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Comment on Catherine Hakim/3. Lust and Found. Parsing Male Horniness in the Modern World

(doi: 10.2383/85808)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 3, settembre-dicembre 2016

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Comment on Catherine Hakim/3

Lust and Found. Parsing Male Horniness in the Modern World

by Roger Friedland

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Somebody is finally tackling the gendered politics of lust and spasm. I applaud Catherine Hakim's insertion of sex, qua sex, both as scarce good and inequitably distributed desire. Here and elsewhere Hakim convincingly shows that there are substantively and statistically significant differences between women and men in their interest in and pursuit of erotic pleasure [Hakim 2015; 2016]. Contra feminist, constructivist cant, she argues women want it less, less often, with fewer partners and fewer positions than men. Men, she argues, are sexually starved and in consequence engage in sexual harassment, rape, extra-marital affairs, renting female bodies in proliferating spot markets in foreign brothels and sugar-daddy sites, watching porn and resorting to hand stimulation of their one-eyed trouser snakes. Particularly these days patriarchy is about sex, not hereditary seed, let alone female labor. In Hakim's vision the pursuit of male power is more about sex than sex is about male power. It is, as yet, difficult to tell.

Seen through this phallic oculus, Trump's astounding victory among white men in the 2016 election makes sense. The President-elect's bragging about his "pussy" grabs, the dozens of women who came forward complaining about his sexual predations, did not disqualify him in their eyes: on the contrary they were an electrifying announcement that it was ok to be a man who tried – with his eyes, his lips and his hands – to take what he could get off women's sexual bodies. Men secretly cheered this public conversion of power into carnal pleasure. In Hakim's version of the sexual playing field, increasingly horny men, both outside and inside of marriage, who can't

get laid are taking whatever they can get in other ways. In this hydraulic tale millions of men are now lifting their hats to the dude who still pulls it off. I don't contest the existence of a gendered sex deficit. But it is not adequate by itself to analyze the changing order of intimate life. I would argue that there are two, not just one, deficits: sex and love. And they are related. Men cannot get enough sex; women cannot get enough love. Men cannot get enough sex because they cannot give enough love. And women cannot get enough love because it is way too easy for men to get sex. Where this is going to go from here is a critical question.

For most young women love and intimacy are a necessary part of their erotic pleasure. In my surveys of college students, we repeatedly find that women are twice as likely as men to find it difficult to have sex without love, or even intimacy (50% vs. 25% in a random sample in 2013, for example). Now this survey was taken at UC Santa Barbara, a party school, a campus known for its Nobel prizes and its nooky, its crop-tops and hookups, where thousands of men commute for hundreds of miles to be there on Halloween in hopes of getting laid. By now the pull of its reputation should have drawn legions of girls out for a good time, yet the female student population is dominated by lovers and virgins, not players: 36% of the heterosexual women have never had vaginal sex (n=833).

What this gender differential in the difficulty of sex without love means is that young women are having a lot of sex they are not comfortable with, as a result of which they have to get plastered in order to make their way through the night [Friedland and Gardinali 2013]. UCSB is a campus where cops arrest drunken young women to keep them from getting raped. It also means that sex is not particularly pleasurable. One out of four of the women who did not love their last sexual partner had an orgasm in their last encounter, as opposed to 64% of those who did. For men, there was a difference, but it was pretty small.

TAB. 1. *Loving Your Last Sexual Partner and Orgasm*

Did you have an orgasm?	Did you love that person at that time?			Total
	Yes	No	Not sure	
Yes	244 63.87	61 26.52	13 39.39	318 49.3
No	98 25.65	134 58.26	19 57.58	251 38.91
Pretended to have one	16 4.19	20 8.7	1 3.03	37 5.74
Don't know	24 6.28	15 6.52	0 0.00	39 6.05
Total	382 100.00	230 100.00	33 100.00	645 100.00

Note: Women, 2013, UCSB random sample of undergraduates (n=645)

Credit: Paolo Gardinali, Director, Survey Research Center

Women who cannot spread their legs and open their hearts at the same time don't enjoy the sex that much. In our surveys, women who have difficulty separating sex and love have significantly fewer sexual partners. I suspect some of the gender differences in sexual activity and interest are due to the ways these two deficits operate together. That sexual activity is higher in Mediterranean countries where romance is more prevalent and lower where it is less, notably Japan and the Scandinavian North is consonant with this hypothesis [Hakim 2015, 324]. In Japan, the dissociation of love and marriage has become such that “will you share my grave with me?” has become a common male marriage proposal [Shoji 2011]. In contrast in my research in Rome, I found the young men were extraordinarily romantic, more so even than the women, and that young Italian women were more likely to be sexually satisfied than their American counterparts [Friedland 2014]. In the case of Italy, Hakim argues, the “surplus of male sexuality stimulates a culture of eroticism and flirtation” [Hakim 2016, 15]. Italian flirtation, however, is not associated with rape, the rates for which are extremely low by comparative standards [Friedland 2014]. A sexual deficit, when conjoined with romance, can work for women.

If for most women the pleasure of their sex is contingent upon love and there are slim prospects of getting their sex with love this has got to suppress its supply to men. The question of love brings us back to male power. What Hakim's schema does not make sense of is why Trump won a majority of white women, who in this scheme of things should want to protect the value of and the property rights in their

bodily assets from men like this. Certainly there were other reasons these women would vote for him – to secure more jobs on better terms for Americans, to stop immigration, to fight Islamic terrorism, because of racism. A big part of the story is that Trump's sexism didn't count for much against these other issues. But part of this, I think, is because Trump – even in his excesses – is the kind of old school man who pursues women, who takes his chances and makes women feel desired. Many women are willing to take the risks, believing their allure, their love, and their sex – which is in short supply – can tame their chosen beasts. Powerful men cast an erotic lure; they are easier to love; and they are in short supply.

Love after feminism has become problematic, where many men are no longer sure how to behave, afraid of being called out as sexists, whether to hold a door or offer a compliment. It is arguable, and Eva Illouz has done so, that the erosion of gender roles, and the specific powers embodied in them, has led to a decline in eroticism [Illouz 2012]. Illouz argues that the emphasis on equivalence and equity to which feminism has contributed has made intimate encounters more self-conscious and undercut the intuitive, emotional evaluations necessary to both romance and eroticism. Eroticism and romance, she argues, depend on an ability to play with power.

Feminist practices de-eroticize gender relations thus understood, because they aim primarily at making power explicit and thus unravel the web of implicit meanings in which power hides and aestheticizes itself [Illouz 2012: 186].

It is the semiotic certainties of gender that make it possible to generate the pleasurable ambiguities of eroticism. A flat world of contract and equivalence is a turn-off.

The implication is that women want powerful men because of the erotic attraction and the romance a world of such men affords. How else can we explain the mass attraction to the eroticization of power in *Fifty Shades of Gray* [James 2011], which has now sold 60 million copies – overwhelmingly to women – in the last five years? Erotics are tied up with power and men are losing it. This is also consistent with the geography of rising sexual disinterest that Hakim presents, such as the declining frequency of sexual intercourse in Scandinavia, Germany, Britain and the United States, precisely those regions where feminism has made the greatest strides. In my own work on American undergraduates, we found that young women who thought romance brainwashes women and contributes to their domination, were significantly less likely to have loved their last sexual partner and to have had an orgasm with a partner they loved [Friedland, Mohr and Roose 2014].

Some of the central pathways that Hakim argues are taken by male sexual frustration are empirically problematic.

Men can enjoy porn that humiliates or belittles women as a form of revenge for the attractive women who rejected their advances [...] [P]orn helps men by showing that men can dominate women sexually [Hakim 2016, 13].

Among my American college student samples, young men who are now involved in romantic relationships look at porn just as much as those who are not. The men who watch a lot of pornography are not sexually starved. Indeed, in my college samples there is a modest, statistically significant positive relationship (correlation = .20) between the number of sexual partners they have had in the last six months and how frequently they watch pornography. It is the same with masturbation, young men who have more sexual partners masturbate more frequently, not less. For young college men at least, lack of sex and love do not translate into pornography and masturbation.

If ever there is a sexual deficit for men it is in the Muslim world. Together with Janet Afary, I have collected a large survey data set on the intimate lives of young Muslims in seven Muslim-majority countries [Friedland *et al.* 2016]. These countries have very strict understandings of female modesty. For an unmarried and unrelated male and a female even to be together alone is forbidden. So I was curious: Based on Hakim's universalizing logic we would expect young single Muslim men who did not have intimate contacts with young women to be those who harassed women on the street. Close to 3,000 young single men replied to the questions whether they had ever amorously kissed a young woman and whether they had ever touched a woman's body on the street, a bus or at work. Young men who had dared to kiss somebody were slightly less likely to have sexually harassed a woman, but the difference was not substantively large: 42% vs. 47%. The big difference in sexual harassment was not located in their lack of access to women, but in patriarchy *per se*. Men, married and non, who believed that husbands should have absolute control over their wives' movements, whether they worked or not, for example, were dramatically more likely to have sexually harassed women in public [Friedland and Afary, unpublished; see also Friedland and Afary 2013]. Variations in such sexual aggressions towards women operate through the presumptions of patriarchy, not through individual sex starvation.

Hakim is a pioneer in making sociology more lubricious, in asking us to delve into what it means that we live in a wet world. Understanding the pathways of sex, its relation to gender, power and love, is going to take a lot of work. I am delighted we have begun.

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Lust and Found.

Parsing Male Horniness in the Modern World

Abstract: This essay suggests that while men in contemporary societies – as Hakim argues – suffer a sexual deficit, women suffer a love deficit, and that the two phenomena may be related.

Keywords: Sex; Love; Gender; Trump; Pornography.

Roger Friedland is a Visiting Professor of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University and Emeritus Professor at Religious Studies and Sociology at University of California, Santa Barbara. Together with Janet Afary, he is working on the relationship between sexual intimacy, romantic love, gender and Islam with survey data on seven Muslim-majority countries; and with John Mohr and Henk Roose on the institutional logics of love among American college students. His essay, “Counting on the Gods: Value and Divine Operations in Institutional Life” was presented at the *Accounting, Fact and Value Workshop* at the London School of Economics and Political Science, in May 2016.