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A Response to Comments. The Modern Significance of Sexuality - and the Sex Drive

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A Response to Comments

The Modern Significance of Sexuality – and the Sex Drive

by Catherine Hakim

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In most cultures, the chastity of women was valued because it ensured that any offspring and inheritors were her husband's children, and no-one else's. This often led to the physical segregation of men and women, the domestic seclusion of wives, and women's exclusion from the public sphere.

The contraceptive revolution of the 1960s changed all this, although it is taking decades for social customs to adapt to the change. Pre-marital sex is now acceptable in the West, but extra-marital sex is still viewed negatively by many people. The "moral" rules invented to justify and enforce practical necessity (notably the sexual double standard) change very slowly. Social scientists are not immune to viewing sexuality in redundant emotional and moral terms, and this is reflected in the comments on my article "The Sugar in His Tea" [Hakim 2016].

In the past, sexuality was confined to marriage for most people. Kings and wealthy aristocrats could afford additional entertainment, and mistresses were even expected. But most wives had only one or two lifetime lovers: their husband(s). Men had the option of sexual liaisons in the commercial sex industry, or else kept mistresses and concubines.

Today, marriage no longer has the monopoly on sexual expression. Sexual activity now occurs almost as often in the spot market for short-term and casual encounters as within long-term relationships (this has altered the social and economic attractions of marriage, but that is a separate issue). Both women and men can have sexual adventures outside marriage. The inevitable result is that sex surveys show

a steady decline in differences between men and women on most indicators of *sexual behaviour* and, to a lesser extent, sexual attitudes. Marzio Barbagli [2016] underlines the increasing similarity in male and female reports of sexual experience. In the Twentieth century, this happened in parallel with contraction of the huge commercial sex industry in Western countries. But this trend is now being reversed globally, with convergence of professional and non-professional sexuality.

It is thus all the more remarkable that sex surveys show fundamental sex differences persist in *sex drive and motivation*, which is measured separately from behaviour and attitudes. Finland has the longest series of sex surveys, supplemented by qualitative studies. After reviewing the results of recent sex surveys in Finland and other countries, Osmo Kontula, the internationally famous sex researcher, concluded that this is the key continuing difference between men and women, even in the sexually liberated cultures of Scandinavia. He also concludes that the sex difference in sex drive is widening in the Twenty-First century [Kontula 2009, 39-44, 215-230]. I draw the same conclusions, with additional evidence for Britain, and I also offer possible explanations for these trends [Hakim 2015a; 2016]. I urge readers to look at my 2015 article on the male sexual deficit which sets out the evidence in full.¹ The male sexual deficit is a social fact, not open to dispute or debate, or quibbles from the history of ideas about desire. However the size of the problem, and responses to it, differ widely across individuals and cultures. Even priests and monks are unable to refrain from sexual activity, sometimes with minors, despite major social and ethical barriers to such behaviour, as recent media stories attest. I have never come across similar stories about libidinous nuns.

Rossella Ghigi [2016] is quite right that my necessarily short account of feminist theories about patriarchy does not do justice to the endless elaborate theorising that academics have offered over the past 30-40 years. Her essay summarises the history of Western ideas on sexuality very elegantly. She also provides further detail on Marxist explanations for the emergence of patriarchy that are consistent with Lerner's thesis based on full historical evidence [1986]. Her essay expands my article with her literature review, but it does not challenge or alter my thesis in any way. One key point she overlooks is that feminism has destroyed eroticism, flirtation and courtship, as Friedland [2016] points out. Yet these elements are valued by women.

Roger Friedland accepts my thesis of a male sexual deficit as a social fact of the Twenty-First century, even in liberal Western democracies [Hakim 2015a] and he is open-minded about the new thesis that sexuality contributes to maintaining patriarchy today, even in the Western world. He tests the thesis on Moslem countries

¹ The article is available on my website www.CatherineHakim.org

of the Middle-East. My reading of his research evidence is that it solidly supports my thesis.

Roger Friedland rightly points out that the sexual deficit is probably largest among men in the Moslem countries of the Mediterranean. Due to weak economies and high unemployment (or hidden unemployment), many young men cannot afford to marry. Since pre-marital sex is ruled out, sexual frustration runs through their teenage and young adult years, and even beyond. Some commentators have explained the so-called “Arab spring” movements as an outcome of this problem of young sexually-frustrated men. And yes, it is in these countries that the sexual harassment of women in public places is most ubiquitous, and most extreme. In Cairo, mobs of young men have attacked women, even stripped and raped them in public places. Friedland’s 2013 survey of the *Facebook* generation in Egypt, young people aged 18-25, found that sexual molestation of women in the street and public places is routine: women are touched, grabbed, and groped by men – irrespective of the men’s religious views, and irrespective of how modestly their victims were dressed. Two-thirds of young women had experienced such molestation, and four in five young men admitted to doing this. In contrast, only 30% of Californian college students report being touched inappropriately [Friedland and Afary 2013]. The World Values Survey routinely identifies Moslem countries as having the most patriarchal attitudes in the world [Inglehart and Norris 2003]. Friedland shows patriarchal attitudes increase men’s control of women by the sexual harassment of women who dare to appear in public places unaccompanied. Such behaviour can also be read as resentment of the sexual power women have over men, even on strangers in the street.

As Roger Friedland [2016] points out, one key sex difference is that women persist in wanting sexuality to be confined to “loving” contexts – meaning long-term relationships – while most men reject this idea (and perhaps always did). Even in Sweden and France, two cultures with modern liberal sexual cultures, the majority of women regard love as a precondition for sexuality, whereas the majority of men reject the idea [Hakim 2015a, 321]. In effect, women still regard sexual activity as an investment in a relationship they hope has long-term potential, rather than sensual pleasure pursued for its own sake. The advent of the *Tinder* website for casual sexual hook-ups (similar to the gay community’s successful *Grindr* website) has not made much of an impact in the end. Young women try it out, excited by the novelty of treating men as candy in a store, and soon move off it back to normal dating [Glass 2016]. Heterosexuals are a very different community from the tiny gay community that Anderson [2016] knows well. My thesis is not affected by the existence of the gay community, which I do discuss. Heterosexuals form almost 97% of all populations, the vast majority.

Eric Anderson may be right to suggest (without offering any evidence) that gay men do not support or promote patriarchal ideology. Clearly, they do not need to, as their sexual interest is focused on other men, with women just platonic friends on the side. However the gay community is so tiny as to be invisible – only 3% of men and women self-identify as homosexual in sex surveys, even if a few more have tested the waters. Also, Anderson’s book on *The Monogamy Gap* promotes and supports extreme patriarchal attitudes to women and sexuality [Anderson, 2012], as I point out in my “Sugar” article.

Heterosexual men’s awareness of the free-for-all promiscuity that thrives in the gay community promotes envy and jealousy of this hedonic sexual freedom that is still so rare among the heterosexual majority. So the gay community exacerbates heterosexual men’s resentment of their sexual deficit, indirectly increasing male incentives to control (access to) female sexuality through patriarchal systems that reinforce the idea of the “male sex right”.

Friedland and to some extent Ghigi address women’s focus on love as a precondition for sex. Friedland shows women are more likely to achieve orgasm with a partner they love. Emotional and physical satisfaction combine for some women. This need for love and affection might explain women having fewer sexual partners, and their sexual *behaviour* generally. However, it does not explain lower levels of pure uninhibited lust and weaker libidos among women at all ages, even within a loving marriage. Men, especially husbands, regularly complain of unfulfilled sexual desires [Hakim 2012]. Typically, wives do not. Women are more likely to complain of excessive sexual demands from partners.

Like most academics, Marzio Barbagli reports sex survey *averages*. The distribution is also important, as many people are celibate, while others are sexually active daily at least. Low-libido people seem unable to understand the situation of high libido people, and vice versa. It is easy for low-libido people (especially women) to dismiss sexual starvation and sexual famine as trivial problems, unlike hunger. Similarly, colour-blind people have no idea what it is they cannot see.

Sociology focuses on social processes and social scripts. From there, it is a short step to the over-socialised view of humans as creatures 100% shaped by their social environment, with no agency at all, no ability to reject standard scripts and write your own. From there, it is another short step to disregarding topics shared with other disciplines – such as economics, social psychology and yes, genetics and biology. Sexuality straddles the borderline between physiology and sociology, public and private life. It is pointless for sociologists to pretend that physiology can be ignored, and that the private realms of sexuality can be dealt with theoretically. Children are not a blank slate waiting for parents and others to write on, and they are not sexless. From

the age of seven onwards, boys in Britain negotiate increases in pocket-money from their parents, so that a distinct “pay gap” in pocket money emerges among children long before they get anywhere near the labour market [Barrett 2016]. Girl babies as young as four months old have been seen to masturbate. Long before society starts to impose standard ideas about sexuality, young people develop their own ideas and practices independently – as illustrated by “deviant” practices such as cross-dressing, homosexuality and fetishes. There is a danger that difficult topics fall into the black holes of sociology – including sexuality, beauty, height and intelligence [Hakim 2013].

Finally, I address some smaller points. Theories that present women as more libidinous than men are usually offered by men to justify male control of female sexuality and women’s activities – as illustrated by Islamic ideas. The extreme version of this is the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) practiced in East African societies to eliminate recreational sexuality for women.

Eric Andersen mis-reads my article as offering a pejorative view of porn, masturbation and the commercial sex industry. He is totally wrong. I do not stigmatise these sexual entertainments. On the contrary, I champion all forms of sexual entertainment, including commercial sexuality, and I argue that the sex industry should be free to expand just like any other leisure activity. I also publicly advocate the decriminalisation of the sex industry and sex workers [Hakim 2015b], as do the United Nations, Amnesty International, and the British Parliament’s Home Affairs Select Committee in recent years.

In sum, only Friedland’s comment really addresses the new thesis, and he welcomes it. The other three comments reiterate facts and (unproven) theories about women’s changing status, behaviour and ideas in the Western world. None of them offers any real challenge, and the evidence they offer corroborates and supports my thesis.

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Abstract: Only Friedland's comment really addresses the new thesis, and he welcomes it. The other three comments reiterate facts and (unproven) theories about women's changing status, behaviour and ideas in the Western world. None of them offers any real challenge, and the evidence they offer corroborates and supports my thesis on the significance of sexuality for the maintenance of male dominance in the Twenty-First century.

Keywords: Sexuality; Sexual Harassment; Male Sexual Deficit; Marriage.

Professor **Catherine Hakim** is a pioneering social scientist, currently Professorial Research Fellow with *Civitas*, a London think tank. Her professional experience spans central government, consultancy, and academia. She is a regular commentator in the media. As a Senior Research Fellow in the London School of Economics she developed a thesis on the social and economic value of Erotic Capital, as well as Preference Theory. She is an internationally recognized expert on women's employment, social policy, and related issues. She has also done research on voluntary childlessness and the male sexual deficit. Her publications include over 100 papers published in academic journals, numerous books and research monographs. See <http://www.catherinehakim.org>.