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The Meaning of Sexuality: A Critique of Michel Foucault's
History of Sexuality Volume 1

Anne E. Stewart Grow

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Meaning of Sexuality: A Critique of Michel Foucault's *A History of Sexuality Volume 1*

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Master of Arts

Michel Foucault is a celebrated post-structuralist theorist that has helped shape gender and sexual theory. In *A History of Sexuality Volume 1* Foucault dismantles many longstanding sexual traditions and morals by exposing them as societal constructs. According to Foucault, anonymous yet fully invasive power sources have shaped and continue to shape sexual culture and more importantly, individual beliefs about sexuality. However, Foucault's obsession with the influence of power limits his sexual theory in three particular ways. First, he disregards the female sexual experience; second, he undermines individual agency; and third, he undermines the innate desire for love and family. The first half of the paper focuses on his dismissal of the female experience and individual agency. This section of the thesis relies heavily on other feminist scholars, social studies, and the work of historians. The second half of the paper focuses on the human desire for love and family and looks to dystopian literature to help critique Foucault. Dystopian literature has often been paired with modern cultural criticism, including psychoanalysis and post-structuralism as both act as critiques of the permeating effects of societal control at a community and individual level. However, even dystopian literature leaves some room for individual agency and explores the innate desire for love and family.

Keywords: Michel Foucault, Post-Structuralism, dystopian literature, sexuality, agency, reproduction

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

More than any paper I wrote during my undergraduate studies, this paper was truly a labor of love and genuine curiosity. I owe so much of this effort to the many teachers and supervisors that allowed me the freedom and encouragement to pursue my interests. I would like to first thank my official thesis committee: my chair, Martha Peacock for giving shape to my ideas, pushing me along, and showing a tremendous amount of trust in me; Jon Ostenson for providing an encouraging yet critical environment to help shape my ideas; and George Handley for giving me the assurance I needed in my very first Master's class and for the demanding yet essential feedback I needed in order to finish my thesis. I would also like to thank Mike Pope for taking me under his wing, even though I was a complete novice in Classics. And I want to thank Roger Macfarlane for his constant support and for introducing me to Plato's *Symposium*. Finally, I must thank my ever-supportive and kind husband, Alex Grow, who showed a long-sustained interest in my studies, Henry and Josephine for always being a bright spot in my life, my encouraging parents, Nancy and Charles Stewart and my dear friend Andy Ballstaedt for her constant feedback and enthusiasm.

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INTRODUCTION

Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* proposes that the majority of sexual morals and norms do not reflect an objectively innate system of right and wrong. Instead, western sexual culture is based on biased and intentional constructions designed and perpetuated by "the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world."¹ He refers to the "regime of power-knowledge-pleasure" and the "power-pleasure dichotomy" interchangeably. Both refer to an unidentifiable yet inescapable power or influence that creates and controls society through sexuality, by means of repression and incitement. It therefore these power systems do not entirely stifle nor entirely promote sex. He claims all sexual culture and morals "found an opportunity to deploy [themselves] in the discourse of sex. Not however, by reason of some natural property inherent in sex itself, but by virtue of the tactics of power immanent in this discourse."² By dismantling the propriety of sexuality, Foucault shaped Post-Structuralist gender and sexual theory. It is important to note that Foucault's theory helped dismantle sexual mores and traditions that helped establish a hierarchical sexual order that resulted in sexual deviants and outcasts. Feminists are particularly accepting of Foucault since he helped to deconstruct the history of sexuality and gave room for women to expose historical female oppression. However, in his efforts to expose the heteronormative (one man and one woman) construct that has shaped most of western sexual culture, Foucault created a new construct that favors certain sexual experiences and ignores other real and crucial aspects of sexuality. Foucault actually creates a new hierarchical system, one that generates new reasons for oppressing as well as new oppressors and victims. Ultimately by arguing that sexuality is a constructed discourse dictated by power and pleasure, and positioning

¹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 11.

² *Ibid*, 70.

physical gratification as the most innate element of sexuality, Foucault strips sexuality of any ethical or moral meaning. He thereby devalues it to as common a human function as eating or sleeping. The main difference between these human acts according to Foucault is the “strange endeavor: to tell the truth of sex.”³ He argues that anything “fundamental, useful or dangerous, precious or formidable⁴” about sex is socially constructed. Foucault even goes so far as to defend an act of molestation of a little girl as an “inconsequential bucolic pleasure.”⁵ Therefore, Foucault’s theory perpetuates an oppressive view of sexuality that favors the male sexual experience and elevates the freedom to express physical sexual desires as the ultimate dictator of sexual activities.

In order to analyze how the desire for love and relationships impact sexual desire this study looks at two dystopian novels, *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. Although it might appear strange to connect Foucauldian theory with dystopian literature, there is an academically recognized link between the two. In his book “The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature” M. Keith Booker discusses “...the close kinship between the social criticism contained in dystopian fiction and that carried out by important modern social and cultural critics from Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud to Bakhtin, Adorno, and Foucault.”⁶ He continues:

In particular, sexuality functions as a focal point for an entire array of practices through which modern society has attempted to constitute the individual as a subject of administrative control. Psychoanalysis itself is one of these practices, and Foucault especially argues that the psychoanalytic project of categorizing certain sexual practices as normal and others as deviant contributes to general

³ Ibid, 57.

⁴ Ibid, 56.

⁵ Ibid, 31.

⁶ M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1994), 21.

strategies for the manipulation of individual behavior in modern society.⁷

The supporting connection between dystopian literature and Foucault is found in the many ways political and societal powers have controlled society through sexuality.

However, I would argue that Huxley and Atwood's novels are better used as a critique of Foucauldian theory. Each novel is an example of an exaggerated implementation of Foucault's theory. *The Handmaid's Tale* represents a government that controls society through sexual repression, with extremely rigid sexual morals that dictate all sexual activity, which revolves around reproduction. *Brave New World* explores a government that controls society through incitement, by encouraging and promoting non-committal, promiscuous sexual behavior. Like Foucault, both novels show that sex is a powerful tool to control society, and can be used in a number of different ways. However, these novels help critique Foucault's theory because unlike Foucault, these novels highlight individual agency, and personal desire for a loving sexual relationship that extends beyond satisfying physical sexual desires. In fact, both novels show that sex is only meaningless if there is no love or hope for a committed relationship. In other words, the dystopian novels are another way of highlighting the limitations of Foucault's theory, particularly his dismissal of agency and the innate human desire for love and relationships.

Ultimately this paper argues that the desire for, and risks associated with, reproduction and love are also humanly innate elements of sexual desire that shape the perception of sex and that not all meaning attributed to sex is a social construct. Cultural feminists, critics of Foucault, and historical accounts of female sexual experience help illuminate the important role reproduction plays in sexuality. This examination of Foucault's theory through *Brave New World* and *The Handmaid's Tale* makes it clear that the desire for love is also a humanly innate

⁷ Ibid, 21.

element of, and motivator for, sex. These novels show that when people use sex for selfish purposes, whether for reproduction or physical gratification, it ultimately minimizes the value of sex itself and creates a sense of entitlement to sex. Foucault's *History of Sexuality Volume 1* is oversimplified and ethically dangerous as it ignores other natural motivators for sexual desire. He does this in three specific ways. First, Foucault neglects the biological and lived experience of women, specifically in regards to pregnancy and birth; second, he dismisses individual agency (which is different than sexual desire); and third, he ignores the possibility of an innate desire for love and children. Although it is impossible to escape societal and governmental influence and control, we cannot elevate the role of outside influence and power to a degree that completely undermines the human individual and the desires and concerns that make us human.

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

In order to understand Foucault's theory and its impact it is important to understand his place among gender and sexual theorists. It is not surprising that most theorists support the idea that gender norms are the creation of pleasure and power, as this further disproves Essentialism and Biological Determinism – which argue that there are essential characteristics of each gender and that biology determines gender. Therefore for the first portion of my argument I will provide a brief overview of Post-Structuralist gender theory that paved the way for Foucault's theory. I look to other gender and sexual theories to help inform my critique of Foucault, like Difference Feminism, Cultural Feminism, and also the Matrixial Borderspace theory. I also rely heavily on studies that expose the lived human sexual experience and the way that these studies contradict the minimized role reproduction plays in Foucault's theory. The effort of this study is not to retroactively redefine women by their biology, but to demonstrate how Foucault's dismissal of anything slightly Essentialist or Deterministic actually negates a discussion that adequately represents other human motivating factors of sexuality that cannot be simply limited to societal constructs.

For the next portion of the paper I turn to Dystopian Literature in order to examine the way in which desire for love and meaningful relationships motivates sexual desire and behavior. Foucault's work, specifically *A History of Sexuality*, has been described as dystopian, because his "emphasis on continual change arises from an intense sense of cultural crisis that might be termed 'dystopian' more rightly than Utopian, embodying a fundamental suspicion of any and all idealized vision of society."⁸ But while the dystopian novels show the permeating effects of societal power structures, both novels also leave room for individual agency. Furthermore, these

⁸ Booker, Theory and Research Guide, 26.

novels expose the difference between physically gratifying sex and sex born of intimacy and love and a potential for growth as a couple, not just through reproduction, but also by building a committed life together. In fact, we find in these novels that selfishly motivated sex usually leaves people feeling dissatisfied, harassed, or devalued. This study relies almost entirely on specific examples from the books to critique Foucault's theory.

Part 1: Theoretical Critique of Foucault: Neglect of the
Female Sexual Experience and Individual Agency

The first critique of Foucault's sexual theory is his dismissal of reproduction and the way it affects the female sexual experience. However, the separation of reproduction and sex has been happening since the 1950s with the introduction of The Pill and Post-Structuralist feminism and therefore critics rarely find fault with this aspect of his theory. Simone de Beauvoir was a precursor to post-structuralism as the first feminist to make this distinction and to argue that biology alone does not explain or define the female experience. In fact, according to Beauvoir, a woman's identity has been so heavily influenced by male-centric society that gender is hardly more than a construction of society.⁹ Judith Butler continues by arguing that gender is not an arbitrary and fixed interpretation of one's sex but is performative. She writes:

If there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end...Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.¹⁰

The argument that sex does not define nor inform gender is an affront to Biological Determinism.¹¹ In fact, some scholars see Simone de Beauvoir as the initiator of the movement against Biological Determinism and Essentialism.¹² Many theorists trace gender stereotyping and discrimination back to these theories and have therefore worked for decades to dismantle them. Traces of Biological Determinism are found as early as Ancient Greece with Plato's Wandering

⁹ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1953).

¹⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33.

¹¹ Alison Stone, *Luce Irigaray and The Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6.

¹² Ann Heilmann, "Gender and Essentialism: Feminist Debates in The Twenty-First Century," *Critical Quarterly*: 53, no. 4 (December 14, 2011): 80.

Womb theory.¹³ During this time physicians believed that the uterus wandered around the female body, rather than staying in a fixed place. They claimed that women were mentally pathological and hysterical because of their wandering womb. The discrimination attached to Biological Determinism and Essentialism is still prevalent in the modern world. As recently as 2005 the former president of Harvard University claimed that men are more hardworking and capable of achieving higher levels of success than women.¹⁴ Even some forms of third wave feminism show hints of Biological Determinism and Essentialism.¹⁵ Rather than identifying women by their reproductive abilities, many third wave feminists have reverted back to identifying women by sexual appeal. It is often referred to as “girlie” feminism.¹⁶ Beyonce is a current example of this type of feminism. However, Natasha Walter argues against this hyper-sexuality saying that it has, “reflected and exaggerated the deeper imbalances of power in our society.”¹⁷ She goes on to argue that although women have increased opportunities, the hypersexual culture is redefining sexual allure as female success. These are just a few examples of the complexity of identifying women by their biology. However, the real heart of the complexity of equating women with their bodies extends beyond these examples. Throughout history the womb and the ability to procreate has defined, and oftentimes confined women. This is why many feminists want reproduction left out of discussion about gender and sex. This explains some of the success of

¹³ Plato, *Timaeus* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1959).

¹⁴ Suzanne Goldberg, “Why Women are Poor at Science, by Harvard President,” *The Guardian*, January 18, 2005, accessed August 27, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2005/jan/18/educationsgendergap.genderissues>.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Grenoveld, “Be A Feminist or Just Dress Like One: Bust, Fashion and Feminism as Lifestyle,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 18 no. 2 (2000).

¹⁶ Elizabeth Evans. *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms*, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015. Online resource, Springer eBooks, English.

¹⁷ Natasha Walter. *Living Dolls*. London: Virago, 2010, Print. Pg. 8. Other feminist others that share her opinion are Banyard, Kat. 2010. *The Equality Illusion*. London: Faber and Faber. Redfern, Catherine and Aune, Kristin. 2010. *Reclaiming the F Word*. London: Zed Boks.

Post-Structuralism and Foucault's sexual theory.

However, some theories have tried to reclaim the body and its significance in gender and sexual theory. Difference theory attempts to reinstitute the body in gender theory and relies on the differences between genders that set women apart from men. Luce Irigaray, a well-known Difference theorist even uses imagery of the womb to explain how a woman does not always have to be the "Other" but can be the main subject:

One of the distinctive features of the female body is its tolerance to growth within itself without incurring illness or death for either one of the organisms. Unfortunately, culture...has given no interpretation to the model of tolerance of the other within and with a self that this relationship manifests...Whereas the female body engenders with respect for difference, the patriarchal social body contracts itself of the other's living hierarchically, excluding difference.¹⁸

Even her use of female organs to describe the female experience is controversial and is in almost direct opposition to Butler who says, "misogynist dialectic, materiality, and meaning are mutually exclusive terms."¹⁹ But according to Rachel Jones, Irigaray does not believe this is misogynist dialectic, and instead argues that this dialectic "belong[s] to a different logic than that governed by the opposition of self and other and the desire for identity in sameness."²⁰ Or as Diana Fuss simply states, "Given that we are historically encased within the reductive essentialisms of patriarchal thought, finding alternative ways of representing the female body is a crucial stage in the project of thinking woman differently."²¹ But even Irigaray is extremely careful not to connect reproduction and gender.²² She also is clear to explain that Difference

¹⁸ Luce Irigaray, "Je-Tu-Nous—Toward A Culture of Difference," *Southern Humanities Review* 28, no. 2 (1994): 182, accessed September 2017. Ebscohost Ebrary.

¹⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Chapter 2, E-book.

²⁰ Rachel Jones, *Irigaray: Towards a Sexuate Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Malden, 2011) 144, accessed September 2017. ProQuest Ebrary.

²¹ Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 72.

²² Jones, *Irigaray*, 145.

theory does not stem from Essentialism, since Difference theory contests the idea that all women are the same. Instead, Difference theory makes “it possible to do justice to differences at ‘all levels’.”²³

It is important to also examine Ettinger’s Matrixial Borderspace theory, which offers a different approach to the relationship between the phallus and the uterus. Freudian and Lacanian thought positions the uterus against the phallus and claims that the female is “lacking” since she does not have a phallus. However, Ettinger goes beyond this simple comparison of uterus versus phallus and instead positions the uterus within the “matrixial borderspace.” She explains:

In my view, this implies that a sexual difference beyond-the-phallus exists, making the sexual relationship (*rapport sexuel*) possible. In the phallically dominated conceptualization the sexual relationship is not possible. However, it seems to me that for such a level – on which feminine sexual difference would not be impossible – to be conceptualized, *we need to broaden the concept of the Symbolic beyond the network of signifiers of discourse.*²⁴

Within the matrix the opposite genders share the space, rather than continually oppose each other: “In the phallus, we confront the impossibility of sharing trauma and phantasy, whereas in the matrix, to a certain extent, there is *an impossibility of not sharing* them.”²⁵ She therefore moves beyond the phallogocentric discourse that established the idea of “other” in the first place. Women then are no longer the “other” but are equal partners with men in the sexual arena. But Ettinger does not address reproduction, despite her constant reference to uterus. Ultimately Ettinger is concerned with sexual difference as it relates to identity through the use of “Phenomenology, aesthetic practice, and the ambitions of psychoanalytic theory to provide

²³ Ibid. 145.

²⁴ Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 58.

²⁵ Ibid. 89.

knowledge of the structures and processes of subjectivity “²⁶ Ultimately Ettinger is concerned about the philosophical identity of women and the philosophical elements of gender difference and equality. She is not concerned about the actual biological differences of sexuality and the practical implications of these biological differences.

Understanding these theories properly frames my critique of Foucault who, in true Post-Structuralist form, rejects Biological Determinism and Essentialism by avoiding any proper discussion of reproduction. This study argues that the sexual discourse should include reproduction, since it is the primary way in which reproduction occurs, despite scientific advances such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) and artificial insemination (AI). Furthermore, it remains the only way by which spontaneous pregnancies occur. The spontaneity of a pregnancy matters, since unwanted pregnancies are only possible through sexual conception. It is highly unlikely that a woman impregnated by IVF or AI would ever abort or give her child up for adoption. It is also unlikely women impregnated through IVF would be incapable or disinterested in having a child. Therefore, the risks associated with sex, which will be discussed further on, justify the inclusion of reproduction in the sexual dialogue, even if sex is no longer the only way to conceive a child.

Of all modern feminist theories, Cultural Feminism is the most outspoken about the importance of reproduction and therefore asks for the consideration of the influence of sexual biology. Cultural Feminist Adrienne Rich argues:

I have come to believe...that female biology-the diffuse, intense sensuality radiating out from clitoris, breasts, uterus, vagina; the lunar cycles of menstruation; the gestation and fruition of life which can take place in the female body-has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate. Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision

²⁶ Pollock, Griselda, introduction to *The Matrixial Borderspace*, by Bracha Ettinger (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota, 2006), 35.

has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny. ... We must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence.²⁷

Unlike the other theories mentioned above, Cultural Feminism stands in opposition to Post-Structuralism. Linda Alcoff explains further:

Briefly put, then, the Cultural Feminist response to Simone de Beauvoir's question, "Are there women?" is to answer yes and to define women by their activities and attributes in the present culture. The Post-Structuralist response is to answer no and attack the category and the concept of woman through problematizing subjectivity.²⁸

Alcoff articulates the risk of the nominalist nature of Post-Structuralism, she says it "has the deleterious effect of de-gendering our analysis, of in effect making gender invisible once again."²⁹ And this study argues that a nominalist approach to sexuality tends to strip sex of any significant meaning, diluting it to the mechanical level of eating or sleeping. We must be careful to not strip sex of all propriety as doing so can undermine reproduction, devalue relationships, trivialize sexual abuse, and invalidate the right to deny sexual advances.

Now that Foucault's position and acceptance within modern gender and sexual theory has been established, we will move on to the specifics of Foucault's theory. First, it is important to understand Foucault's definition of power. He does not believe in an ultimate source of power that is immune to all societal and cultural influences. Nor does he believe power is generated constantly or singularly. Rather, "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but

²⁷ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976), 21.

²⁸ Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 407 accessed September 9, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174166>.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 420.

because it comes from everything.”³⁰ The source is complex and multifaceted, and even though it controls and manipulates the discourse, power is both an active and passive player. He argues that this power feeds off of human physical sexual desire in order to control. Furthermore he argues that power politics control sex not just through oppression, but through incitement as well, “Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement.”³¹ In an effort to clarify his understanding of power, Foucault gives a list of propositions of power. The first and second posit that power is not acquired and is not in a position of exteriority. The third and fourth propositions argue that power comes from below rather than from the top controllers of society and “that power relations are both intentional and purposeful...the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them.”³² This more intricate and entrenched source of power is ultimately more difficult and impossible to identify, and inevitably extremely difficult to overcome or escape because it is embedded in and made from the culture. Carolyn Dean explains, “In short, power is monstrous precisely because it can no longer be anchored, located, or contained: it now infuses, occupies, and produces everything.”³³ However, it would be a mistake to think the nuanced nature of power erodes its existence. Although Foucault does not explicitly define or locate power, this does not stop him from postulating its multiple sources and purposes. In fact, using the sexual culture of the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie as a decisive era in the history of sexuality is actually

³⁰ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 93.

³¹ Ibid. 48.

³² Ibid. 95.

³³ Carolyn J. Dean, “The Productive Hypothesis: Foucault, Gender, and the History of Sexuality,” in *History and...: Histories within the Human Sciences*, ed. Ralph Cohen and Michael S. Roth (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), pg. 280.

contradictory to his theory of power, “The eighteenth century is thus ‘at once the pivotal moment of [Foucault’s] analysis and the great hold in it’ because Foucault presumed the self whose production he purports to explain.”³⁴

One specific example Foucault uses to explain the way that power controls society through sex is the promotion of the Malthusian Couple (one woman and one man). He argues that it was promoted mainly for the purpose of population control to stimulate economic growth and societal prosperity. He argues this was particularly true of the eighteenth century:

...One of the great innovations in the techniques of power in the eighteenth century was the emergence of ‘population’ as an economic and political problem: population as wealth, population as manpower or labor capacity, population balanced between its own growth and the resources it commanded. Government perceived that they were not dealing simply with subjects, or even with a ‘people,’ but with a population,’ with its specific phenomena, and its peculiar variables: birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health, frequency of illnesses, patterns of diet and habitations.³⁵

He acknowledges that this was not the first instance in human history when the connection between population stability and societal prosperity was recognized. Instead this was the first time the real determinant of population was understood as “the manner in which each individual made use of his sex.”³⁶ As such it is a significant moment in history for examining society’s control of sexuality.

Prior to Foucault the prominent belief among sexual theorists was that sex was controlled primarily through means of repression, especially repression of non-reproductive sex. As the main proponent of this idea Freud says:

...The breach and turning-point in the development of sexual life lies in its becoming subordinate to the purposes of reproduction. Everything that happens before this turn of events and equally everything that disregards it and that aims

³⁴ Ibid. 280.

³⁵ Foucault, *The History*, 25.

³⁶ Ibid. 26

solely at obtaining pleasure is given the uncomplimentary name of ‘perverse’ and as such is proscribed.³⁷

Although Freud acknowledges sexual manipulation from outside sources, namely language and authoritative figures,³⁸ Foucault argues that repression theory oversimplifies the control and purposes of power, which are continually perceived as repressive. As explained by the scholar G.R. Skoll, “Foucault wishes to correct this one-sided understanding of power by bringing out its productive and creative implications. Power, in Foucault’s sense, not only subjugates or represses objects, but it also creates them.”³⁹ Foucault insightfully explains that sexuality was too important and necessary to simply stifle it. Methods of incitement and repression were implemented to control the discourse. For example the use of confessions, the structure of dorms, and classrooms,⁴⁰ even the family were all “a network of pleasures and powers linked together at multiple points and according to transformable relationships;”⁴¹ each was a purposeful system that appeared to banish and condemn sexuality all the while making it accessible, tantalizing, discussed, and present. Even the “psychiatric investigation” which Freud was famous for has the “over-all and apparent objective of saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities, but the fact is that they function as mechanisms with a double impetus: pleasure and power.”⁴² For Foucault, “the agencies of power” were determined to find multiple ways in which sex could be spoken about with more frequency and in greater detail.⁴³ His theory of incitement is crucial to

³⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1989) 316.

³⁸ Michael Billig, *Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

³⁹ Geoffrey R. Skoll, “Power and Repression,” *The American Journal of Semiotics*. 8, no. 3 (1991): 7, accessed November 2014, DOI: 10.5840/ajs19918314.

⁴⁰ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 46.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 46.

⁴² *Ibid.* 45.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 18.

his argument and demonstrates a deeper and more complex understanding of the purposes of sexuality than the repression theory. Foucault believes that the common and strong desire for sex was promoted and condemned in an effort to proliferate sexuality through obsession and paranoia.

Admittedly, Foucault recognizes the importance of the procreative element in the history of sexuality and that it is a primary reason why “agencies of power” were first invested in sexual culture, particularly in the eighteenth century. While his argument might garner strength in psychoanalytic or philosophical reasoning, it suffers when countered with the practical elements like pregnancy, childbirth, childrearing, to say nothing of human desire to procreate, or even the human desire for love (which will be discussed further in the Dystopian section). Carolyn Dean points out the privileged role discourse plays for Post-Structuralist theorists like Foucault and says, “...in the process of recovering and exposing exclusions, many theorists often sacrifice meaning and agency in favor of sweeping references to ‘discourse,’ ‘culture,’ ‘power,’ ‘disciplinary formations,’ and ‘undecidability’.”⁴⁴ Instead, he analyzes reproduction as a byproduct of the manipulation of power and does not consider the position of a potential mother or father. In effect, he completely disregards the way in which the possibility of reproduction affects a woman’s sexual experience.

Although Foucault rejects any natural or innate inclination for a relationship, he attributes a person’s purely physical sexual instincts and desires as innate expressions and refers to them as “everyday pleasure.”⁴⁵ He insists that pleasure is the means by which power is established:

This is the way things worked in the case of the family, or rather the household...it was...a network of pleasures and powers linked together at multiple points and

⁴⁴ Dean, “The Productive Hypothesis,” 274.

⁴⁵ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 11. Other examples of references to pleasure or desire as the most innate human instinct associated with sex can be found on pages 47, 48, 56, 57, 68, 69

according to transformable relationships...to reduce them to the conjugal relationship, and then to project the latter, in the form of a forbidden desire, onto children...was less a principle of inhibition than an inciting and multiplying mechanism.⁴⁶

In other words, outside influences, or power sources promoted preserving sex for marriage and condemned “underage” sexual activity only in an effort to perpetuate paranoia about sexuality and thereby control society. This explanation of the family completely disregards any natural inclination to have children and a family with someone you love. It also neglects the reasons why a parent might be concerned about sexually active children and the risks associated with promiscuous sexual activity. He says,

The essential point is that sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law and taboo, but also of truth and falsehood, that the truth of sex became something fundamental, useful or dangerous, precious or formidable...it was the basis of all aberrant, naïve and cunning discourses where knowledge of sex seems to have strayed for such a long time.⁴⁷

Certainly Foucault was right in arguing that people are heavily influenced by power structures and societal constructs, however Foucault does not consider how human desire and concern might also shape sexual norms or morals. One just needs to examine the cost of unwanted pregnancies, abortion, and the statistics for children born out of wedlock to understand that sex has actual, real-life implications. Instead Foucault ignores these human issues and elevates physical gratification as the most innately motivated element of sex, thereby demeaning all other desires and concerns as social manipulations.

He particularly ignores the reality of reproduction. In the section entitled “Periodization” Foucault explains the different levels, sources, and reasons for the control of sexuality in the eighteenth century. He argues that sole purpose of the bourgeoisie’s promotion of conjugal

⁴⁶ Ibid, 46

⁴⁷ Ibid, 56.

relationships was to incite reproduction and says, “The bourgeoisie began by considering that its own sex was something important, a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all costs.”⁴⁸ Although he attributes procreation as the main motivator for controlling sexuality he omits any individual human desire to have a healthy and stable population. He fails to grant independence to a parent’s desire to protect his/her child, or to an individual’s desire to procreate, or to a woman’s concern about bearing and raising a child alone. Foucault ignores the practical implications for women when he says, “the organization of the ‘conventional’ family came to be regarded, sometime around the eighteen-thirties, as an indispensable instrument of political control and economic regulation for the subjugation of the urban proletariat.”⁴⁹ This is why it is important to look to the actual experiences of women of the eighteenth century. In her book *The Long Sexual Revolution*, Hera Cook writes about the female sexual experience in the eighteenth century. She argues that a woman could not consider sex without contemplating “its material consequences, to which desire is peripheral and risk is central.”⁵⁰ She continues by saying:

The greatest of these consequences is pregnancy. Unlike sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy can be an intensely desired outcome of someone’s sexual activity. This does not make it less of a risk. The connection between pregnancy and female sexual expression is not an essentialist, natural or spiritual connection (although for some women it may also be all of these). It is a banal, dull connection. Pregnancy has had enormous consequences because babies entailed physical and economic costs. Often women could not afford to enjoy sex. The risk made it too expensive a pleasure.⁵¹

Obviously the risks of sex greatly differ between modern women and women of the eighteenth century. However, modern day contraceptives have not mitigated all risks. But Foucault does

⁴⁸ Ibid, 121.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 122.

⁵⁰ Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution* (Oxford. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12.

⁵¹ Ibid. 12.

not mention any of these risks, nor do most feminists and sexual theorists who fear Essentialist and Determinist thinking.⁵² Jana Sawicki writes, “Foucault and feminists both focus upon sexuality as a key arena for political struggle. Both expand the domain of the ‘political’ to include forms of social domination associated with the personal sphere. And both launch critiques against forms of biological determinism, and humanism.”⁵³ Also, Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby agree that Foucault is popular among feminists because he dismantles the “existing but heretofore unrecognized modes of dominion.”⁵⁴ As Margaret McLaren explains:

Within those terms [the terms of the debate about free will and determinism], ‘the body’ appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself. In either case, the body is figured as a mere *instrument* or *medium* for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related. But ‘the body’ is itself a construction, as are the myriad ‘bodies’ that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender...⁵⁵

Not all feminist and sexual theorists support his approach to reproduction. Eloise Buker, a feminist critic of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* actually acknowledges the minimal presence of reproduction in Foucault’s theory:

A feminist reading illuminates how Foucault’s narrative constitutes the male body in procreation as a single action, the ejaculation of sperm, while the female body becomes an object, which passively receives it. After the male body ejaculates, the male is freed for more important public work, while the female is committed to years of child rearing.⁵⁶

⁵² Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray.

⁵³ Jana Sawicki, introduction to *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body*, by Jana Sawicki (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 49.

⁵⁴ Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, “American Feminism and the Language of Control,” in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, ed. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), X.

⁵⁵ Margaret, McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 101.

⁵⁶ Eloise A. Buker, "Hidden Desires and Missing Persons: A Feminist Deconstruction of Foucault," *The Western Political Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (1990): 823, accessed August 2017, doi:10.2307/448737.

As Buker rightly points out, even though modern women do not share the same risks that women of the eighteenth century experienced, contraceptives still do not mitigate all the risks of pregnancy. The passion and continuation of the abortion debate is a demonstration of the weightiness of pregnancy and childrearing. In fact, the heart of the abortion debate rests on the battle between the tremendous cost of pregnancy versus the importance of the life of the unborn baby.

However, Buker is not concerned about the inclusion of reproduction in the sexual dialogue for any other purpose than to point out another way in which the government controls sexuality. She writes:

Feminist analyses can extend Foucault's argument by showing how the medicalization of abortion and of birth control become mechanisms by which the state exercises control over sexual activity and child production, while claiming not to interfere in family matters. The state hides its exercise of power behind its pretense of protecting the privacy of the family. The control over a so-called 'intimate' act then shows the ability of the state to penetrate the inner workings of the family to its most secret center where it creates itself, its site of origins, the bedroom. Feminist analysis shows how this controls the lives of women and reduces their ability to participate in public life, thus privatizing half the population.⁵⁷

This position assumes that the only motive for government intervention in matters concerning reproduction is "to exercise power." Similar to Foucault, this position undermines the emotional and physical cost of pregnancy as well as abortion⁵⁸ on members of society. It denies the fact that children born out of wedlock are a tremendous cost to society.⁵⁹ Additionally, this argument

⁵⁷ Ibid. 821.

⁵⁸ David M. Ferguson, L. John Horwood, and Joseph M. Boden, "Abortion and Mental Health Disorders: Evidence from a 30-Year Longitudinal Study," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 193 no. 6 (November 2008): pg, accessed June 2014, doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.108.056499. "After adjustment for confounding, abortion was associated with a small increase in the risk of mental disorders; women who had had abortions had rates of mental disorder that were 30% higher. There were no consistent associations between other pregnancy outcomes and mental health."

⁵⁹ Sherif Girgis, *What is Marriage?* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012).

assumes that the only risky pregnancy is an unwanted pregnancy, but even welcome pregnancies are large undertakings for women physically and emotionally. Although fatherhood is also demanding, a father is not nearly as biologically bound to the child as the mother. Therefore it seems arguable that women who risk pregnancy, whether wanted or unwanted, would be highly motivated to have a legally binding contract with the father of the child in order to better ensure his commitment to her and the child. Certainly such laws benefit women. Therefore it seems limited to suggest that the promotion of the Malthusian couple was directed by power structures for political and economic reasons only.

Furthermore, ideologically separating sex and reproduction further distances men from reproduction, much more than it distances women from reproduction. Women are needed to develop and birth the baby, whereas men serve no necessary purpose past the point of conception. Whereas it is impossible to separate women from reproduction, precisely because “it is a biological fact that the mother will be at the birth of every child, whereas the father could be 9 months away.”⁶⁰ By further removing men from these parental duties we inevitably make the mother the sole carrier of these duties. A father’s commitment to the child matters not only to the mother of the child, but to the child as well, as statistics continue to prove the importance of a father’s presence in a child’s life.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Ryan Anderson, “Ryan Anderson in the Indiana House Judiciary Committee,” January 13, 2014, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2cgYPFzXj8>.

⁶¹ 1. Danielle J. DelPriore, “The Impact of Fathers on Parental Monitoring of Daughters and Their Affiliation With Sexually Promiscuous Peers: A Genetically and Environmentally Controlled Sibling Study,” *Developmental Psychology* 53 no. 7 (2017), accessed January 2017. ISSN: 00121649. 2. “Out-of-Wedlock Births Rise Worldwide,” YaleGlobal Online, last modified March 2017, accessed December 2017, <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/out-wedlock-births-rise-worldwide>. 3. Jeffrey Rosenburg and W. Bradford Wilcox, “The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children,” *US Department of Health and Human Services*, accessed January 2018. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/fatherhood.pdf>.

Foucault also fails to consider personal agency, except in regards to expressing a physical sexual desire. He tends to privilege the right to express sexual desire above the right to deny sexual advances or requests. Although *The History of Sexuality* has received much support, there are several critics who describe his sexual theory as “covert androcentricity” and “insensitive to feminist concerns.”⁶² I would argue that it extends beyond androcentrism, ultimately privileging the freedom to express physical sexual desires at the expense of another person’s freedom. He therefore creates a sexual culture that revolves mostly around sexual desire rather than gender.

Foucault’s approach has been described as a “critique of functionalist and structuralist models of power and causality” rejecting a “history based on the premise that individuals possess presocial inalienable rights or an authentic essence and describe instead how ‘disciplinary power’ constitutes individual subjects.”⁶³ It is this precise disregard for the individual that greatly limits his analysis of sexuality. He does not consider how the Malthusian couple serves what appear to be natural, human desires and individual concerns. Dean argues that he purposefully takes an anti-humanist approach in order to escape the regular methods of historians, that is historicizing the world through a “pre-discursive rational (usually male and heterosexual)” perspective.⁶⁴ This approach is beneficial to *History of Sexuality* because it illuminates reasons for the phobia and segregation that has surrounded sexual behavior outside of the “normal” conjugal relationship. While Dean is critical of Foucault’s unbalanced approach, she rightfully admits that humanist and Foucauldian investigations are equally important to the honest investigation of sexuality. Theorists ultimately praise his work for its “theoretical contributions and empirical insights, his subtle critique of the Marxist paradigm, his attention to everyday social practices neglected by

⁶² Soper, *Up Against Foucault*, 29.

⁶³ Dean, “The Production Hypothesis: Foucault, Gender and The History of Sexuality, 273.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 273.

structuralists” and also reprimand it for neglecting agency.”⁶⁵

Undoubtedly it is difficult to make an argument based on what Foucault did not say, however, hopefully by providing enough evidence of what he did say we can establish that Foucault did not adequately address the innate motivators for sex. Kate Soper criticizes him for his oversight of the individual from a feminist perspective, but we can interpret her argument more broadly:

...To dismiss the idea of ‘spontaneous’ feeling is to undermine the feminist demand for a ‘reclamation’ of the body and the expression of an ‘authentic’ desire. Foucault’s radical anti-essentialism can even be seen to lend itself to the forces of reaction in so far as it offers itself as a preemptive warning against any politics which aims at the removal of the constraining and distorting effects of cultural stereotyping.⁶⁶

In other words, Foucault’s vision of power that is all-consuming yet impossible to pin down negates the possibility of independent thinking, desires, and choices true to the individual and leads to a new type of marginalization; one which stereotypes and pigeon-holes people, viewing individual’s choices as something conditioned and not independent. By overlooking the individual’s intent Foucault cannot adequately claim to address the broad history of sexuality.

The greatest evidence for Foucault’s phallocentrism and sex-centrism is found in his analysis of a story of a farmhand and a little girl in the small village of Lapcourt France in 1867. The farmhand “obtained a few caresses from a little girl,” just as he had seen other villagers do, for they would all play the familiar game “curdled milk.” The parents of the child reported this particular instance and the man was indicted, turned over to a doctor for intensive and invasive examining, and was eventually acquitted on the condition that he be admitted to a mental hospital. The most disturbing aspect of this story is Foucault’s analysis. He argues that the

⁶⁵ Ibid, 275.

⁶⁶ Soper, *Up Against Foucault*, 34.

significant thing about this story is “the pettiness of it all” and then goes on to say, “the fact that this everyday occurrence in the life of village sexuality, these inconsequential bucolic pleasures, could become, from a medical intervention, a careful clinical examination, and an entire theoretical elaboration.”⁶⁷ To claim that the important point to make about a case of child molestation is “the pettiness of it all” is Foucault’s desperate and extreme attempt to deny sex any moral significance. By doing so he sacrifices the dignity, agency, and safety of the child to accommodate a grown man’s expression of sexual desire. By reducing all sexual morality to a construct and elevating sexual desire as the only innate aspect of sex, he excuses sexual abuse. This ultimately turns the male abuser into the victim, and ignores the effects of his actions on the most vulnerable person of the entire story: the “little girl.” He later adds that the farmhand “halfwit,” would “give a few pennies to the little girls for favors the older ones refused.”⁶⁸ While it is uncertain why Foucault offered this bit of detail, it can be argued that it is perhaps further effort to portray the normalcy of the event. This further trivializes the event, as does equating the child’s body and sexuality to pennies.

It is surprising with all that is written about Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, that very few theorists criticize or even mention this section of his theory. In fact, despite this seemingly blatant deferential and insulting treatment of women, to say nothing of the more helpless and vulnerable victim, the child, some feminist scholars defend Foucault in this specific instance. Johanna Oksala who at one point in her article does criticize Foucault’s rather flippant treatment of this story excuses Foucault’s failure to consider the little girl because his “understanding of experience remains a theoretically fruitful resource for feminist thought, despite his sexist

⁶⁷ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 31.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 32.

treatment of this incident.”⁶⁹ Oksala appears to be one of many feminists who chooses to excuse this portion of the book in order to salvage the “fruitful resource” that is Foucault. Their support of Foucault seems misplaced in someone who values expression of physical sexual desire over individual agency and an individual’s right to say no.

Oksala demonstrates the selective ignorance of his own phallocentrism when she argues that Foucault’s objective with Lapcourt is to attempt:

...To show us the discrepancy between the farmhand’s personal experience of the incident as ‘ordinary pleasure’ and the medical and juridical representations of it as ‘a degenerate and perverse act.’ Although Foucault fails to display moral outrage or concern for the little girl, we are clearly asked to be at least somewhat distressed about the experience of the simpleminded and poor farmhand.⁷⁰

Even though Oskala points out Foucault’s failure in addressing concern for the little girl, her main objective is to justify or excuse the farmhand’s actions since it was just an “ordinary pleasure;” as if the commonness of sexual urges justifies the freedom to express these common desires. This way of thinking overlooks the fact that most sexual acts, particularly intercourse, require more than one person. Sexual expression should then be determined not on individual desires, but the desire of both participants. In other words, the innateness of desire for physical gratification should not determine moral significance.

Kate Soper is one of the few scholars who criticize the Lapcourt incident. She acknowledges others might ridicule her indignation for focusing on “a mere trifle of a narrative when viewed in the context of Foucault’s work as a whole.”⁷¹ However, she contends that overlooking this incident could have more grievous effects on feminism:

⁶⁹ Johanna Oksala, "Sexual Experience: Foucault, Phenomenology, and Feminist Theory," *Hypatia* 26, no. 1 (2011): 209, accessed November 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23016689>.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 213.

⁷¹ Soper, *Up Against Foucault*, 43.

...If we are prepared to allow Foucault to decide for us that little, if anything, was really to be remarked upon in what we may at least suspect was a case of child molestation, why should we not equally respect the decision of all those who have wanted to react to feminism as an unreasonable and over-blown form of 'intolerance'? Would it not have been perfectly in accord with Foucault's own procedure in the case of the Lapcourt events for feminism to have been found 'insignificant' – as indeed it has tended to be by its opponents – only in the fluster and histrionics it precipitated around previously timeless, natural arrangements?⁷²

This attack is important for drawing attention to the bigger implications of the Lapcourt story and making it more than a "mere trifle." However, it is disappointing that the little girl is yet again removed from her rightful place as primary victim and replaced by feminism. Defense of the child alone should be a worthwhile pursuit of critics since they are defenseless and therefore deserve the greatest defense. Furthermore, Foucault should be criticized for his blatant attack on individual agency. For in order to ensure a healthy sexual culture that scorns harassment and abuse of any kind, individual agency must be valued and preserved.

Foucault's preoccupation with discursive power blinds him to the realities of the female sexual experience and minimizes the importance of individual agency in sexual encounters. But Foucault's theory also fails to address how the desire for love is a human desire that also motivates sexual desire, and gives meaning to sexuality. In order to better examine this we will now move on to dystopian literature.

⁷² Ibid. 44.

Part 2: Dystopian Critique of Foucault: Neglect of Individual Agency
and the Innate Desire for Love and Family

As mentioned in the introduction, dystopian literature is known to share many of the themes of modern theory, and specifically Foucault's theory. As Gregory Claeys writes in *The Origin of Dystopia*, the common theme among dystopian literature written between the late nineteenth and mid twentieth century literature is:

the quasi-omnipotence of a monolithic, totalitarian state demanding and normally exacting complete obedience from its citizens, challenged occasionally but usually ineffectually by vestigial individualism or systemic flaws and relying upon scientific and technological advances to ensure social control.⁷³

Each of these novels used for this paper and Foucault's *History of Sexuality* portray a government that controls its citizens through the sexual ethics and practices. They therefore serve as an exaggeration of Foucault's theories carried to fruition. They help establish Foucault's point that sexual culture, like all aspects of culture, is constructed, "Foucault especially argues that the psychoanalytic project of categorizing certain sexual practices as normal and others as deviant contributes to general strategies for the manipulation of individual behavior in modern society."⁷⁴ But where Dystopian Literature and Foucault differ is in their allowance for individual agency. One way Dystopian Literature gives credit to the individual is by allowing for some sliver of hope, even in a completely totalitarian society. According to Fatima Vieira hope is an essential theme in Dystopian Literature, "Dystopias that leave no room for hope do in fact fail in their mission. Their true vocation is to make man realize that, since it is impossible for him to

⁷³ George Claeys, "The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley, and Orwell," in *Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature: The Concept of Utopia*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), accessed November 2016. ProQuest Ebrary.

⁷⁴ Booker, *Theory and Research Guide*, 12.

build an ideal society, then he must be committed to the construction of a better one.”⁷⁵ These novels therefore help point out Foucault’s ignorance of the individual, and the limitations this creates. They particularly demonstrate that despite intentional, multifaceted control of sexual culture, innate human desires exist beyond the desire for physical gratification and these desires influence and shape our sexuality, particularly the desire for love, family and a committed relationship. The novels also examine how minimizing the ethical importance of sex not only makes it easier to ask for and demand sex but also makes it harder to say no to sexual advances.

Brave New World by Aldous Huxley and *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood are portrayals of a society where sex is used as a means to control the citizens and create stability. In *Brave New World*, the ability to reproduce has been taken away from citizens, as has the freedom to form loving, committed relationships and instead casual, non-committal sex is promoted. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* reproduction has become the primary focus of sexuality, and must be had within the bonds of marriage, unless it is done with a Handmaid in a sanctioned ceremony for the purpose of reproduction. Foucault’s theory and dystopian literature share a common theme, which is that governments or agencies of power can control society through the use of sex.⁷⁶ The two novels show the difference between incitement and repression. *The Handmaid’s Tale* represents control through repression, while the societal control of *Brave New World* better represents control through incitement. These novels support Foucault’s theory about power through sexuality, but they also expose the flaws in Foucault’s theory. They emphasize the importance of individual agency in meaningful and equal sexual relations. Furthermore, they show how even if the government creates sexual norms, sexual desire is also motivated by other

⁷⁵ Fatima Vieira, “The Concept of Utopia,” in *Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature: The Concept of Utopia*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17.

⁷⁶ Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*.

human desires, namely the desire for love and committed relationships. However, Atwood, the author of *The Handmaid's Tale* gives us a hint as to why and how this literature departs from Foucault's political critique of sexuality. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Aunt Lydia, a handmaid teacher, succinctly describes the sexual culture of both Western Europe from *Brave New World* and Gilead from *The Handmaid's Tale* when she says, "Love is not the point."⁷⁷ Love is not the point when sex is primarily used for reproductive purposes nor when sex is primarily used for personal physical gratification and love is certainly not the point of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. Certainly sexual norms are partially a societal construct. However, the innate human desires for physical gratification and reproduction and the desire to love and be loved must also influence sexual norms.

The Dystopian Section will therefore first address the ways in which society uses sex to control its citizens and why society does this. It will then explain that even when people are free to satisfy their physical sexual desires, there remains a stronger, more fulfilling desire to have sex for the purpose of creating intimacy, forming relationships, and loving someone. Finally, through this analysis we will see that when sex is stripped of any moral or ethical significance physicality is respected as the most important element of sex, a sense of deservedness emerges, because this mentality turns sex into a harmless, and meaningless act meant for the sole purpose of serving selfish desires. I argue that when sex no longer represents what I like to call a "relational act," or an act meant to serve a loving relationship, it easily leads to situations of abuse and neglect of another person's desires and agency.

We will begin with *The Handmaid's Tale* which takes place in the near future in a society called Gilead. Gilead was established by means of revolution as a puritanical, hierarchical

⁷⁷ Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (New York: Ballantine, Fawcett Crest, 1987), 232.

dictatorship. The government prohibits all women from public life and confines them to domesticated life within the home. The government also regulates all sexual activity, and allows it only within the bond of marriage, with the exception of intercourse with a handmaid. In response to the infertility epidemic taking over Gilead, the government invented the role of handmaids: fertile rebel women who have become reproductive slaves. The state gives these handmaids to married men of position whose wife is infertile. He then impregnates the handmaid in a conception ceremony in the presence of his wife. Any romantic relations between the handmaids and their commanders outside of the sanctioned conception ceremony are prohibited. This novel shows a state interested in controlling all sexual activity for the sole purpose of proliferating the population. And in fact, it is mainly interested in perpetuating the offspring of the bourgeoisie, since handmaids are only given to the commanders.

The sexual society of *The Handmaid's Tale* favors men in horrifically disproportionate ways. This is most sensibly a result of prioritizing the reproductive element of sex over any other element, which attaches the identity and worth of a woman to her ability to procreate. Men use women as a tool to serve their own purposes, or as the handmaid slogan says, "From each, according to her ability; to each according to his needs."⁷⁸ While the most obvious, and tragic victim of this sexual culture is the handmaid, the Commander and his wife, Serena Joy are also slaves to the system and it is important to see how the handmaid system affects each person differently. By prioritizing reproduction as a woman's primary purpose and contribution to the world, the government devalues any other contributions of women. For example, Serena Joy, the wife of the Commander and a rather unlikeable character, is all but completely dismissed and is essentially replaced in her own home, simply because she cannot reproduce. Furthermore, the

⁷⁸ Ibid, 127.

government not only confines her to domestic life, but they strip her of any fulfilling aspect of domestic life. The home is filled with servants who take care of every task. And since she cannot leave the house, she is left useless with nothing to do other than to knit scarves for the young police force known as the Angels. Offred, Serena's handmaid, reflects on this and thinks:

Sometimes I think these scarves aren't sent to the Angels at all, but unraveled and turned back into balls of yarn, to be knitted again in their turn. Maybe it's just something to keep the Wives busy, to give them a sense of purpose. But I envy the Commander's Wife her knitting. It's good to have small goals that can be easily attained.⁷⁹

Society robs her not only of a sense of purpose in the outside world and in her home but also of a faithful and committed marriage, all because of her infertility. The culture forces her to participate in the conception ceremony where she must watch her husband have intercourse with another woman, and should the handmaid conceive, Serena Joy must proceed to raise that child as her own. Her infertility not only minimizes her worth as an individual female but strips her marriage of respect and propriety as well. Society does not force all women to watch their husbands impregnate other women and nor does it require all husbands to have intercourse with other women in the presence of their wives. Only infertile couples must suffer such shame and divisiveness. In a way, it could be argued that Serena Joy holds even less value than the enslaved handmaid. Her husband does not court her or treat her with respect, fidelity or affection. Diminishing sex to serve the reproductive purposes of society or men turns women into objects whose value depends solely on their reproductive capabilities.

The handmaid's only value and purpose in society is her ability to produce a child for prominent men. She is a slave to her womb. The government granted her life only under the condition that she bear children, all of which she must hand over to the Commander and his wife.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 23.

Beyond producing a child, the Commander also uses her to fulfill his emotional needs and to satisfy his sexual desires. These needs are met only outside of the conception ceremony since during the ceremony he is:

...Preoccupied, like a man humming to himself in the shower without knowing he's humming; like a man who has other things on his mind. It's as if he's somewhere else, waiting for himself to come, drumming his fingers on the table while he waits...⁸⁰

The Commander's dissatisfaction with these sexual encounters has nothing to do with Offred and everything to do with the setting and purpose for intercourse. In reality the Commander finds her intriguing and secretly invites her to his study at night to play *Scrabble* and talk. They are innocent encounters for the most part, although he frequently requests a goodnight kiss. And after several of these encounters, the Commander starts to expose his intention for these meetings, in case it was not already obvious, "I like to know what you think, his voice says, from behind me...what he wants is intimacy but I can't give him that."⁸¹ And here Offred's power is made evident: she understands that even though the Commander is already having intercourse with her, and that he technically could demand anything he wants from her, the one thing he cannot demand from her are her thoughts or feelings.

His desire for intimacy beyond mechanical sex leads him to eventually sneak Offred out of the house to a bar and hotel one night. This is forbidden, even for Commanders. In the hotel room he hopes to have an intimate and romantic night with her, and is completely deflated when he finally realizes she does not share the same excitement or desire. Although the night still ends in intercourse, this vignette proves that even the Commander finds dissatisfaction with sex that satisfies nothing greater than physical gratification. Since Offred is his slave, the Commander

⁸⁰ Ibid. 105.

⁸¹ Ibid. 222.

could technically have sex with her whenever he wants. But the Commander wants more; he wants emotional intimacy in their sexual relationship. He still wrongfully sleeps with her that night in the hotel room, but the evening leaves him feeling disappointed because he had hoped to connect physically and emotionally with Offred. Instead he was left taking something from Offred she did not want to give, and in the end was not even able to take the thing he wanted most from her. It is obvious that the greatest motivation for the Commander's desire to spend the night with Offred is not his physical desire but his desire for intimacy and connection.

The Commander offers Offred a chance to experience a less mechanical, certainly rebellious, and more romantic sexual experience than what is typically offered a handmaid. But she does not want it. When they are in the hotel room she thinks, "Alone at last... The fact is that I don't want to be alone with him, not on a bed. I'd rather have Serena there too. I'd rather play *Scrabble*."⁸² Even though the encounter is less reproductive-focused, ceremonious and dutiful than their typical sexual encounters, this night in the hotel is not fulfilling for either the Commander or Offred. Sex void of freedom or shared intimacy or love is meaningless for both of them. Their desire for love and connection trumps their desire for physical gratification.

It is better known that valuing sex primarily for its reproductive purpose not only minimizes the importance of the pleasurable and loving aspects of sex, but more importantly it dilutes the identity and worth of a woman to her womb. She becomes a means to a reproductive end, valued only for her reproductive capabilities. This creates a sense of entitlement for men to use sex to fulfill their own purposes. But elevating physical desire as the primary use for sex also leads to abuse and a sense of entitlement. However, according to Foucault's sexual theory, the Commander and Offred should find complete satisfaction with the hotel encounter, since

⁸² Ibid. 266.

physical desire is the only innate motivator for sex. Certainly the disparity of freedom between the Commander and Offred would affect the experience. Foucault disputes this argument with his example of the Lapcourt farmhand, in which he excuses a man wielding his powerful position over a child in order to take sexual advantage of her and describes it as a trivial and simple act of pleasure. Earlier in *The Handmaid's Tale* Aunt Lydia compares society pre- and post-Gilead and comments, "There is more than one kind of freedom...freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from."⁸³ Foucault seems to overvalue freedom to engage in sex far above the freedom to abstain from sex. He does not consider how the sexual encounter between the farmhand and the little girl might in actuality be a violation of personal agency but also a violation of the purpose and meaning of sex.

In order to explore whether freedom is the main proponent of a sexually satisfying relationship it is helpful to look at Offred's reflections of life before Gilead. During this time people were free to love and have relationships with anyone they liked, whenever they liked. She remembers the early days of her relationship with her husband Luke. Offred has not seen Luke or their daughter since the revolution. Her relationship with Luke was free, loving, and committed. Interestingly their relationship began when Luke was already married to another woman. In her memories of their private escapades in the beginning of their relationship she remembers waiting for him to arrive at their hotel room:

In the afternoons, when Luke was still in flight from his wife, when I was still imaginary for him. Before we were married and I solidified. I would always get there first, check in...I would pace, waiting for him...I was nervous. How was I to know he loved me? It might be just an affair. Why did we ever say *Just?* Though at that time men and women tried each other on, casually, like suits, rejecting whatever did not fit."⁸⁴

⁸³ Ibid, 34.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 61.

Here she expresses her excitement and concern about the risks associated with love and romance. One of the complications of *The Handmaid's Tale* is that the entire novel is supposed to be a document written by Offred. The intended recipient for the document is unknown and so it is therefore impossible to know whether her reflections are her own or a conditioned response. However, it seems plausible that it is mostly an honest expression of her feelings and an outlet for freedom. She includes very private information that would most certainly result in death should it fall into the wrong hands. And although it would be impossible for Offred to live in Gilead without being at least somewhat conditioned by the social and political thinking, I would argue that her reflections seem consistent in their criticism of Gilead, and a pining for the way things were. Even this reflection about the casualness of sex is far less a criticism than a reflection of the past. The more interesting thing to note is her recognition of the casual nature of sex, and the apparent carelessness of it. So while she obviously pines for the freedom to love, her description suggests that people took advantage of the freedom to have sex, not even realizing what they were dealing with, for certainly bodies and emotions cannot be so frivolously treated as an article of clothing. But Offred touches on another very important point in her reflection. Equating sex to trying on clothes portrays an extremely self-centered approach to sex. Trying on clothing has nothing to do with the clothes and everything to do with the way the clothes make the person wearing the clothes feel. Arguably then, total freedom in a sexual relationship is not what makes sex meaningful, even if it is a necessary component to meaningful sex. I would therefore argue that her commentary on pre-Gilead sexual culture is not so much a reflection of systematically imposed morality, but rather is a reflection of a new perspective of sex, and the consideration that sex is not "just" a casual exchange.

It is important to examine Offred's relationship with Nick, the Commander's assistant and driver. When Offred remains barren after months of conception ceremonies, Serena Joy suspects that the Commander is infertile. She then orchestrates secret meeting for Nick and Offred in an effort to impregnate Offred without the Commander's knowledge. Serena Joy's suspicion was right, because Offred soon conceives a baby. But even after she conceives, Nick and Offred continue to see each other in secret. Their private relationship is consensual and physically gratifying. As Lois Feuer wrote, "it is through Offred's affair with Nick, as through her friendships with the other handmaids, that her re-created self desires and rebels."⁸⁵ But the more important thing to note is that she describes the relationship as sad and disappointing:

Each time I would expect him to be gone; or worse, I would expect him to say I could not come in. He might say he wasn't going to break any more rules, put his neck in the noose, for my sake. Or even worse, tell me he was no longer interested. His failure to do any of these things I experienced as the most incredible benevolence and luck. I told you it was bad.⁸⁶

Unlike her sexual encounters with the Commander, these engagements were consensual and desired, yet she still describes them as "bad." Her relationship with Nick is very similar to the beginning of her relationship with Luke – a secret love affair. Both are forbidden, consensual relationships. Yet she does not describe her relationship with Luke in the beginning as bad—at least not to the same extent. Waiting for him was bad, but once they were together she was comforted with a sense of security and hope for a future with him. Arguably the key difference between the two relationships is commitment and potential for growth, or in other words, the hope for a loving relationship. With Luke, even as early as their secret, hotel-love-affair days they were discussing the future of their relationship, "We would lie in those afternoon beds,

⁸⁵ Lois Feuer, "The Calculus of Love and Nightmare: *The Handmaid's Tale* and The Dystopian Tradition," *Critique*: 38 no. 2 (2012): 198, accessed October 27, 2017, DOI: [10.1080/00111619.1997.10543167](https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.1997.10543167).

⁸⁶ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 280.

afterwards, hands on each other, talking it over. Possible, impossible. What could be done?”⁸⁷

Whereas with Nick there was never any hope for a future together. From their very first time sleeping with each other he whispers in her ear, “No romance, okay?”⁸⁸ There can be no romance because it is too risky—not to mention the fact that she still loves Luke and feels like her relationship with Nick is a “betrayal.”⁸⁹ With Luke there was always the thought of a future, a thought to build a relationship and because of that potential she was able to fully give herself to him, and that made their sexual encounters meaningful. Nick and Offred have no hope for a future together. They cannot even claim their own biological child as their own, let alone raise that child together. Their affair has nothing to do with their relationship and everything to do with satisfying their own individual physical and emotional desires. She says:

I went back to Nick. Time after time, on my own, without Serena knowing. It wasn't called for, there was no excuse. I did not do it for him, but for myself entirely. I didn't even think of it as giving myself to him, because what did I have to give? I did not feel munificent, but thankful, each time he would let me in. He didn't have to.⁹⁰

She realizes that the desire for physical satisfaction is not the same as love, and that the freedom to have sex means little when there is no freedom to create a relationship. Love includes giving, not just taking from another to satisfy one's self. Sex used as a means to satisfy the self leaves Offred feeling empty, because stronger than a human's desire for sex is her desire for love, or as she says, “...nobody dies from lack of sex. It's lack of love we die from.”⁹¹ Love has nothing to do with sex in *The Handmaid's Tale* and it has nothing to do with sex in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 61.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 274.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 275.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 280.

⁹¹ Ibid, 113

We will now move on to *Brave New World*. While *The Handmaid's Tale* portrays an exaggerated example of a society controlled through sexual repression, *Brave New World* portrays an exaggerated example of a society controlled by sexual incitement. Similar to how Atwood's novel exposed the dangers of a society that values reproduction as the primary purpose of sex, Huxley shows how a society that favors and promotes sexual gratifications as the primary purpose of sex is also problematic. Furthermore, *Brave New World* demonstrates how trivializing sex actually minimizes the desire for loving relationships. It also shows how viewing sex as inconsequential an act as any other recreational activity perpetuates a culture that uses sex as a means to establish power. *Brave New World* takes place in the distant future in a society called Western Europe. Here sex is not reserved for marriage or for committed relationships of any kind and has nothing to do with reproduction, which takes place in a lab called The Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Center. The government prohibits committed relationships and reproduction. This is because the government finds no value in reproduction since it "...can make a new one [human] with the greatest ease – as many as [they] like."⁹² Society therefore only values sex for its ability to satisfy physical desires.

In order to establish physical gratification as the only use for sex, the government purposefully trivialized it in order to reduce its significance or complexity. In the exaggerated sexually indulgent society found in *Brave New World*, trivializing sex begins at a young age:

Above them, in ten successive layers of dormitory, the little boys and girls who were still young enough to need an afternoon sleep were as busy as everyone else, though they did not know it, listening unconsciously to hypnopaedic lessons on hygiene and sociability, in class-consciousness and the toddler's love-life. Above these again were the playrooms where, the weather having turned to rain, nine hundred older children were amusing themselves with bricks and clay modeling, hunt-the-slipper, and erotic play.⁹³

⁹² Huxley, *Brave New World*, (New York: Harper, 1989), 120.

⁹³ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 128.

This sexual conditioning continues into adulthood through the use of routine pseudo-religious services entitled Solidarity Service,⁹⁴ and erotic movies referred to as “feelies.”⁹⁵ The Controller of Western Europe describes the “feelies” as, “...works of art out of practically nothing but pure sensation.”⁹⁶ These things serve no other purpose than to stimulate physically gratifying sexual interactions between the men and women of Western Europe. The society regards sex as inconsequential a thing as riding bikes or playing with clay. While this type of conditioning may seem extreme, Foucault believes that the regulations regarding child sexuality were created not to actually protect children from actual harmful risks, but only to establish power and control. He claims that all societal regulations, even the architecture of schools⁹⁷ are nothing more than manipulated and constructed means of control. In order to make this argument Foucault has to intentionally ignore actual sexual consequences and risks, which are particularly dangerous for children. Therefore, while the type of conditioning in *Brave New World* seems extremely unrealistic, the point to be drawn is that similar to the agenda of Western Europe in *Brave New World*, a major goal of Foucault’s theory is to strip sex of its moral and ethical significance. And society must reconstruct sex as a common, inconsequential thing in order to establish physical gratification as the most human and important element of sexual desire.

One of the most obvious examples of the negative effects of belittling the importance of sex happens between the prestigious *Arch-Community Songster of Cangerbury* and Lenina, a

⁹⁴ Ibid. 67.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 193.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 194.

⁹⁷ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 28, “Take secondary schools of the eighteenth century, for example. On the whole, one can have the impression that sex was hardly spoken of at all in these institutions. But one only has to glance over the architectural layout, the rules of discipline and their whole internal organization: the question of sex was a constant preoccupation. The builders considered it explicitly. The organizers took it permanently into account.”

very desirable, young woman. The Songster takes her to his bed. There is no relationship between these two characters, and in fact, she is actually falling in love with another character in the novel. The man does not force Lenina to his bed. Instead he simply calls, “Lenina, my dear...come with me” and then “Obediently, but unsmiling and (wholly insensible of the honour done to her) without elation, Lenina walked after him, out of the room.”⁹⁸ The worst part about this story is that Lenina is not motivated by intimidation or force, but by expectation. She has never denied any sexual favors to anyone in her life since in Western Europe “Everyone belongs to everyone else, afterall.”⁹⁹ Furthermore, society had conditioned her from a childhood to believe that sex is as meaningless as child’s play, so why should she consider denying someone such an inconsequential request? Ultimately when sex carries no greater significance than any other physical activity such as eating or sleeping it actually invalidates an individual’s desire to refrain from sex. By reducing sex to merely the satisfying and entitled expression of basic physical desire, like hunger or sleep, Foucault selectively ignores the emotional significance innately attributed to the act. Despite the influential, popular, and somewhat liberating appeal of Foucault’s reductionist view, he cannot change the fact that sex remains the consummating act of marriage and the primary creator of human beings; in essence it is the act of love and life.

Furthermore, prioritizing physical gratification diminishes a person’s desire for love and a relationship. The government of *Western Europe* promoted inconsequential sex with the intention to ease the pains of loneliness and provide a feeling of contentment and security. Mustafa Mond, the Resident World Controller speaks to this contentedness and explains “...they like it. It’s light, it’s childishly simple. No strain on the mind or the muscles. Seven and a half

⁹⁸ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 153.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 40.

hours of copulation and the feelies. What more could they ask for?”¹⁰⁰ This was therefore done in an effort to create stability, by ridding society of the risk of heartbreak. The Controller says:

The greatest care is taken to prevent you from loving anyone too much. There’s no such thing as a divided allegiance; you’re so conditioned that you can’t help doing what you ought to do. And what you ought to do is on the whole so pleasant, so many of the natural impulses are allowed free play, that there really aren’t any temptations to resist.¹⁰¹

People therefore would satisfy their feelings of loneliness and desire for companionship through easy, accessible, and non-committal sexual hook-ups. But the Controller and Foucault fail to recognize that because of the biological bonding effects of sex, it is biologically impossible to isolate sex to a purely physical experience, since it affects our emotional and psychological state as well.¹⁰² However, this fact is unimportant, because even if the government allowed the citizens to form relationships, relationship would eventually become challenging and if the relationship does not represent commitment, love, fidelity or family it would be very easy to abandon it. Therefore, by condoning casual sex and removing all elements of propriety the government simultaneously enables a careless and self-centered approach to sex and inevitably people’s hearts and bodies.

The sexual culture of *Brave New World* obviously avoids the risk of pregnancy or parenthood. It is worth noting that a very real aspect of heterosexual intercourse is the possibility of creating a human being and this ability adds an additional layer of meaning to sexuality, not by means of construction but through biological fact. By removing all connections between sex and reproduction and/or parenthood, the government in *Brave New World* not only changed the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 197.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 209.

¹⁰² Miriam Grossman, *Unprotected* (New York: Penguin Group. 2006).

meaning of sex but the meaning of relationships as well. The Commander reflects on times past when humans produced humans:

Mother, monogamy, romance. High spurts the fountain; fierce and foamy the wild jet. The urge has but a single outlet. My love, my baby. No wonder those poor pre-moderns were mad and wicked and miserable. Their world didn't allow them to take things easily, didn't allow them to be sane, virtuous, happy. What with mothers and lovers, what with the prohibitions they were not conditioned to obey, what with the temptations and the lonely remorse, what with all the diseases and the endless isolating pain, what with the uncertainties and the poverty – they were forced to feel strongly. And feeling strongly (strongly, what was more, in solitude, in hopelessly individual isolation), how could they be stable?¹⁰³

Lest we forget in our efforts to disassociate identity of women from reproduction, reproduction is not inherently bad. It creates some of the most intimate, loving, and long-lasting relationships on earth – namely mother, father, child, brother, and sister. When defending the relationship between mother and child Bernard Marx, a relatively free-thinking young man that was born and raised outside of Western Europe says, “What a wonderfully intimate relationship. And what an intensity of feeling it must generate! I often think one may have missed something in not having had a mother.”¹⁰⁴ Reproduction and the ability to reproduce are not inherently oppressive; rather, using another person for your own sexual purposes is oppressive. A comprehensive discussion of the complexity of sex requires that we include its unique and remarkable ability to bring life into the world.

Both societies made relationships between lovers a subversive act¹⁰⁵ and they demonstrated that even when physical gratification is achieved through sex, there remains a longing for intimacy, connection, and commitment. Sexual ethics cannot be simply equated with

¹⁰³ Huxley, *Brave New World*, 35.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 96.

¹⁰⁵ Lois Feuer, “The Calculus of Love and Nightmare: *The Handmaid’s Tale* and The Dystopian Tradition,” *Critique*: 38 no. 2 (2012): 34-36, accessed October 27, 2017, DOI: [10.1080/00111619.1997.10543167](https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.1997.10543167).

societal constructs. Doing so creates confusion about sexual expectations and the right to abstain from sex.

CONCLUSION

When we frame sex as the inconsequential means to merely a physically gratifying end, rather than a meaningful act between two people, it become an individualized act, rather than a relational one. If physical urge is king and all sexual norms, morals, and ethics are nothing more than misguided social constructs, then all sexual encounters are subject to the selfish quest for carnal satisfaction.

For nearly all of human history women have been abused, harassed, and taken advantage of, both inside and outside the home. One of the reasons for this overt dominance can be blamed on biology. Women are disadvantaged by size, strength, and their ability to reproduce. Pregnancy is certainly not a punishment but it does take a toll on women. It is physically demanding and essentially decommissions a woman for more than nine months. And many women experience pregnancy multiple times in one lifetime.

And this is why The Pill changed everything for women. It offered unprecedented control over their bodies and new sexual freedom. These major shifts also instigated the beginning of sex and gender studies. And as has already been argued earlier in the paper, most of these studies unfortunately selectively remove feminine realities from the overall sexual equation, including reproduction. They seem to treat it as a non-factor, assuming that effective contraceptives have solved all issues and concerns regarding contraception. Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, written in 1970 severely neglects reproduction and in turn neglects the female sexual experience. He also completely dismisses the human desire for love and committed relationships and the way these desires naturally influence sexual behavior. By ignoring these important and weighty elements of sex, he is better able to denounce all sexual morals, ethics, and culture. He argues that these things are nothing more than the byproduct of the "power-pleasure dichotomy." He

therefore leaves physical desire as the only innately human motivator for sex. While Foucault upended and exposed sexual norms in an effort to dismantle an oppressive and discriminatory sexual culture and give freedom to people's sexual urges he also paved the way for newly oppressive and discriminatory sexual norms. To Foucault, sex holds very little propriety or significance and does not have any ethical implications—a dangerous and unfounded perspective.

Right now a reckoning is taking place all over the United States. Dozens of women and men are speaking out about their experiences with sexual harassment. They are opening up, some after several years of silence, demanding justice. How has this been happening for so long? And why has it been excused for so long? Perhaps part of the reason why sexual harassment has been excused for so long is because the sexual dialogue for the last 48 years has been arguing that sex no longer is associated with reproduction and is nothing other than a way to express and satisfy our physical desire. And if sex holds no moral significance or deeper meaning than an expression of physical desire sex cannot be easily violated. How is it any different than shaking hands or hugging someone? When the primary element of sex is gratifying physical desires, the main person to consider is one's self. Of course, another individual's agency should always be respected, but if sex is not particularly worthy of safeguarding, people feel more entitled to ask for it and less entitled to refuse it.

This paper argues that sex holds ethical and moral significance beyond its existence as a social construct, and it reaches into the core of the human experience. It is why the law considers rape a greater violation than a mugging and why women feel harassed and abused when men assume intercourse or sexual favors. Offred's reflection about love and sex is worth restating, "No one dies from lack of sex, they die from lack of love." Of course sex and love are

not the same thing, but we should not be so naïve as to think that sex is not driven by the desire for love and relationships. It is certainly motivated by physical desire, but more important to the human body, heart, and mind is the desire for love. Foucault's theory removes reproduction, agency, and the desire for love from the sexual experience. It is true that sex does not require nor does it always result in reproduction or love, but it is confusing and ethically dangerous to isolate sex as an expression of personal physical sexual desire. If sex is only or even primarily seen as a means to satisfy physical urges it is highly possible that it will be used as a selfish act, rather than as an expression of love or commitment or intimacy, thereby harming individuals, potential offspring, families, relationships, and the very fabric of society.

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