone might keep some people from reading it and these are perhaps the ones who need to read it the most to begin with. How about a title like, "Naughty Science: Reflections on Human Sexuality"?
2. This is not so much a negative on the book but on the lack of scientific research on human sexuality. Such a fascinating topic yet it's clear that for whatever the reasons the science of human sexuality is its infancy.
3. A lot of the findings in the book are tentative. In truth, all science knowledge is tentative but it seems to me that the some of these studies require much further research. Enough there to whet the appetite but not enough to reach strong conclusions.
4. No direct links to notes on the kindle version, a real shame.
5. Some of the findings will cause cognitive dissonance. I don't agree with everything in this wonderful, thought-provoking book. As an example, I disagree with the general notion that a person who believes in supernatural punishment may be more trustworthy than one who isn't. In the fantastic book, "Society without God", Phil Zuckerman makes the compelling case that those societies without religious beliefs (or less of) are more successful, better functioning and happier places to live in. As a personal example, if was looking for a babysitter and a member of the clergy were to ring my doorbell, I'd probably be more inclined to call a policeman.
6. This book whets your appetite for more, more, more.
7. No formal bibliography.

In summary, what a trip this book was. First of all the topic of human sexuality is fascinating and rarely dealt with at the scientific level. I'm glad that for once an author has the guts in lieu of another word, to get a book like this out for the public. This book will make your cringe, laugh, disagree, concur, and ultimately think. The only thing that limits this book is the fact that the scientific research on human sexuality is still in its infancy. Be that as it may, I learned so much from this book while

having fun with it. I highly recommend it! Further suggestions: "The Belief Instinct: The Psychology of Souls, Destiny, and the Meaning of Life" by the same author, "Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior" by Leonard Mlodinow, "Society without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us About Contentment" by Phil Zuckerman, "The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies---How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths" by Michael Shermer, "The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature" and "The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined" by Steven Pinker, "Who's in Charge?: Free Will and the Science of the Brain" and "Human: The Science Behind What Makes Us Unique", by Michael S. Gazzaniga, "Hardwired Behavior: What Neuroscience Reveals about Morality" by Laurence Tancredi, "SuperSense: Why We Believe in the Unbelievable" by Bruce M. Hood, "The Myth of Free Will, Revised & Expanded Edition" by Cris Evatt, and "The Brain and the Meaning of Life" by Paul Thagard. All books have been reviewed by me, look for the tag "Book Shark Review".

This would make a great beach read, as the individual sections are reasonably brief and enjoyable on their own. I like the way Bering dives into oddball questions that you may or may not have ever considered before...primarily dealing with our sexual anatomy or urges. He throws in a little history when appropriate, and science from time to time. You can possibly justify this book as an "educational expense" if you're embarrassed about picking up a nice, humorous non-fiction book for your next plane ride.

Bering writes a collection of essays that although center around sexuality, carry us on an intellectual roller coaster far beyond the act of sex of how we make choices to what influences certain social behaviors to the scientifically treacherous realm of do we have free will. Sex and sexuality keep constant as the congruent thread both narratively and emotionally - sex can be humorous, scary, humbling, reactionary, surprising, and nebulous. A great book for any curious mind. Plus he's adorably funny - the perfect hot gay nerd in every positive sense of meaning.

Jesse Bering is a very knowledgeable and entertaining writer. I'll continue to buy and enjoy his books.

As a 68 year old man, I have had some of the issues we get as we age and this book did a fine job of truth telling and myth busting about all sorts of things, so don't worry about the title...just get it and enjoy!

I had to buy this for one of my Human Sexuality classes in college. Its hilarious, informative, and legitimately hard to put down. I felt like the author was a friend of mine and we were gossiping about different sex things we had heard. There is a good mix between serious chapter and the more comical ones.

A series of essays, covering a number of interesting topics... many of them are matters of human sexuality, but many are not. For example, there are two very personal essays on what may lead humans to commit suicide. I was not familiar with Mr. Bering. But now I'm a fan. His writing style is very accessible and personal; his gayness pervades his point of view, in a friendly way. To answer the title question: the penis says Bering and others works as a sort of sperm remover, helping insure the last male to inseminate the female is the parent of her offspring. This is not a prurient book, nor is it totally about homo sapiens sex. The mix is more like 50/50%.

Great addition to my book collection. Bering keeps the reader engage and is very funny and witty while at the same time teaching the reader!

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Advent and Christmas Reflections (Catholic Daily Reflections Series) (Volume 1)  
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