

## The Gender Gap

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o one particularly likes going into the **hole** (16thC), but this isn't your ordinary run-of-the-mill cavity. It's **your better 'ole** (16th–19thC), and ever since Eden the center of man's attention. His preoccupation with it has led him to embellish it: as the **sweet-scented hole** (C. 1690, Rabelais), the **touch-hole** (17th–20thC), the **aperture of bliss** (16th–20thC), and **your hole of holes** (16thC). He has also named it the **gap** (19th–20thC), **crack** (16th–20thC), **slot** (20thC), **cranny** (20thC), and **nook**, from which we get our favorite, **nooky** (or **nookie**, early 20thC), though some argue that **nooky** derives instead from **nug** (17th–19thC) or to **nock** (late 16th–18thC), two of our more venerable expressions for **the Big F**.

Over time, your basic hole assumed new dimensions as the **crevice** (19th–20thC), the **bottomless pit** (18th–early 19thC), the **Great Divide** (c. 1925), and the **Grand Canyon** (20thC). It got religion with the **holy of holies** and the **temple of low men** (as opposed to the temple of **hymen**), puns calculated to bring us all to our knees.

### *Starting from Scratch*

Nobody really knows where the **hole** came from, though Captain Grose, the roguish eighteenth-century lexicographer, had his own ideas about it. His version opens with an angel who had been employed in forming women, forgetting to cut off their **parts of generation**. Enter Lucifer who took it upon himself to set matters right.

Taking a somewhat direct approach to the problem, he placed himself in a sawpit with a scythe fixed to a stick in his hand and directed the women to straddle the pit. He then gave each the **mark of the beast** (c. 1715). The pit being too deep for the length of his instrument, tall women received only a moderate scratch, but little women, because their legs were so short and more within his reach, received a somewhat larger cut. The long and short of it?

*The portions of a woman that appeal to man's  
depravity  
Are constructed with considerable care,  
And what at first appears to be a simple little  
cavity  
Is in fact a most elaborate affair.*

*Physicians of distinction have examined these  
phenomena  
In numerous experimental dames;  
They have tabulated carefully the feminine  
abdomina,  
And given them some fascinating names.*

*There's the vulva, the vagina, and the jolly  
perineum,  
And the hymen, in the case of many brides,  
And lots of other little things you'd like, if you  
could see 'em,  
The clitoris, and other things besides.*

*So isn't it a pity, when we common people chatter  
Of these mysteries to which I have referred,  
That we use for such a delicate and complicated  
matter  
Such a very short and ordinary word.  
—Anon., cited by Peter Freyer,  
"It" in Mrs. Grundy, 1963*