Men get laid, but women get screwed.

A Radical Feminist look at America’s harmful views on women’s sexuality.

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At the age of sixteen, I was completely in love with a boy named Austin. We had experimented with sexual activities, like fondling and heavy petting, but had never actually “gone all the way”. One afternoon, I went to his house raging with sexual attraction that I knew he felt for me as well. When it finally came down to the moment where he asked if we could have sex, I was overcome with a feeling of immense panic. I knew that we had to have a condom so that I wouldn’t get pregnant, but I was too worried about what my close-knit community would say if I was seen buying condoms at the store. So, with a great amount of pressuring, we ended up using plastic wrap as a make-shift condom, and had sex. Driving home after the fact, I called my closest girl friend and began bawling. I thought that I was a whore. Even after her, and plenty of other people’s reassurances, I still felt like I was dirty and that I had lost a piece of myself. Austin, on the other hand, felt prouder than ever that he had finally gotten a girl to have sex with him.

These lingering feelings of guilt and contamination haunted me for the next few years of my life. Though I went on to engage in more sexual activities with other partners, I continued to feel apprehensive toward every encounter. I did not realize that I was a victim of a society’s broken views on female sexuality until I took a Women’s Studies course on human sexual behavior. I realized that I had absolutely no sexual agency (owning my sexual self) for years. The Feminist analyses brought up in this class helped me see the sexual institutions that are in place in our society that cause women to leave the reigns of their intimate lives in the hands of men.
Description:

In today’s world, women are battling a huge problem of unwanted pregnancies and the effect that society’s views have on the choices made by women affected by them. Through changing the attitudes behind women’s sexuality we can eliminate the problems associated with unwanted pregnancies. This is not an issue of an individual woman getting pregnant without meaning to; at least, it isn’t yet. This is a battle to give women ownership of their own bodies, something women have not had in thousands of years. In changing women’s attitude toward their bodies and the way they and others see our sexuality, we can create a society in which women have full ownership of their bodies and eliminate issues associated with birth control and abortion rights.

There is a great misunderstanding in our society that women who encounter unwanted pregnancies knew exactly what the consequences were when they decided to have sex. Unfortunately, for a great deal of these accidental mothers, there is a huge stigma put on pregnant women who are non-married and/or in their teens and early twenties. In America there is an increasing incidence of teenage pregnancy rates because of lack of sex education. Ironically, these figures are lower” in six other Western countries [which] range from only 13 to 53 percent of the U.S. rate.” (Westoff 254) What is more, “in women who are aged 18–19 and 20–24… more than one unintended pregnancy occurred for every 10 women.” (Finer, and Henshaw 92) In a group where this issue is so prevalent, it is astounding that there have not been more studies behind the cause of this stigmatization.

Not only are there unwanted notions that come with pregnancy, but there are also large numbers of women who have sex that are either do not know if they are ready, didn’t feel strongly about having or not having sex, or simply did not want to have sex when experiencing
this on their first time. This ambivalence during their first sexual encounter causes them regret the act altogether. (Mitchell 722) In fact, a study done on the variability of women wanting their first sexual experience found that on a scale of one to ten the “average score reported for women’s wantedness of (voluntary) first intercourse [was] 5.98.” (Houts 1092) What these numbers are saying is that more than half of the women who were interviewed did not want or didn’t really care about their first sex act. These women, (who can arguably be called girls because of their age), were not excited about their first time having sex. In actuality, women do not enjoy sex as much as they could simply because they don’t own their sexuality. Instead, they are taught by nearly everyone that their sole purpose in life is to please men. The fact is that women that who are sexually interested in anyone, or even just sexually interested, feel the cold stabs of the word “slut” after pursuing their own sexual desires. Women often shy away from participating in sex for their enjoyment because they are trapped in a sexual double standard. While men are actively looking for intercourse to fulfill the pressures put on them to have sex, women are constantly attempting to appear sexy without having sex. Faced with continuous pressures from men to “do it” and society’s insistence that they not, women end up being put in situations where they have not thought about the physical consequences of having sex, such as STD’s and pregnancy. What ends up happening to these women is that sex is treated as something that just “happens to them.” They become non-participators in an act that should be mutually enjoyable and wanted by all involved.

One of the supposed “solutions” to this maladaptive behavior is the existence of abstinence only sex education. This type of education is teaching our children that,” sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects.” (Dailard) Some abstinence-only cites offer ideas on how to avoid sexual encounters.
However, these cites only offer more information to women on how to change the subject, and not talk about sex at all. ("It's Great to Wait") Unfortunately, many abstinence only programs are the cause of the psychological and physical effects that women experience after having sexual relations. A study done on a form of abstinence only education, the Virginity Pledge, shows that people who take the pledge, and then break it are” less likely than others to use contraception at first intercourse” (Bearman, and Bruckner 862) and thusly, are at a higher risk for STD’s and pregnancy. As Bearman and Bruckner point out, it is easy to believe that these young men and women are having unprotected sex, because someone who is planning to stay celibate till marriage would not plan ahead and have a condom at the time the activity took place.

Unfortunately, women are becoming unprepared for sex not only because of Virginity Pledges, but also because of the high cost of birth control and the fact that some pharmacists refuse to even dispense birth control pills. In our society, a woman needs to obtain a prescription before she can get most types of birth control. This can be a problem, as many physicians do exams before they give out prescriptions, which can cost from $45-$125. (“Estronaut: A Forum For Women’s Health”) Though Planned Parenthood does many services for reduced fees, there are plenty of women who do not have access to such a facility or who fear persecution from receiving assistance from Planned Parenthood. On top of the costs of the initial exam, birth control (namely hormonal birth control) ranges from “about $15-$25 or so a month.” (“Estronaut: A Forum For Women’s Health”) For some women, these costs are just too great. After spending the time, money, and effort to get a prescription for birth control, a woman can be further kept from receiving her medication by the pharmacist who is supposed to fill her prescription. In Texas, a pharmacist was disciplined for “refusing to fill the prescription of a rape victim seeking a morning-after pregnancy- prevention pill,” because the pharmacist did not think
it was morally right. (Chicago Tribune) This happens not only with emergency contraception, but also with monthly birth control.

The women of our society are suffering problems that are completely unique to their sex. They are being forced into situations of sex where they either do not want it, or are not ready for it. These women are not choosing to have sex. They are just choosing not to say no. Not only can most of these instances be termed as rape, but they also leave the women with feelings of shame and regret, especially when having to obtain emergency contraception. The women are then called whores and sluts because they participated in sex, but cannot even validate the act by saying that they wanted or even enjoyed it as well. These ideas did not simply start one day in our society. It has taken many years and many ideas about women and men’s sexuality for us to get to this point.

**Analysis:**

This stigmatization exists because of the way in which we teach, or rather do not teach, our young women about sex. In our society there is a huge amount of time and energy spent on avoiding sex. Countless pictures of concerned teen girls holding pregnancy tests litter our high schools. Sex is thought to be indecent conversation material, even between a husband and wife. The only people that society dictates are allowed to be having sex. This reluctance to talk about sex goes a step further when it comes to the women of our society and morphs into utter avoidance of sexual acts. These women are taught that they will become “sluts and whores” if they succumb to the temptation of sex. Connotations that are put on sex and that the solution to this problem has its roots in Radical Feminist thought.
A problem with fighting this issue on an individual level is that women who resist the advances of men or who have a strong desire to have sex are seen as a threat. For instance, in Freud’s time if a woman was willing to own her sexual experience enough to admit that vaginal intercourse was not where she reached orgasm it was” diagnosed as an anti-male phenomenon.” (Koedt 187) Because these women chose to tell their partners and doctors that they weren’t getting sexually satisfied, they were deemed to be man-haters. The very thought that a woman was not happy with what was being done to her and that she should express these notions sent the psychiatric world into a frenzy over how to explain this “phenomenon”. It was deemed that because women were not enjoying this certain type of sex that they were” envious of men.” (Koedt 187) In this time period, a woman speaking about her sexuality couldn’t be seen as wanting to enjoy it too. No. To this society it must be that she is jealous. This can be explained by the fact that these men were” protecting [their] own superiority… because it was a jewel to [them] of the rarest price.” (Woolf 136) They were simply explaining away a problem in order to protect their own interests. Unfortunately, this problem is still in existence today.

Kate Millet describes sexual politics as,” power-structured relationships, whereby one group of persons is controlled by another.” (Millet 181) This definition of a sexual relationship is completely relevant to the reasons why our society has been mistreating our women’s sexuality. You see, this definition brings to light the fact that our society’s sexual relationships are dominated by one group: men. We teach our women to be handled and leave them with a feeling of powerlessness while we laud our men for taking control of a sexual experience and doing it often and with many women. This way of educating our women leads to not only unwanted physical effects of sex, but also to the psychological effects of participating in an act in which they have been told is wrong their entire life.
Many people have tried to fix this problem on an individual level. Thanks to Feminism, many women are taking control of their sexual lives, but this is not enough. What needs to be done is that we fix the way society thinks about women and their sexuality. As the Redstockings so eloquently put it “the conflicts between individual men and women are political conflicts that can only be solved collectively.” (Redstockings 182) The fight for women’s sexuality needs not to be thought of as something that is each individual woman’s problem, but as a problem for our world to help deal with. The idea that this is a personal problem only makes it harder for each woman to find a way to defeat it. The Redstockings knew that this problem was only made to be more prevalent because of our society’s insistence that it is not a political issue.

What is more, this problem is not one that would have garnered any attention until the women who were suffering under it had spoken out. It is the women who have the” long burden of carrying, bearing, and rearing the unwanted children” that are finally taking a stand on this issue. (Sanger 127) As Peggy McIntosh would agree, those who do not suffer from a disadvantage often do not see the advantage that they have been given and thus explains why men have rarely, if ever, acknowledged the plight that women are experiencing. (McIntosh) Women were only given the vote in 1920 and have been fighting tooth and nail since then for full equality. The reason this mistreatment has been allowed to go on for so long is that women are only recently gaining a voice in society, and much more recently, have been able to openly talk about sex. It is my experience that most women have a clear definition of the first two waves of Feminism, but have no idea that a third wave, based on giving everyone a voice, exists.

What this all comes down to is that the current definitions of sexuality are not of women’s making. Modern sexuality is” defined by men, forced on women, and constitutive in the meaning of gender.” (McKinnon 414) Women’s sexuality is actually defined by a lack of
sexuality, a lack of wanting, a lack of participating. This attitude towards women’s sexuality is not contrived by women themselves, for who would purposefully create a society in which they were the pariahs? This is all fallout of patriarchy that must be redefined without the pervasive pull of this male centered institution.

**Vision:**

A world in which all of these behaviors and notions have been defeated would first start with comprehensive sex education for everyone. The members of this society be taught about safe and healthy sex in their homes (by their parents or guardians), from groups they participate in outside of school such as youth groups and clubs, and also in school. Sex education that teaches children all aspects of having sex is commonplace in this world.

An emphasis on education will help lessen the amounts of unprotected sex, and will give both sexes the tools they need to engage in safe intercourse. Men will be taught that it is perfectly fine for women to turn down sex, and that if they pressure these women, there will be great consequences. The women of this society will also have complete certainty that they want to have sex when they experience their first time and are not afraid to say no. These women will not be afraid to engage in sex because they have been taught otherwise. There will also be myriads of family planning tools available to both sexes so that their first time may be happy, fun, pleasurable, and without the worry of STD’s and pregnancy.

This perfect world will also have many avenues that women can access to explore their own sexuality. They will have books, articles, magazines, websites, and other things that encourage them to be sexual but most importantly to have sex on their own terms. These women will not feel pressured to be and think in a certain way about sex. These women will feel
confident in their sexual experiences and feel that they have experienced as much pleasure as their partner. They will not fear being called a “slut” or a “whore” because they participate in sex and will not be scorned if they should become pregnant, or if they get an abortion.

The women of this fabled place will also not have to resort to abortion and adoption because there will be services lined up to help them every step of the way, thus eliminating the stigmas behind unwanted pregnancies. The only need for abortion would be when a mother’s health is at risk if she carries the pregnancy to term. These women will be given top-shelf medical care at the first sign of pregnancy to make sure that they, and their prospective child, are as healthy as possible. There will also be plenty of programs that teach both men and women the skills needed to raise children. There will be affordable child care so that the pregnancy will not interfere with the either parent’s life that is mostly subsidized by the government. There will be forums on computers and in person alike for young parents to talk to more experienced parents about challenges and insecurities. All of these things will be eligible to all parents because the stereotype that it is the woman’s fault for getting pregnant will be nonexistent.

In this place there will be no advertising that suggests women want to be taken advantage of. There will be no emphasis on the myth that women want to be treated like objects. There will be absolutely no media portraying women as beaten and broken unless it is in an educational manner. There will also be no notions that a hurt woman is a “beautiful” piece of art. Media will mostly emphasize the strength and power of women instead of their fragility and frailness. Also, media will display women who are interested in and pursue sex just as often as men do and who are adamantly against being raped, beaten, and hurt through sex.

There will be more emphasis on creating a language that helps women define their own sexualities in their terms. The words that so often are used to subjugate women, “tap that” and
“hit that”, will not be descriptive of what is actually happening, and will not be used to insinuate sex. They will be archaic and replaced with sayings that connote mutual understanding and respect for the other person involved. Women will also create a language that defines their sex acts, and the sex acts that women participate in with other women. There will be no ambiguity about homosexual sex simply because the world of my dreams will not be focused primarily on heterosexuality. If anything, ambiguity about sex will simply be present because of inexperience or young age.

If someone from our society looked at this perfect place the most surprising fact that they would find would be that men are just as concerned about women’s attitudes towards themselves as the women of today. These men will realize that the optimal sexual experience is not one in which they are in control of every move, but rather one where the sexual script is written jointly by both partners.

**Strategy:**

It is imperative that we start letting our women enjoy sex as much as our men seem to be enjoying it. The key to creating this type of society is all in how we socialize our men and women. To eradicate this problem we first must create outreach programs that teach women and men about the problem of women’s agency. Sadly, our school systems are highly regulated by the government, which, let’s face it, is not getting any better about dealing with this problem. To remedy this situation, a network of concerned feminists (as well as closet feminists) will have to be created. The creation of the Third Wave Feminist Network will aid in the abolition of these problems.
The major dilemma to creating a solution to this problem will be funding the many different steps that are needed. To begin with the Center for Disease Control, Planned Parenthood, Metro Charities, DART, and other safer sex/health related organizations will be rallied to my cause funding will be procured from them. Through this coalition, enough money will be amassed to start the nationwide Third Wave Feminist Network of individual people as well as smaller feminist corporations. To get people to join the effort, by giving money and time, this mission will be advertised through many different media sources (such as feminist websites, Facebook, blogs, NPR and other news media).

After the feminist organization has gained enough of a following, programs targeting teens and college students will begin. These programs will be focused on respecting women’s bodies as well comprehensive sex education. There will be programs that are centered on the woman side of the issues, as well as the man side of the issues, but will not exclude either sex from attending the opposite seminar. Because there is a huge problem of the boredom or fear-raising aspects of sex education, these classes will be creative, fun, and interactive.

As previously stated, the school system is much too conservative to allow such progressive education. To remedy this problem, these classes will be held at community centers, public meeting places, libraries, hospitals, private residences, and anywhere that is possible. The point of this movement is to educate as many people as possible. So with the money collected even private tutorials will be available for small groups.

Workshops and programs will also be available for the younger crowds as well. Teaching our youth about loving and owning their bodies will be instrumental in making the future brighter. If we can teach younger generations to respect women’s bodies and sexualities these
people will be less apt to participate in the broken systems of sexuality that we currently have and that will tempt them into treating women as possessions.

Another goal for the TWFN will be to decrease, if not eliminate, the cost of birth control. Though it will still be required to get a prescription, so that the drug is not abused, the actual pills will cost very little to nothing. This will be attained by creating large lobbying groups to storm Capitol Hill. Innovative ideas of how to create a climate in which a bill will pass will be gleaned from every level of participation in the TWFN because no voice will be insignificant. With this low-cost/no-cost birth control, it will be enormously easier for women to truly have voluntary motherhood. Birth control options for men, including hormonal pills as well as condoms, will also be fought for by the lobbyists of TWFN.

Another aspect, often overlooked by feminists is the need for men to become active consumers of birth control. The TWFN will shift the focus of birth control to from concentrating mostly on what women must do, to what both people must do to prevent pregnancy. Through the programs that the organization will run, men will be taught that they are just as responsible for their partners birth control needs. With the insistence that men become more diligent in fight against unwanted pregnancy, the STD rates will also decrease as condoms become a “must have” for sexually active young people.

Our society insists that women be held to impossibly high standards of sexual purity. This focus on keeping our women pure, while we teach our men to have as many sexual conquests as possible, is ruining the lives of both sexes. Through the combined efforts of all of the Third Wave Feminists in our society, I know that we can beat this horrible institution. It is time to stop punishing our women for having feelings as natural as sexual feelings. It is time to set our women free.


**Title quoted from Quentin Crisp.**