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# Comment on Catherine Hakim/4. Gendering Desire. Male Power and Sexual Gap in Feminist and Sexuality Studies

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# Comment on Catherine Hakim/4

## Gendering Desire. Male Power and Sexual Gap in Feminist and Sexuality Studies

*by* Rossella Ghigi

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### 1. Introduction

Catherine Hakim's essay [2016] investigates the roots of patriarchy and identifies them with men's need to subordinate women by controlling their sexuality. The merit of this project lies in its ambitiousness: it aims to explain the causes of patriarchy and, taking up Lerner's theory of the male control over fertility [1986], it proposes a new causal theory based on male sexual deficit and the desire to control female sexuality. Hakim's departing point is that sexual deficit is "permanent and universal" [2016, 1] running through centuries and cultures, and placing men, whatever their age and social background, in a condition where the demand for female sexual performances (roughly considered as penetrative sexual acts) exceeds the supply. The sexual deficit in the present age appears to be further exacerbated by women's access to the wage labor market and high levels of education, according to Hakim. The sources of her analysis vary from quantitative data issued by nationally representative surveys, to individual case studies collected through qualitative methods.

The article presents many interesting points and it undoubtedly has the merit of allowing empirical research to dialogue with an ambitious and wide-ranging explicative hypothesis. However, I believe that the need to present this project within the space of just a few pages of an article tends to hinder a faithful account of the theoretical positions that it places under a critical lens (in particular, some feminist approaches). Secondly, it ends up taking some crucial theoretical elements for gran-

ted (especially an objectifying and positivist perspective on desire), without taking a broader sociological literature on sexuality into sufficient account.

## **2. From Patriarchy to Gender Order and Back**

Hakim chooses to recuperate the term “patriarchy” which went out of fashion in the 1990s and 2000s in favor of notions such as “gender regime” and “gender system”, as Hakim admits. The reasons behind this theoretical shift, however, are not investigated, so that her choice is not fully justified from a theoretical point of view. At most, Hakim does mention the critical work by Vrushali Patil [2013] about patriarchy in a note; but it is worth noting that Patil’s contribution has more to do with the inadequacy of the current intersectional approach and with the importance of cross-borders analysis than with a systematic response to patriarchy’s historical allegations (being monolithic, tautological, ahistorical and eurocentric). As a matter of fact, Patil’s analysis seems closer to a constructionist approach of a transnational gender order, which would create “man” and “woman” as historically specific categories, than to Hakim’s, who uses the term “patriarchy” in the sense of “women versus men”, criticized by Patil.

Speaking of “gender order” or “gender system” actually recognizes, in the first place, the combination of dynamics that create the meanings and expectations around gender identities in a relational way; it also allows the disadvantages that men face due to the specific way masculinity is socially organized to be included in the analysis. On the one hand, men too have limited freedom of action and expression within the gender order, and are severely sanctioned when their behaviors or attitudes do not fall into the stereotypical features of hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, it takes into account subordinate masculinities (e.g. non-heterosexuals, but not only) and a variety of possible, even resistant, femininities. Furthermore, the gender order can provide a plurality of specific gender regimes (or patterns in gender arrangements: see Connell [2011, 72]) within its institutions and organizations: a factory’s gender regime can be different from that of a school, even within the same wider gender order.

Observing the experiences of men and women from the gender order perspective, focusing on the social organization of their difference, allows us to take into account the interaction of orders through different dimensions (such as race, age, social class, etc.) favoring an intersectional approach toward patriarchal norms. Nor does this impede the recognition of hierarchies and relations of domination. As pointed out by Raewyn Connell, for example, this perspective does not exclude the existence

of an advantage men gain as a group from maintaining an unequal social order: anything but. Connell calls it “patriarchal dividend”, which can be expressed in terms of

money, [...] authority, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power, emotional support, sexual pleasure and control over one’s own body [Connell 2011, 140].

Men benefit from this dividend to varying degrees depending on their position in the social gender order. Homosexual men, for example, may be excluded by the authority and respect guaranteed to men who embody hegemonic forms of masculinity, but they can share with other men the general economic advantage they have over women. Likewise, some women may benefit from the patriarchal dividend of their husbands or partners. The notion of gender order thus allows us to identify different gender regimes in the same context and is not weakened by the recognition of different levels of inequality between men and women: the notion of patriarchy is much less sensitive to this multidimensionality.

In sum, men share their power over women, but the amount of power is not the same for all of them: class, age, race are just some of the variables that can change the type of hierarchical relationship with women. It should also be recognized that there are dominated segments within the dominant group, to quote Bourdieu [1998]. Originally, as Walby [1990] recalls, the term “patriarchy” in part referred to the men who dominated over other men as well as women in the family (as in Weber [1947]: see Walby [1990]). Moreover, the notion of gender order admits the possibility of reconciliation with men on a truly human and egalitarian basis. From this point of view, it remains to be explained why the notion of patriarchy should be used instead of a more systemic notion of the relationship between men and women, as done by the scholarship in the last twenty years.

### **3. The Roots of Patriarchy in Marxist and Radical Feminism**

I also believe that the article does not honor the plurality of voices and depth of feminist analyses she criticizes. First, Hakim argues that feminists ask for “gender equality” defining it as

completely symmetrical lives for men and women, without first identifying theories or explanations for the ubiquity of differential life outcomes, how and why patriarchy developed, or why gender symmetry is a realistic demand despite differences in aspirations and dispositions [Hakim 2016, 2].

Such an argument is likely to re-create the old misconception that feminists and gender scholars in general would like to eliminate the differences between men and women as such, whereas (at least in the majority of cases) they want to eliminate inequalities, if anything. Difference is not inequality; the problem is that the inequality is defined as difference to be made socially acceptable and not subject to confutation [Butler, 1990; Bourdieu, 1998]. This entails the fallacious idea that feminism would argue that men

*choose* to oppress their own partners, the people they share a bed with at night [Hakim 2016, 2] (my italics).

The notion of “choice” includes a hard-to-defend notion of voluntariness of oppression. Feminism (at least its academic stream) has always been far from saying that men are bad persons who choose to oppress their partners, wives, sisters or mothers because of their advantage. As Bourdieu observes when referring to men and women’s relationships [1998] we can roughly say that the dominant and the dominated share a certain way of categorizing the world reflecting the inequalities in the social order: the cognitive structures of both the dominant and the dominated follow the objective structures governing their relations.

Moreover, I find it inaccurate to say that feminism never confronted the question of “why” men dominate women. If we just take into account the classic second wave feminist works, we can find several reasons for the establishment of patriarchy: for example, the physical, social and psychological disadvantages imposed by pregnancy, childbirth, and subsequent child-rearing [Firestone 1970]; the male physical and symbolic appropriation of female sexuality and bodies through sexual assault and the menace of it [Brownmiller 1975]; the greater physical strength of males and their power to make women pregnant [Ehrenreich 1976]; the compulsory heterosexuality [Rich 1980], just to mention a few.

Hakim’s account of the feminist debate on patriarchy is influenced by Walby’s [1990] analysis often cited in the text. Take, as an example, her description of Marxist feminism. As Walby did, Hakim too notes that

Marxist or socialist feminism [...] offered no explanation for patriarchal practices that pre-date capitalism by millennia, nor for gender inequality in socialist societies [Hakim 2016, 2].

Hakim also notes that there are few women in key positions in Russia and China, and that women are more likely to achieve top management jobs in the US and Britain than in equal gender regimes in Scandinavian countries.

These are two critical points that actually rest on different argumentative grounds. The second point relates to the way in which some countries concretely carried out policies inspired by a theoretical position. This issue has been studied extensively, especially with respect to analyses of gender equality in the post-Soviet regimes, also adopting a very critical lens (think for example about the study of Soviet and post-Soviet masculinities by Novikova [2000]). The first point, instead, is a criticism of a line of feminist thought, and therefore remains on the same theoretical ground as the rest of the argumentations.

It is inaccurate to say that Marxism has not considered nor tried to explain gender inequality in pre-capitalist societies. Marxist was indeed one of the first economic and political thoughts to have seriously considered women's condition in a wide-ranging perspective and searched for its material (instead of moral or biological, as previous approaches) basis. For example, Engels explicitly spoke of men's domination before capitalism. According to him, since ancient times, as the first signs of civilization appeared after what he calls the age of barbarism, men's supremacy was established through the institution of monogamous marriage. In 1884, in his classical work on the origins of the family, he wrote:

[Monogamous marriage [...] is based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father's property as his natural heirs. [...] As a rule, it is now only the man who can dissolve it, and put away his wife. The right of conjugal infidelity also remains secured to him, at any rate by custom [...], and as social life develops he exercises his right more and more [...]. We meet this new form of the family in all its severity among the Greeks. [...] In the heroic age we find the woman already being humiliated by the domination of the man and by competition from girl slaves. This is the origin of monogamy as far as we can trace it back among the most civilized and highly developed people of antiquity. [...] Thus when monogamous marriage first makes its appearance in history, it is not as the reconciliation of man and woman, still less as the highest form of such a reconciliation. Quite the contrary. Monogamous marriage comes on the scene as the subjugation of the one sex by the other; it announces a struggle between the sexes unknown throughout the whole previous prehistoric period. [...] And today I can add: *the first class opposition* that appears in history *coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman* in monogamous marriage, and *the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male* [Engels 1884, 33-35, my italics].

According to Engels, monogamous marriage was a great historical step forward compared to previous times; it had nothing to do with sexual love conceived as passion and sexual impulse (see also Giddens [1992]), but was always a marriage for

convenience and economic reasons; that is why, he believes, it was supplemented by adultery and prostitution.

Not only did the subordination of women precede capitalism according to Engels, but it was the “first form of class oppression.” Of course, capitalism had a strong impact on the monogamous family and the relationships between men and women. As is known, similarly to the dynamics of the sorcerer’s apprentice story, capitalism creates forces it is unable to control. It establishes the economic and social foundations for its own overcoming. Likewise Engels added:

And now that large-scale industry has taken the wife out of the home onto the labor market and into the factory, and made her often the bread-winner of the family, no basis for any kind of evil supremacy is left in the proletarian household – except, perhaps, for something of the brutality towards women that has spread since the introduction of monogamy [Engels 1941 (1884), 8].

It is plain, he concludes, that the first condition for the liberation of women from male domination is

to bring the whole female sex back into public industry, and that this in turn demands the abolition of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society. The supremacy of the man in marriage is the simple consequence of his economic supremacy, and with the abolition of the latter will disappear of itself [*Ibidem*, 43]

Marx too, in *The Capital*, writes that women’s work helps to assign women, young people and children of both sexes an important role in the process of production taking place outside the domestic environment, by creating the new economic foundation needed for a higher form of the family and of the relationship between the sexes. Due to limitations of space, Hakim’s account of feminist approaches erases decades of discussions and does not reflect their complexity.

However, a deeper analysis of the feminist literature would highlight some important connections with her approach and would allow to better justify some of her positions, even when distancing from these classic texts. I shall therefore limit myself to observing that socialist feminism is far from monolithic in investigating gender relations in capitalist society. Today, it has come a long way, as evidenced by the distance between the early Twentieth century debates and the current intersectional approach [Smith 2015; Holmstrom 2002]. More generally, as Barbara Ehrenreich stated as early as in 1976, the term feminist socialism “is much too short for what is, after all, really socialist internationalist anti-racist, anti-heterosexist feminism;” Marxist feminism distanced itself from Marxism true and proper in that the latter considered that “things having to do with education, sexuality, recreation, the family, art, music, housework” were peripheral to the central dynamics of social change

while they were instead of fundamental importance in the reproduction of female subjugation.

The considerations made for Marxist feminism are even truer for radical feminism. This is the approach with which Hakim's contribution interacts more closely, as it is more attentive to sexuality. Radical feminism is described by Hakim as a thought that would portray heterosexuality as "dangerous and demeaning" characterized by "rape, sexual slavery in marriage, and sexual slavery in the sex industry" [2016, 3]. There is a variety of positions that are difficult to summarize under the umbrella of a single interpretation: Rich's position [1980] is different from Dworkin's [1981], for example. In any case, radical feminists' main criticism regards how heterosexuality is actually built. Catherine MacKinnon, one of the authors cited by Hakim when referring to this perspective, does not claim that heterosexual desire is demeaning to women *per se*: it is the fashion in which it is constructed by the sex industry that makes it demeaning. The problem of pornography, for example, is that it is a violence presented (and perceived) as desired by the women who experienced it. Heterosexuality is defined by pornography and not vice versa: pornography defines what is sexual and what is not, but in doing so it covertly the real violence that it reproduces. Pornography and the sex industry contribute to the production of the meanings of masculinity and femininity in our society (women are defined by this specific configuration of sexual desire as "sex", but, at the same time, they are deprived of their sexuality), as well as the meanings of desire itself: the male heterosexual desire becomes the sexual desire *par excellence*. MacKinnon concludes that

as Marxism exposes value as social creation, feminism exposes desire as socially relational, internally necessary to unequal social orders but historically contingent [1989, 4].

#### **4. Problematizing Drive, Desire and Sexuality**

Here we come to a crucial point in Hakim's argument, the issue of male and female desire. As for the notion of patriarchy, also for the conception of sexuality and desire, Hakim resorts to postwar theoretical perspectives notwithstanding the successful paradigms in social research on sexuality in the last decades. First of all, in this work she speaks of drive, desire and sexuality as if they were synonyms and therefore interchangeable terms, whereas extensive literature tends to distinguish them both analytically and theoretically [Plummer 2002]. Secondly, Hakim does not problematize the relationship between sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction, especially where studies on black, young, less educated and lower status women reported lower



levels of sexual satisfaction with higher levels of sexual activity [Fahs and Swank 2011]. Thirdly, and most importantly, Hakim actually retrieves a pre-social and biological conception of sexual drive which has been strongly questioned over the last fifty years by sociologists of sexuality who adopt a constructivist approach. Hakim anticipates and bypasses this criticism by noting that the variety of ways sexuality has been expressed and practised in different places and eras does not deny the sex drive as universal and natural.

Food styles and cuisines are “socially constructed” and defined by local resources and cultures. But that does not deny the reality of hunger as a natural drive, and eating as a physiological necessity. Lust is also a powerful motivating force, even if culture molds sexual expression [Hakim 2016, 6].

The analogy between sexual appetite and hunger is a recurring one in the history of thought. It was called into question in the past by noting that the indefinite abstinence from sex does not have the same disastrous consequences as the indefinite abstinence from food [Jackson 1984]. But the strongest criticism from a sociological point of view is that sex drive itself can be related to the historical and spacial context. Maintaining the parallelism with hunger, we may note that the way we define ourselves with respect to hunger, talk of hunger in everyday life, define it, and socially organize times of meals, actually impacts on how we perceive hunger (or not). From a phenomenological perspective, we do not experience hunger if not culturally mediated.

Hakim separates the sexual impulse from its cultural development, and takes the sexual impulse as universal and, we can infer, biologically based. This biological sex model owes much to the evolutionary theory and, in many aspects, to the very distinction made between sexuality and reproduction in modern times (the emergence of recreational sexuality, as Hakim defines it). But when referring to sexuality, it assumes a primacy of penetration which goes back to the idea that sex should have primarily a reproductive function. By stating that sexuality is separated from reproduction we assume that sexuality is solely and specifically performed through (and referred to) the penetrative coitus.

In addition, by considering desire as an impulse we return in many ways to a “nativist” approach, as defined by Connell and Dowsett [1992]. But, as these authors observed on the basis of anthropological documentation:

All human sexual behavior is socially scripted behavior.[...] It is not the physical aspects of sexuality but the social aspects that generate the arousal and organize the action [2002 (1992), 262].

Hakim does not sufficiently consider the burgeoning sociological literature on the construction of desire itself, as it can not be reduced to an approach that simply takes into account the multiple forms that desire can assume in different cultural contexts.

From the 1970s onward, sociological theories on sexual identity exceeded those on sex drive. It was understood that individuals play a greater part in shaping sexual change through social learning and daily interaction and that it was not necessary to repress a natural sex drive to make society operate. The role of interactionist sociology was crucial:

Interactionists shifted the research emphasis from sexual *roles* to the looser notion of sexual *identity* – from showing how social norms constrain and shape the sexual impulse, to showing how individuals, as active agents, negotiate sexual construct through social interaction [Stein 1989, 7].

This change of perspective owes much to Gagnon and Simon's [1973] theory of sexual scripts, which surprisingly is not mentioned by Hakim, despite its being recognized as one of the most important researches in social studies on sexuality and the most cited theoretical model in post-psychoanalytical sexual science [Wiederman, 2015]. Even before Foucault defined his repressive hypothesis theory of sexuality [1976], Gagnon and Simon broke with the naturalising approaches of human sexuality based on the representation of the sexual drive as a biological imperative censored or repressed by society. Sexuality is not a force independent from the social, but is defined and shaped by society.

Gagnon and Simon were indebted to Kinsey, with whom they had long worked, but overtly challenged his mechanical view of sexual relations. According to their approach, individuals learn the meanings culturally ascribed to certain events and situations defined as sex and they gradually acquire the ability to identify sexual situations or act sexually:

Scripts are involved in learning the meaning of internal states, organizing the sequences of specifically sexual acts, decoding novel situations, setting the limits on sexual responses and linking meanings from non-sexual aspects of life to specifically sexual experience [Gagnon and Simon 1973, 17].

This is a systematic application of symbolic interactionism and the Chicago school sociology. To put it very briefly, within a few *scenarios* (general narratives providing instructional guides for defining the boundaries of what is sexual, generating frames to make sense of individual experiences, and defining gender roles: who, how, when, where, why and with whom), there are *intrapsychic scripts* (fantasies, memories, and mental rehearsals producing arousal) and there are *interpersonal*

*scripts*, giving instructions for the interactional conduct. Through intrapsychic scripts the individual works out the difficulties involved in enacting interpersonal scripts within the general context of cultural scenarios. All three levels of scripts are not static, but dynamically related. This is not to oppose nature to culture: the aim of the researcher is to understand the interaction between these levels.

Gender dynamics occurs at all levels: for example, during adolescence, men and women learn the “appropriate” timing of entry into active sexuality, the accepted forms of sociosexual behavior, the frequency of masturbation, the number of partners, etc. This learning takes place in a strongly gendered homosocial context. Within male groups, orgasm, masturbation and heterosexual experiences are publicly promoted and regulated, and in such contexts girls serve as the mediators of social status among males. On the contrary, girls live in a world dominated by girls, but projected toward future heterosexuality, toward romance, attachment, and in certain cases, to mild forms of masochism.

The script-based approach also allows desire itself to be historicized.

[Scripts] provide the motivational elements that produce a commitment to desire and act sexually in a certain way [...] In this perspective, desire and other sexual feelings do not derive from the inner body, as drives or instincts, but emerge through a reflexive process, which is always also interpretive and interactional [Bertone and Ferrero Camoletto 2009, 371].

Throughout Hakim’s paper we are led to infer that male sexual desire is substantially connected to a pulse which is difficult to control and instinctive. It is a “hydraulic” approach to male sexuality, or what Gagnon and Simon called “predatory script.” This approach has been called into question by many authors [Plummer 2002; Kimmel 2000] because it is itself the result of a common, but not universal, scenario. In addition, this male sexuality model assumes that in every individual there is a certain amount of sexual energy that eventually requires release. The amount would vary from individual to individual, and would not be under his control; men are supposed to have greater sex drive (although some have questioned this notion: Sherfey [1966] quoted in Jackson [1984]) and this male sexual model would become the sexuality model *par excellence*. A similar view has been criticized as it implicitly regards any divergent sexual experiences as peripheral or inhibited. And so a model that re-biologizes sex drive, while recognizing the importance of social norms in structuring sexual behavior, tends to find more uniformity than difference, and to look for consistency rather than change across ages and cultures [Stein 1989].

## 5. Sex Hermeneutics

In the wake of Gagnon and Simon, an entire scientific literature on sexuality has blossomed within the social sciences opposing and criticizing the reduction of sexual desire to a merely biological element. Research has emphasized the importance of distinguishing between desires, behaviors and identifications [Michael *et al.* 1994]. For example, I may desire a sexual relationship with a person of my own sex but I neither call nor recognize myself as homosexual, or (want to) put it into practice. Hakim's conception of sexuality reduces it to desire or compulsion to have (hetero)sexual intercourse without taking into account other dimensions of sexual behaviours. Similarly, no distinction is made between desire and pleasure [Halperin 1995; Trachman 2016], nor is the importance of the hermeneutics of desire in constituting the modern subject taken into account: the power to name and describe one's own sexual desire is unequally distributed [Sedgwick 2008, 47] and can be a political stake. The way in which a person acknowledges and gives shape to his/her sexual fantasies is conditioned by gender and by extrapsychic institutions.

In the same vein, Foucault wanted to study the history of desire as a *rapport à soi* mediated by knowledge and institutions. The presence of sexual relations between men in ancient times did not mean homosexual desire as we now understand it nor greater social tolerance towards it [Trachman 2016]. It was a matter of taste and relationship to the rules of age, functions and obligations. The distinction between heterosexual and homosexual desire has its own history [Halperin 1995]: an approach that is ultimately rooted in evolutionary visions does not explain non-heterosexuality and asexuality except as deviations from a norm which is not just statistics, but morals; nor does it explain social and individual change, nor the presence of multiple and divergent forces in sexual desire.

However, the oversocialized individual of Gagnon and Simon's theory has also been called into question by some subsequent approaches. The exaggeration of the symbolic at the expense of the corporeal being in the 1970s was revised in later research [Plummer 2007, 24], thanks to a retrieval of the bodily dimension as sex body projects, sexual embodiments and new technologies of sexuality further enhanced by the market or medical interventionism. But the idea of sex drive in its biological sense has in no way been retrieved. Sexual scripts have often been translated into embedded practices and habits in a Bourdieusian perspective, and conceived not as autonomous from structure, nor structurally determined, but in a dialectical relationship between objective and cognitive structures [Stein 1989]. More recently, some authors make reference to a sexual field whose central theoretical argument is that

desire and desirability are transformed over time as individuals enter collective sexual life and become exposed to field forces" [Green 2015, 30].

This allows them to be more exposed to historical and social change, an aspect that remains unexplained in the natural and universal drive approach.

Gagnon himself, in 1991, registered converging trends in men's and women's sexual behavior in the United States, such as for the number of sexual partners and premarital intercourses [Monteil 2016]. The same convergence is detected in other countries, such as France and Italy [Bozon 2014; Barbagli, Dalla Zuanna and Garelli 2010] while others recorded a gradual closure of the sexual gap between boys and girls [Kimmel 2000, 248 et seq.]. This convergence of practices, however, is still marked by gender, especially in their meanings. Kimmel and Plante [2004] collected the testimonies of some students on their sexual fantasies, showing how they differ. The boys talk about their experiences in more detail, sexuality is described in more direct fashion and involving a greater variety of practices; girls do not mention the physical characteristics of the partners, they refer more than boys to their real partners than ideal, and they are more descriptive about the context. This result is affected by the gendered construction of sexuality [Kimmel 2000].

More generally, recent critical perspectives on heterosexuality have emphasized the need to elaborate complex analyses of the dynamic, historically and socially specific relationship between sexuality and gender [Richardson 2007]. This new awareness has guided empirical investigations about the way men and women experience and practice heterosexuality in daily life, also showing how they relate differently to sexual desire itself. A research based on in-depth interviews with men about their sex lives by Bertone and Ferrero Camoletto, for example, shows that

[men's] accounting for their sexual desire as context dependent, produced in heterosexual interactions, appears in particular as a key step towards dismantling the naturalised notion of man as a "sex machine" [Bertone and Ferrero e Camoletto 2009, 383].

Studies on sexuality throughout the course of life also showed that turning points and transitions represent junctures at which people can reaffirm old ways of negotiating sexual life or adopt new ones [Carpenter 2015]. Since in most societies men and women are encouraged to follow different sexual scripts,

insofar as the scripts individuals enact at one stage of life partly govern what scripts are accessible and appealing to them at later stages, sexual scripting is a gendered process that tends to produce distinctive cumulative dynamics for men and women [Carpenter 2015, 72].

The interaction between sexual scripts, gendered construction of sexual desire and stage of life can thus lead to different sexual practices. Carpenter continues:

For example, men who embrace scripts that equate masculinity with sexual uncontrollability may be more likely to have extramarital affairs [*Ibidem*, 72].

## 6. Conclusions

In 1949, one of the most influential voices of the Chicago School, Ernest Burgess, while acknowledging the great value of Kinsey's work, criticized it by saying that "the interest of the sociologist in sex is of course different from that of the biologist" [2002 (1949)].

The sociologist should be interested in the social and individual attitudes towards a particular behavior, according to Burgess, who added:

The small child assumes the masculine or feminine role before he is conscious of sex or of sex differences in the biological sense [...] The ideal of masculinity becomes associated with toughness, with physical exploits, with profane and obscene language, and with unrestrained sex behavior [*Ibidem*, 137].

Recent research confirms that masculinity is produced and reproduced through repertoires of performances and of meanings which are shared with specific homosocial "communities of practice" on the different importance attributed to masturbation and sexual intercourse during male life [Bertone and Ferrero Camoletto 2009]. In other words, the desire to have more sex than one currently has, as reported by the surveys, could also be affected by the meanings that masculinity assumes today: the desire to have a large number of sexual relations is part of the definition of masculinity, because the "real man" is quintessentially supposed to want sex. The answers provided by men and women may be influenced by the social desirability deriving from a shared definition of masculinity: differentiated sexual scripts and broader scenarios could induce a gender bias in the answers given in a questionnaire about one's sexual desires (that is, subjects could answer according to their own definition of masculinity or femininity). The researcher's reflexivity also calls for a problematization of why in a questionnaire some questions are asked and not others, why certain behaviors and not others are considered relevant. One might wonder, for example, what answers would be collected if the surveys considered a broader spectrum of sexual experiences, once the idea of sexuality as a practice or desire to have a coitus has been recognised as historically determined.

Hakim's approach, in fact, never calls into question the idea that heterosexuality is natural and that the most natural form of activity is heterosexual coitus. From this

point of view, the other forms of sexual acts are just preliminary elements, optional or substitutive extras [Jackson 1984]. This idea is shared by the majority of people responding to a questionnaire, but it nevertheless depends on the current definition of sexuality and the analyst should not let it go unchallenged, as it is just one of the possible ways in which sexual desire can be expressed. Therefore, if we included non penetrative sexual experiences and those more linked to romance in a survey (provided that, among other things, we place in question both sexual performance as synonymous of sexuality for boys and compulsive romance for girls) our results about the sexual gap between men and women could be very different. In last decades, in fact, many empirical investigations on gender and sexuality adopting qualitative methods have shown that when they say the word “sex”, women and men often mean different things. In one study, monogamous heterosexual couples in their mid-forties were asked: “How many times did you make love last week?” The number reported by the two partners was different.

Women’s understanding that sex equals the entire encounter gives them a somewhat broader range of sexual activities that count as sex. Men’s focus on orgasm as the defining feature of sex parallels their tendency to exclude all acts except intercourse from “having sex”. Oral or manual stimulation are seen as “foreplay” for men, as “sex” for women [Kimmel 2000, 241].

I believe that Hakim’s contribution and her ambitious research on the origins of men’s power over the female body could benefit from the literature mentioned here. Of course, it is not *compulsory* to deconstruct *compulsory* heterosexuality. However, the methodological choice to reject the more recent developments in feminist theories and sexuality studies and to not take into account their position, needs to be justified: this is true for both the retrieval of patriarchy and the theory of sex drive. A dialogue with the research that grasped the epistemological pitfalls of these theories would allow to better understand the role of sexuality not only in defining the relationship between men and women, but also the relationship of men and women with themselves. The outcome of such dialogue could represent an important epistemological challenge: the problematization of sexual drive and of sexual desire may, in fact, have interesting implications with respect to the thesis underlying Hakim’s work. If desire can be connected to society, a society marked by gender inequality and the domination of men over women (in other words, patriarchy), then desire can not be at the origin of patriarchy: rather, it could be an effect of it.

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## **Comment on Catherine Hakim/4**

Gendering Desire.

Male Power and Sexual Gap in Feminist and Sexuality Studies

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Abstract: The paper investigates Catherine Hakim's theory on men's need to control women's sexuality. It first criticizes Hakim's choice to recuperate the term "patriarchy" at the expense of 1990s and 2000s notions such as "gender regime" and "gender system". It argues that these terms are more fruitful in adopting an intersectional approach toward gender inequalities and power relations. Second, it criticizes Hakim's account of Marxist and second wave feminist theories on male domination by highlighting their complexity and internal variety. Third, and most importantly, it argues that Hakim retrieves a pre-social and biological conception of sexual drive which has been strongly criticized over the last fifty years by constructivist approaches in the sociology of sexuality. These critiques put Hakim's theory into serious question, since that, if desire can be connected to society, and society is marked by men's domination, then desire can not be at the origin of patriarchy: rather, it could be an effect of it.

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*Keywords: Feminism; Sexuality; Masculinities; Sexual Scripts; Gender.*

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