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PSY460- Prenatal Psychology

Dr. S. Maret

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Maret Chapter 3- Essay Questions

5. What happens in the moments prior to fertilization? What happens at the moment of conception?

There are several things happening in the moments. Before exiting a man's body, sperm cells are met with seminal fluid that alkalize them enough to survive the acidity of the vaginal environment. After semen has entered the vagina or the opening of the cervix, depending on how deep the thrust of the penis upon the moment of ejaculation, sperm begin their upward swim toward the fallopian tubes in search of the ovum. Muscle contractions during and following the experience of mutual orgasm actually help sperm to reach the cervix faster. Although the vaginal fluids fight against the invasion of sperm once sperm cells make it into the cervix a female's anatomy is designed to assist them on the way to the fallopian tubes. Hair-like cilia lining the cervix and the fallopian tubes help guide both the egg (if present) and sperm along the tube toward one another.

Should an egg be present in one or both of the fallopian tubes, although many sperm may approach it, only one will get in. Sperm making it to the ovum will release special enzymes preserved specifically for the purpose of drilling through the ovum's outer layer. As the sperm cell burrows in that portion of the outer layer begins to wear away to make for entry. Once the single sperm cell has made it inside it fuses with the plasma membrane and is pulled into the

ovum. The ovum then releases an enzyme that hardens the outside of its membrane so that no other sperm may enter.

At the moment of conception, the 23 chromosomes contained in the father's sex cell and the 23 chromosomes belonging to the mother's sex cell combine to begin the process of creating an entirely new being, but that...is another story.