

“Saying How You Feel: Women and Men on Sexual Arousal and Sexual Desire”

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I compare three philosophical discussions of sexual desire and examine them in light of some recent empirical research on sexual arousal and desire. In doing so, I distinguish between sexual arousal and sexual desire. I argue that properly understood the recent empirical evidence offers support for philosophic positions (or at least doesn’t contradict it). That is, that sexual desire is an interpersonal, intimate connection that represents an existential need, while sexual arousal is restricted to the physiological level and tends to be biologically based.

Unlike psychology, where sexual desire has long had a central place, philosophy has paid it relatively little attention. This has been particularly true of the Anglo-American analytic tradition. But Thomas Nagel’s 1969 article, “Sexual Perversion,” was a notable exception to this rule (although he certainly borrowed heavily from the Continental tradition).¹ He began by suggesting that possessing a conception of sexual perversion would tell us a lot about sexual desire. Borrowing heavily from Sartre, Nagel maintained that paradigmatic cases of sexual desire begin as self conscious desires for another that can only be completed in *mutual desire*. That is to say, sexual desire must involve not only awareness that another feels sexual desire towards you, but also that that awareness increases your sexual desire, and vice-versa: it is, then, a “multi-level interpersonal awareness” of escalating desire.² On this account, sexual perversion is any incomplete version of this complex of mutual desire thus making all narcissistic practices sexual perversions as well as bestiality, pedophilia, sex with inanimate objects (presumably including necrophilia), sadism, masochism, (non-mutual) masturbation and perhaps also group sex.

¹ Thomas Nagel, “Sexual Perversion,” *Journal of Philosophy*, LXVI, 1, Jan. 16, 1969, 5-17.

² Ibid.

Many have disputed Nagel's account, especially his list of perversions. On that note, Nagel would have escaped lots of criticism by avoiding the word, "perversion," and opted for something like "incomplete" vs. "complete" sexual desire. This seems more in keeping with his view anyway, as it turns out, since Nagel argues at the end of his essay that there is nothing necessarily immoral about perverse/incomplete desire and sex, nor is it necessarily 'worse' sex, as sex, than sex based on complete sexual desire.³

But there have been other complaints of Nagel's position including the claim that Nagel tells us only of the *form* of sexual desire, and little or nothing of its *content*. I.e., while we know that (complete) sexual desire will have to be interpersonal, and that A's awareness of B's desire towards A increases A's desire, and so on, it is left unclear what specifically fuels the desire originally. As Solomon complained: "What makes this situation paradigmatically sexual?"⁴ as opposed, e.g., to a meeting of two philosophers both getting excited by each other's new treatment of the mind-body problem.

While I have some sympathy for Solomon's point, we must be careful and avoid saying too much about the *specific* content in our definition of sexual desire since that content is so wildly diverse and heteronymous that it risks making it impossible to say anything worthwhile at all. After all, the specific content of sexual desire can include everything from missionary heterosexual intercourse to BDSM, feces and furry animal costumes fetishes. Moreover, Nagel does say a couple of very important things about the general content of our sexual desires. First, he says that it essentially involves *embodiment*. "All stages of sexual perception," he says, "are varieties of identification with the body. What is perceived is one's own or another's *subjection* to or *immersion* in his body...."⁵ Second, Nagel also insists that sexual desire can *not* be reduced to the level of generic bodies and certainly not to the level of body parts. "[T]he object of sexual attraction is a particular individual, who transcends the properties that make him attractive.... We approach the sexual attitude toward the person through the features that we find attractive, but these features are not the objects of that attitude." According to Nagel, this has to be the case given his characterization of sexual desire as multi-level *interpersonal* awareness: "This would be incomprehensible if its object were not a particular person, but rather a person of a certain kind [or a mere combination of appealing body parts]. Attraction is only the beginning, and fulfillment does not consist merely of behavior and contact expressing this attraction, but involves much more."⁶

Other philosophers have made a similar point. Robert Nozick, e.g., says that "[s]ex is not simply a matter of frictional force [It is] the most intense way we relate to another

³ Ibid, 15-17.

⁴ Robert Solomon, "Sexual Paradigms," *Journal of Philosophy*, ????: 337.

⁵ Nagel, "Sexual Perversion," 12.

⁶ Nagel, "Sexual Perversion," 8-9.

person... The excitement comes largely from how we interpret the situation and how we perceive *the connection to the other*.”⁷ Indeed, Nozick argues that the excitement of sexual desire can be frightening because it is a way in which we open ourselves up to others: There is a “trust involved in showing our own pleasures, [and a] vulnerability in letting another give us these and guide them, including pleasures with infantile or oedipal reverberations, or anal ones [which] does not come lightly.”⁸ Hence, Nozick concludes, in “sexual intimacy, we admit the partner within our boundaries or make them more permeable, showing our own passions, capacities, fantasies, and excitements, and responding to others.”⁹

People are, of course, gendered beings and so if our desire is directed to individuals, it is essential that we include gender in our discussion. Although neither Nagel nor Nozick makes gender central to their discussions, both of them do mention it. Nagel considers gender in his discussion of sexual roles typically played in heterosexual intercourse. While he does add the caveat that “temporary reversals of role are not uncommon in heterosexual exchanges of any length,” it is still the case, he believes, that “there is much support for an aggressive-passive distinction between male and female sexuality. In our culture the male’s arousal tends to initiate the perceptual exchange, he usually makes the sexual approach, largely controls the course of the act, and of course penetrates whereas the woman receives.”¹⁰ Although Nozick refers to gender in a different context, he makes a similar point regarding the roles typically played by men and women in heterosexual encounters. Unlike “making love,” which can be “symmetrical, tender, and turn-taking all the way through,” in “fucking,” Nagel maintains, “the male displays his power and force. This need not be aggressive, vicious, or dominating, although perhaps statistically it frequently slides into that. The male can simply be showing the female his power, strength, ferocity even, for her appreciation. Exhibiting his quality as a beast in the jungle ... he shows (in a contained fashion) his protective strength. The display of force need not be asymmetrical, however. The female can answer (and initiate) with her own ferocity, snarls, hissing, scratching, growling, biting, and she shows too her capacity to contain and tame his ferocity.”¹¹

Many will react negatively to what could be considered sexist assumptions made here regarding male aggressiveness and female passivity. We should note, however, that it is not uncommon in various species for the males to be aggressive –particularly in those species where males tend to be larger than females and where there is also male-male fighting for females. Besides obvious examples like big horn sheep and walruses, snakes too, e.g., follow this pattern.¹² Indeed, in some animals, like the bean weevil, the

⁷ Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1989), 61. Emphasis added.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁰ Nagel, “Sexual Perversion,” 16, 15.

¹¹ Nozick, *The Examined Life*, 66.

¹² See, e.g., Richard Shine, “Sexual Size Dimorphism in Snakes Revisited,” *Copeia*, 2, 1994: 326-346. Accessed: 15/10/2009 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1446982>.

male's "intermittent organ" is barbed and actually harms the female during intercourse in order to discourage her from mating with other males.¹³

These examples are not meant to be anything but illustrations. That is, they are not meant to 'prove' that males are naturally more aggressive or that humans' behavior must necessarily follow the behavior patterns of other species. For one thing, we are influenced by far more than our biology, and we have the capacity to radically alter the way(s) in which we behave. And secondly, you can find almost everything in nature – just consider the relevant case of the black widow spider where the female is much bigger than the males and eats him after they copulate. Rather, I use them merely to illustrate that dimorphism between the sexes is not uncommon, and humans may be susceptible to being pushed to various behaviors just as other species are. I shall return to this issue in a moment after discussing a third, and recent philosophical analysis of sexual desire.

James Giles claims that sexual desire is "a need based ... on ... an awareness ... of having a gender, which implies a sense of incompleteness that calls out to be fulfilled by the gender of another person." Reason acts upon this "self awareness (together with the awareness of others)" to make "me see this as a problem that needs to be resolved, and imagination enables me to picture or fantasize ways -- namely, baring and caressing of the desired gender -- of trying to solve it."¹⁴ In effect, Giles combines several threads of the accounts provided by Nagel and Nozick, but adds gender as a central component of it. Sexual desire necessarily involves, he says, a component of mutuality in which each person is revealed somehow: i.e., it is a "desire for mutual baring and caressing between oneself and at least one other person (real, fantasized, or symbolized)"¹⁵ This opening of oneself to others is actually a display of our vulnerability, and is a signal to them, as it were, that we want to be cared for; indeed, that we need to be cared for.¹⁶ As such, sexual desire has much in common with romantic love. The difference between the two, according to Giles, resides in the level of mutuality. In romantic love, not only do I have a certain desire "toward the other person concerning our mutual vulnerability and care," ... I also "desire that the other person have similar desires toward me, that is that I have desires concerning the other person's desires."¹⁷ Giles maintains that in sexual desire, "the schema is not so complex. For although I have certain desires directed toward a mutual baring and caressing of the

¹³ Helen S. Crudgington, Mike T. Siva-Jothy, "Genital Damage, Kicking and Early Death," I thank Kelly White for directing me to this article and the one listed in note 11.

¹⁴ Giles, *Sexual Desire*, 181-182. Although Giles' claims seem suited only for heterosexual relationships, he goes to great lengths to apply his view to homosexual relationships as well. To be very brief, Giles maintains that for homosexuals the difference between you and your sexual partner is a *felt or perceived* shortage of your own gender. "The homosexual is someone who intensely admires the attributes of same-gender persons. The homosexual does this because he feels himself to be lacking in these attributes" (128). In this way, then, hetero- and homosexual desire is the same experientially, Giles maintains, because it is based of a felt shortage that can only be completed in another.

¹⁵ James Giles, *The Nature of Sexual Desire* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2008). 93. His emphasis.

¹⁶ See, e.g., *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 174.

other person's body, I need not also desire that the other person has desires for a mutual baring and caressing directed toward me."¹⁸

In arriving at this conclusion, Giles considers, but rejects, the two most widely promulgated theories regarding the origin of sexual desire. On the one hand are the biological essentialists, such as sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists, who maintain that the origin of our sexual desires lies in our genes and is directed to reproduction. According to this view, human sexual desire is universal, and while there may be changes over time and place regarding what particular things give rise to particular preferences or behaviors, sexual desire itself exists independently of time and culture. Social constructionists deny these claims and insist instead that human sexual desire is entirely the product of what we *make* of it. In its most radical form, social constructionists maintain not only that such things as societal perceptions of homosexuality, monogamy, and fetishes are constructed, but also that sexual desire itself is radically amorphous and open to any inscription, independently of any physiological function. Very briefly stated, Giles opts instead for a phenomenological approach that seeks to explain "sexual desire [as] ... an existential need that has its roots in specific experiential features of the human condition."¹⁹ The particular features of human existence that make us special are, as Kant put it, that we belong to both a phenomenal, material world where determinism is true, and a noumenal one where we have the capacity to choose for ourselves. This "disequilibrium," as Giles calls it, is our self awareness that we are not *only* biological organisms. Yet, since we still have needs that are an "inherent and universal feature of the human condition,"²⁰ they are not the product of social construction. They are, rather, "existential needs."

While I agree with Giles that sexual desire is an existential need for humans, I disagree that this entails that biological and social constructionist views are incorrect. I shall argue, rather, that it simply depends on what level of analysis we are considering and of course also on what we take biological and social constructionist accounts of sexual desire to be saying. In this regard, consider first a distinction that Giles himself refers to between "ultimate" biological causes and "proximate" ones.²¹ As Giles explains the distinction, "Ultimate causes refer to our evolutionary history, while proximate causes refer to the biological mechanisms that directly cause sexual desire."²² This is important since ultimate causes allow room for a diversity of proximate causes, and in humans at least, many of these will be culturally based and thus open to the sorts of explanations proffered by social constructionists, so long as we see social constructionism in its, so to speak, more moderate forms. As Jacobsen has pointed out, "Social constructionism need not deny biological realities; more plausibly, it often contends that what qualifies

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Giles, *Sexual Desire*, 180.

²⁰ Giles, *Sexual Desire*, 181.

²¹ D. Symons, "An evolutionary approach: Can Darwin's view of Life Shed Light on Human Sexuality?" In J.H. Geer & W.T. O'Donohue (ed's.), *Theories of Human Sexuality*, New York: Plenum Press, 91-125.

²² James Giles, *The Nature of Sexual Desire*, 179.

as sexual desire emerges only after our biological urges are subjected to socialization.²³ This is the sort of argument I wish to suggest. Namely, that much of our sexual behavior is biologically based in the sense of an ultimate cause. However, proximate causes are much more likely to be the products of social construction. Finally, I want to suggest that Giles' existential thesis is not necessarily inconsistent with either of these two approaches.

My argument proceeds by considering the claims about sexual desire made by Nagel, Nozick, and Giles in light of some recent empirical research that has been conducted that suggests some fundamental differences between men and women with respect to what can be referred to as the sexual process. As a precursor to this discussion, I note what I take to be an interesting fact. Though all three of the philosophers we have examined thus far are men, they present a theory of sexual desire that is not stereotypically masculine (apart from the claims by Nagel and Nozick on male aggressiveness and female passivity). The stereotypical male view of sexual desire would be one that was reductionist in the sense that it would understand the object sexual desire as less than a whole person with whom one wants to share something, some intimacy that involves baring oneself and making oneself vulnerable. I shall suggest that these three philosophers got this aspect of sexual desire right and that there is empirical evidence that, properly understood, supports this.

Meredith Chivers, along with others, has undertaken a series of experiments that measured both physiological and subjective responses of males and females to various videotaped sexual stimuli. These experiments all showed men and women -- who were self labeled as either hetero- or homosexual -- videos of humans (and in one experiment of bonobo chimpanzees) in various stages of sexual congress. These scenes ranged from ones of naked men or women not engaged in sexual activity, men or women engaged in masturbation, to man-man, woman-woman, and male-woman sexual intercourse. One experiment added video of copulating bonobo chimps.

She found that while men are "category specific," women are not. That is, men's physiological and subjective responses regarding sex match. Hence, a heterosexual man will typically get an erection only when he is shown video of women and of lesbian or heterosexual sexual activity. Moreover, when asked, this is what a man says arouses him. Women, in contrast, display a marked difference between their objective and subjective reactions. Women typically say that videos do not sexually arouse them, and yet they lubricate at displays of almost anything -- not just of both male and female sexual activities but even to presentations of bonobo chimpanzees having sex.²⁴

²³ Rockney Jacobsen, "Sexual Desire," in Alan Soble, ed., *Sex from Plato to Paglia: A Philosophical Encyclopedia*, 2 volumes. Greenwood Press. Vol. 2: 224.

²⁴ Meredith Chivers, M. Seto, & R. Blanchard, "Gender and sexual orientation Differences in Sexual Response to Sexual Activities Versus Gender of Actors in Sexual Films," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2007, 93 (6): 1108-1121; Meredith Chivers, G. Rieger, E. Latty, & J.M. Bailey, "A Sex Difference in the Specificity of Sexual Arousal," 2004, 15 (11): 736-744; Kelly Suschinsky, M. Lalumiere, & M. Chivers, "Sex Differences in Patterns of Genital Sexual Arousal: Measurement Artifacts or True Phenomena?" *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 2008.

Consistent with other studies, she has found that (self described) heterosexual women are more “flexible” than men with respect to their sexual orientation.²⁵ That is, while men identify strongly with their sexual orientation, women “are more likely to experience and express same-sex attractions and less likely to engage in exclusively heterosexual or homosexual contacts.”²⁶ Hence, heterosexual women as well as homosexual women “reported greater sexual arousal to stimuli depicting female targets than to stimuli depicting male targets.”²⁷ Indeed, sexual response for women is much more the result of the level of *sexual activity* displayed – the greater the activity, such as intercourse, the greater the arousal – while men’s arousal tends to be the result of the *gender* of the actors in the video.²⁸

How can these differences be accounted for, and what do they say about sexual desire in men and women? First, we need to distinguish between various types of sexual response. The physiological responses to which we have just referred – male erection and female lubrication – are preconscious reactions to stimuli.²⁹ If sexual desire is anything like any of the conceptions we have considered thus far, then these reflexive responses cannot be instances of sexual desire, since sexual desire in those accounts is interpersonal in a way that requires conscious thought. Clearly, however, the responses are sexual since they involve the genitals and are responses to genital, sexual activity. Let us call this type of sexual response, sexual arousal. Since it is reflexive and unconscious, there is good reason to believe that the responses are biologically based.

There is some evidence to support this. For example, Chivers et al. suggest that female lubrication to almost any sexual stimuli -- irrespective of whether it is even a welcome sexual stimuli – may be an evolutionarily selected for trait that protected women from injuries caused by rape. As they put it: “Ancestral women who did not reflexively lubricate would have been more likely to experience injuries or infections that could have rendered them reproductively sterile or resulted in their deaths.”³⁰ Let us consider the bean weevil once again since one of their evolved traits provides some (very indirect) evidence for the evolved trait of women to vaginally lubricate at the sign of almost any sexual stimuli in order to protect against male aggression and sexual violence. The female bean weevil has evolved a similar type of strategy. She repeatedly

²⁵ Meredith Chivers, M. Seto, & R. Blanchard, “Gender and sexual orientation Differences in Sexual Response to Sexual Activities Versus Gender of Actors in Sexual Films,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2007,93 (6): 1108-1121.

²⁶ Ibid. Also see, J.M. Bailey, M.P. Dunne, & N.G. Martin, “Genetic and environmental influences in sexual orientation and its correlates in an Australian twin sample,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*,” 78: 524-536; A.C. Kinsey, W.B. Pomeroy, & C.E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1948); ; A.C. Kinsey, W.B. Pomeroy, C.E. Martin, & P.H. Gebhard, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1953).

²⁷ Chivers et al., Gender and Sexual Orientation Differences,” 1117.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ M. Chivers, “Leading Comment: A Brief review and discussion of sex differences in the specificity of sexual arousal,” *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*,4: 377-390; E. Lann & W. Everaerd, “Habituation of female sexual arousal to slides and film,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*,” 24: 517-541.

³⁰ M. Chivers et al., “Gender and Sexual Orientation Differences,” 1118.

kicks the male during mating. This shortens mating time, and reduces the risk of harm to females.³¹ It is important to stress here that vaginal lubrication in women does not necessarily entail that women feel any sexual *desire*. That is, while it may appear that there is a disconnect in women when they respond physiologically to sexual stimuli, but say that they feel no desire, the apparent disconnect disappears when we realize that the lubrication is a reflexive, preconscious response and not sexual desire. Their desire is what they report when they tell us subjectively how they feel.

I repeat and stress once again these examples are not meant to be anything but illustrations. Moreover, they do not suggest that human sexuality is biologically caused in a proximate sense. Rather, biology is operating here as an ultimate cause. This is, I believe, obvious in the female lubrication case since we are speaking of something that evolved long ago in our ancestral history. To understand conscious sexual reactions like sexual desire, we will need to move beyond biology and consider other influences, either existential or social.

We see exactly this sort of combination of explanation when we attempt to explain why men are category specific and women aren't. First, there is empirical evidence that suggests that in many mammalian species one sex is flexible while the other is not.³² Of course, this just raises the question of why it is the human males that are not flexible. Here, there are various possible explanations that will be social (rather than biological) in nature. For example, heterosexual men in our culture may be much more susceptible to a taboo of gay sex than women are. Indeed, some research suggests that for women "social and emotional factors are more salient than sexual arousal to the development of their sexual interests"³³ while in men "sexual arousal is more salient than the other factors."³⁴

This last piece of information is, I believe, vitally important and tells us something crucial about women's sexual desire (as opposed to sexual responses). Women's sexual desire is prototypically (and perhaps stereotypically as well) directed to a whole person, just as Nagel, Nozick, and Giles suggest all sexual desire is. And in the context of the whole person, even one's gender becomes less determinative of sexual desire than emotional and social factors for women. We've already suggested that men's sexual response may be the product of a strong sexual taboo in our culture and so emotional and social factors cannot overcome the strength of that taboo.

³¹ Helen S. Crudgington, Mike T. Siva-Jothy, "Genital Damage, Kicking and Early Death,"????

³² R.W. Goy & D.A. Goldfoot, "Neuroendocrinology, animal models, and problems of human sexuality," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 4, 1975: 405-420. Also see, Chivers et al., "Gender and Sexual Orientation Differences."

³³ Chivers et al., "Gender and Sexual Orientation Differences," 1119; also see L.M. Diamond, "Passionate Friendships Among Adolescent, Sexual Minority Women," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 10, 2000: 191-209; L.M. Diamond, "Sexual Identity, Attractions, and Behavior Among Young Sexual-Minority Women Over a 2-year period," *Developmental Psychology* 36, 2000: 241-250; & R. Knoth, K. Boyd, & B. Singer, "Empirical Tests of Sexual Selection Theory: Predictions of Sex Differences in Onset, Intensity, and Time Course of Sexual Arousal," *Journal of Sex Research* 24, 1988: 73-89.

³⁴ Chivers et al., "Gender and Sexual Orientation Differences," 1119; also see R.C. Savin-Williams & L.M Diamond, "Sexual Identity Trajectories among Sexual-Minority Youths: Gender Comparisons," *Archives of Sex Behavior*, 29, 2000: 607-627.

Of course, it could be argued that men's sexual desire is simply different than women's sexual desire is directed, contra Nagel, Nozick, and Giles, at particular features of the sexual object and not the whole individual. And this may be based on biological mechanisms (spreading one's seed amongst a variety of persons) and/or social constructions (e.g., that boys and men receive lots of peer reinforcements for promiscuous behavior).

Although I can't provide anything conclusive in response to this claim, I do believe it's largely false and that men's sexual desire is directed to the entire individual, and hence, e.g., emotional connection is important to men in sexual relationships as well as to women. Let me begin my argument in a rather curious place: the purchasing of commercial sex by men. I say this is an odd place to begin my argument because surely the fact that men purchase commercial sex while women by and large do not would go to support the opposite of my thesis since commercial sex is paradigmatically *impersonal* sex, and men's interest in it is arguably toward particular body parts – vagina, mouth, etc. – rather than to the person as a whole. Moreover, engaging in sex with prostitutes is surely has little to do with mutual baring and caressing, and even less to do with a desire to be cared for, which Giles says is the core of sexual desire.

Oddly, while there is truth in these claims, the truth lies with the prostitute and not with her client. That is, while prostitutes have no sexual desire for their clients – i.e., to use Giles' language, they have no desire for mutual baring and caressing, and to be cared by their clients, that is exactly what many clients want. This is evident in a number of studies that have been done on what men want from prostitutes. While there are, of course, a variety of reasons why men purchase sex, many have to do with the lack of alternatives for (self perceived) unattractive in both physical and social senses. And, most importantly for our purposes, many are actually seeking intimacy. As one client put it: "It's more for intimacy... I am a hermit if you like, I am a lonely guy. I don't have many real time friends or I don't see them that often. There you are for five years, most of the time sleeping in your own bed alone... it's very nice to have a cuddle. (Steve. 47, divorced, IT)³⁵

Finally, let's consider why women's subjective and objective reactions to sexual stimuli are different and men's are not. The most obvious answer here is, I believe, probably the correct one. That is, there is a disconnect in women's subjective responses and physiological ones because women have been strongly encouraged to be, "modest and chaste," as David Hume argued two centuries ago.³⁶ According to Hume, in a patriarchal society where (i) wealth runs through males lines, (ii) where men don't have any guarantee that 'their' children are actually theirs, and (iii) children require lots of

³⁵ Teela Sanders, *Paying for Pleasure: Men Who Buy Sex*, (Devon, UK: Willan Publishing, 2008), 40.

³⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, reprinted from the Original Edition in three volumes and edited, with an analytical index, by L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), Sec. XII.

care, attention, and resources, men will need assurances that their wives are being faithful. Although laws and social disapproval will go some way toward this end, he said, they would not go far enough because there is always the chance that one would not be caught. Hence, women have to internalize the 'womanly' virtues of chastity and modesty if men are to be assuaged.

Women have, by and large and for better or worse, internalized these virtues to a great extent – certainly to a far greater extent than men have, although things may be changing in this generation. But then lots of things are changing in this generation, perhaps most prominently that America is at present almost hypersexual (even if there is a great deal of discomfort with this fact). I end this discussion by referring to Brian Alexander's recent book, *America Unzipped: In Search of Sex and Satisfaction*. After spending almost 200 pages telling us of the sexual exploits of contemporary Americans, many from America's conservative heartland, he ends by claiming that what Americans are really looking for in their pursuit of sex is escape from American (or more broadly, 'Western') culture, which is increasingly characterized by bewildering technology and increased loss of community, which has led to a sense of personal isolation. Sex, then, provides them with a way in which they can connect with others and escape their loneliness. Hence, though many practicing 'unconventional' sex would deny it, they are still looking for intimacy and indeed for love, regardless what sexual package it is found in. Having said that Alexander also claims that many within and indeed at the forefront of the sexual revolution in America are increasingly bored with it. "That is why I think the sex explosion is just about over. People will still watch porn, and we will certainly still have sex, and some people will still want to be tied up as some people always have, but the hypersaturation of it all is about to fizzle."³⁷

If I'm at all correct in my analysis, another way to put this is to say that Americans are ready for a turn away from sexual arousal to sexual desire.

³⁷ Brian Alexander, *America Unzipped: In Search of Sex and Satisfaction* (Three Rivers Press, 2008), 302.