

Between My Sheets, A Lonely World

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One mantra of the Sixties generation was that everything should be free. But at revivals of the Woodstock festival decades later, the hippies went square and hawked water for \$5 a bottle.

"Free love" was nevertheless still being peddled, as the New Establishment clung to its revolutionary self-esteem by promoting sex for sex's sake as pure pleasure without consequences. Today, this dogma is being challenged by a new counterculture -- of chaste women -- who are storming the gates to protest that the promoters' sex, like their water, comes at a very high price indeed.

Count me among those dissatisfied daughters of the sexual revolution. I was born in 1968 -- "the year of The Beatles and Humanae Vitae," as my Baby Boomer priest puts it, referring to Pope Paul VI's encyclical on sexual issues. By the time my generation hit its 30s, the pope's pronouncements on chastity remained virtually untouched by the masses -- like a still-sealed vinyl record -- while the pop philosophy of the Fab Four's era had grown stale, recycled and repackaged, like so many CD reissues containing the same old songs. Even the arresting question that formed the philosophical foundation of the novel and TV show *Sex and the City* -- "Can a woman have sex like a man? -- is but a modern day rephrasing of one posited in 1962 by Helen Gurley Brown in *Sex and the Single Girl*.

That was the dawn of the sexual revolution, when fashionable women's purses first began to include birth control pills alongside Revlon Fire & Ice lipstick -- the chic dials on the pill cases resembling then-fashionable Princess telephones. Future *Cosmopolitan* editor Brown considered whether women could have sex free from emotional consequences, and answered yes -- because "like a man, [a woman] is a sexual creature."

Her insight launched a million "100 new sex tricks" features in women's magazines. And one of the era's feminist icons Germaine Greer enthused that "groupies are important because they demystify sex; they accept it as physical, and they aren't possessive about their conquest."

Greer's patchouli-tinged philosophy lives on in modern-day women's magazines, television shows and films that relentlessly tell women that if they're unhappy having premarital sex, it's because they're doing it wrong. More than that, the exceptions to the cultural norm -- the small minority of women who, for various sad reasons, feel compelled to reduce themselves to mere sexual objects -- are held up as the platonic ideal. If groupies, models, film and TV beauties, and pop stars can bed a different man every night -- all the while appearing to have the time of their lives -- surely you, lowly reader, can occasionally shed your outmoded values and shag a man you just met.

The fruits of this accepted single-woman lifestyle resemble those of a drug habit more than a dating paradigm. In a vicious cycle, women feel lonely because they are not loved, so they have casual sex with men who do not love them.

That was my life. I spent my 20s and early 30s pursuing premarital sex in one way or another -- longing for nuptials, but willing to settle for physical pleasure, ego validation and respite from

loneliness. Being a New York City based rock historian, contributing to magazines like Mojo and Billboard and penning liner notes for CD reissues, the opportunities for shenanigans were endless.

I read *I'm With the Band* by super-groupie Pamela Des Barres, envying her ability to drink in everything that was desirable about rockers -- their good looks, wit, creativity and fame -- without seeming to lose any part of herself in her dalliances with them. My big secret was that, underneath my longing to make a love connection, I was terrified of intimacy. Making myself vulnerable would mean opening myself up to the possibility of rejection. From that standpoint, a touring musician was an ideal sex partner. I could enjoy a temporary sort of fairy-tale bond with him and not have to tear down the walls that I had put up to protect myself. The rejection would come as he would move on to the next town and the next woman -- but somehow, being able to see it coming made me feel more in control. I was choosing, I thought, the lesser pain.

When I was having casual sex, there was one moment I dreaded more than any other. I dreaded it not out of fear that the sex would be bad, but out of fear that it would be good.

If the sex was good, then, even if I knew in my heart that the relationship wouldn't work, I would still feel as though the act had bonded me with my sex partner in a deeper way than we had been bonded before. It's in the nature of sex to awaken deep emotions within us -- emotions that are distinctly unwelcome when one is trying to keep it light.

At such times, the worst moment was when it was all over. Suddenly, I was jarred back to earth. Then I'd lie back and feel bereft.

At base, the champions of the sexual revolution are cynical. They know in their tin hearts that casual sex doesn't make women happy -- that's why they feel the need to continually promote it. All the sex I ever had, far from bringing me closer to the personal fulfillment and marriage that I sought, had only made me less capable of attaining marriage or even a committed relationship. I sacrificed what should have been the best years of my life for a black lie.

Although I believe that young people should be taught to reserve sex for marriage, there is one area where I'm in agreement with opponents of abstinence education: Abstinence means nothing unless one understands exactly what it is. To that point, I would add that to understand what abstinence is, one must also understand what both sex and marriage really are -- what they mean, and what they're for.

That all may sound simple enough, but growing up, I had little concept of the meaning and purpose of sex and marriage. I thought sex was something one did for recreation and also if one wanted to have a baby. (Well, I was on the right track with that last one.) Marriage, I believed, meant that one had a societal sanction to have sex with a particular person. Sex was better when one was in love, I imagined. Married people should have sex only with each other because -- well, because it wasn't nice to cheat, plus cheating could lead to divorce, which I knew was a pain.

All those assumptions were based on what I witnessed in living with my mother and, to a lesser degree, in visiting my father. My parents had been wounded by the failure of their own union, and their bitterness tainted the image of marriage that they passed on to me.

As a teenager with no moral foundation for my resolution to save my virginity for Mr. Right -- other than a fear of being hurt by Mr. Wrong -- I felt free to push the envelope. No, more than free; I felt entitled to push things, because I resented that God -- if He existed -- hadn't sent me my soul mate. I became one of those mythical virgins who does "everything but." The name Lewinsky was not yet a verb, but if it were, I imagine men would often have whispered it to one another behind my back.

When, at age 23, I finally got tired of waiting and "officially" lost my virginity to a man I didn't love, it was a big deal to me at the time, but in retrospect it wasn't really so significant. True, my dalliances became less complicated. When I did "everything but," I used to dread having to explain why I didn't want to go all the way; once I started having sex, that was no longer necessary. But in a wider sense, losing my virginity, far from being the demarcation between past and future, was just a blip on the continuum of my sexual degradation. The decline had begun when I first sought pleasure for its own sake.

The misguided, hedonistic philosophy which urges young women into this kind of behaviour harms both men and women; but it is particularly damaging to women, as it pressures them to subvert their deepest emotional desires.

These days, I live a very different kind of life. I still touch base with old musician pals now and again, but I'm more likely to hang out with members of church choirs. I am chaste. My decision to resist casual sex was, once again, influenced by my mother -- though not in the way she initially hoped.

When I was a teenager, my mother gave up her New Age beliefs for Christianity. I myself had no such plans. For one thing, I didn't have faith; after being a bat mitzvah at 13, I fell into agnosticism and it seemed like nothing could pull me out. For another, I didn't know of any salty Christians other than my mom. As far as I could see, Christians were a dull, faceless mass who ruled the world. My mission in life, as I saw it, was to be different --creative, liberal, rebellious, obviously not one of those white-bread Jerry Falwell types.

One day in December, 1995, I was doing a phone interview with Ben Eshbach, leader of a Los Angeles rock band called the Sugar plastic, and asked him what he was reading. His answer was *The Man Who Was Thursday*, by G.K. Chesterton.

I picked it up out of curiosity and was captivated. Soon, I was picking up everything by Chesterton that I could get my hands on, starting with Orthodoxy. That was the first time it struck me that there was something exciting about Christianity. One of the main ways I had defined myself as a rebel was by not being Christian. Chesterton planted the idea in my head that perhaps it was the other way around; Christians were the true rebels.

I kept reading Chesterton even as I continued my libertine lifestyle, and then one night in October, 1999 I had a hypnagogic experience -- the sort in which you're not sure if you are asleep or awake. I heard a woman's voice saying: "Some things are not meant to be known. Some things are meant to be understood." I got on my knees and prayed -- and eventually entered the Catholic Church.

One night last year, I had dinner with a male friend, a charming English journalist I would have dated if he shared my faith (he didn't) and if he were interested in getting married (ditto). He peppered me with questions about chastity, even going so far as to suggest that maybe, given that I'd been looking for so long, I might not find the man I was looking for.

"That's not true," I responded. "My chances are better now than they've ever been, because before I was chaste, I was looking for love in all the wrong places. It's only now that I'm truly ready for marriage and have a clear vision of the kind of man I want for my husband.

"I may be 37," I concluded, "but in husband seeking years, I'm only 22."

- Dawn Eden's first book, *The Thrill of the Chaste: Finding Fulfillment While Keeping Your Clothes On*, was released in December by W Publishing Group/ Thomas Nelson. www.thrillofthechaste.com.