

other animal species are much rarer (because, of course, they provide far fewer of the appropriate sexual stimuli) and have been recorded in only 6.6 per cent of females and 8 per cent of males. Masturbation, although it does not provide 'partner stimuli', is nevertheless so much easier to initiate that it occurs with a much higher frequency. It is estimated that 58 per cent of females and 68 per cent of males masturbate at some time in their lives.

If all these reproductively wasteful activities can take place without reducing the long-term breeding potential of the individuals concerned, then they are harmless. In fact, they can be biologically advantageous, because they can help to prevent sexual frustration which can lead to social disharmony in various ways. But the moment they give rise to sexual fixations they create a problem. In our species there is, as we have seen, a strong tendency to 'fall in love'-to develop a powerful bond with the object of our sexual attentions. This sexual imprinting process produces the all-important long-term mateship so vital to the prolonged parental demands. The imprinting is going to start operating as soon as serious sexual contacts are made, and the consequences are obvious. The earliest objects towards which we direct our sexual attentions are liable to become the objects. Imprinting is an associative process. Certain key stimuli that are present at the moment of sexual reward become intimately linked with the reward, and in no time at all it is impossible for sexual behaviour to occur without the presence of these vital stimuli. If we are driven by social pressures to experience our earliest sexual rewards in homosexual or masturbatory contexts, then certain elements present in these contexts are likely to assume powerful sexual significance of a lasting kind. (The more unusual forms of fetishism also originate in this way.)

One might expect these facts to lead to more trouble than actually occurs, but two things help to prevent this in most cases. Firstly, we are well equipped with a set of instinctive responses to the characteristic sexual signals of the opposite sex, so that we are unlikely to experience a powerful courtship reaction to any 84