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Masculinities and the Phenomenology of Men’s Orgasms

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This article looks into the art of male sexuality. Its starting point is the traditional biological focus on male sexuality, which has narrowed the understanding of male sexuality. Through readings of authors such as D. H. Lawrence, Catherine Millet, Susan Bordo, and others, the author seeks to lay out a cultural understanding of sexuality on the basis of positions of masculinity within culture. He also discusses possibilities of a male sexual ethics based on the penis as a bridge from me to you.

Keywords: men’s sexuality; orgasm; body; emotions; male sexual ethics

Can anything be said about male sexuality? Does not male sexuality follow the simplest logic: seduction—erection—penetration—orgasm—withdrawal? And that is all. Moreover, no more can be said precisely because male sexuality is not commonly associated with speech—it is an act. It is concerned with action, and thus is not a topic for discussion or, therefore, critical examination.

Nevertheless, in this article, I take the liberty of speaking about it and try to dismantle the notion that male sexuality follows a simple logic. Rather, it may be that the idea that sexuality works according to a simple logic has hampered the understanding of male sexuality.

In the wake of the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s, discussion of female sexuality has been intense. Debates have considered female orgasms, their absence, and the link between female emotional life and sexuality. In the Scandinavian countries, men have regularly received public instruction on how to stimulate a woman and about any and every female erogenous zone. Today, most men know far more about women’s bodies than they do about their own—at least if they have been reasonably attentive in class. Accordingly, polls in Norway on men’s views on sexuality show, among many other things, that men prioritize women’s orgasms ahead of their own. It is more important for a younger man today that his partner has an orgasm than that he himself does. Possibly men think this way because they feel that they will always attain orgasms anyway and that their problem is that they orgasm too easily.
The problem with this way of thinking is that it confuses orgasm with ejaculation. The fact that a man reaches ejaculation does not necessarily mean that he has an orgasm. It is important to stress that orgasm should not be confused with the sensations of overspilling or bursting, terms often used to describe ejaculation and how that feels. An orgasm occurs when this ejaculation is linked to a more comprehensive and deeper emotional reaction or bodily explosion. An ejaculation has an emotional circumference, which includes the genitals and at most, the groin, whereas an orgasm includes the whole body and not least the brain. Men can ejaculate at appropriate and inappropriate times. It can happen while they sleep (usually at a very young age), in erotic encounters before they have managed to undress, or after prolonged sessions of intercourse in which sensitivity may have been reduced or hypersensitization may have occurred. In none of these instances can we speak of orgasms. Some men will have their sensitivity reduced to a point at which they have great difficulty in achieving orgasms at all, whereas others will experience both situations. The problem is that little research has been done on the extent of men’s problems with orgasm and on men’s subjective experience of sexual release.

Today, in Norway, we know precisely how many women experience orgasms, how often, and at what age. The newspapers inform us of this regularly. Everyone knows the most relevant facts about what might be required for a woman to achieve orgasm, both on a technical level and in terms of care and trust. At the same time, most people know nothing about men’s orgasms—often not even men themselves. Without doubt, we are living in a strange age, which many call sex fixated. If that is the case, it is a fixation that hardly has terms for and knowledge of sexuality as such, in particular the sexuality of men.

Even though men raised this question as early as the 1970s (Holm 1975), and Wilhelm Reich (1927) wrote about it before then, it seems that the debate about the relationship between male sensuality and male sexuality never really took off. There could be several reasons for this. First, the marketplace is such that the thematic juxtaposition of women, the body, and sexuality is more marketable and better adapted to our usual point of view in which the connection between femininity and consumption is already established. Second, we know that our culture has not handed down a vocabulary that can establish a theme of male sensibility, the male body, and sensuality. The ideal male body is supposed to be hard in every way. It is supposed to be able to endure flogging, gunshots, stabs, and punches without a murmur. It also functions as a protective layer against emotional outbursts or, more precisely, a buffer to the world outside whereby emotions are kept within. It is also supposed to deliver what is expected in the way of sexual performance in any given situation.

**Parchment-like Sensibility**

The absence of a vocabulary for communicating bodily sensations and emotions is unsurprising given that the body and emotional life have been marginalized within...
patriarchal rationality since at least the seventeenth century. This has had far-reaching consequences for men, who have been seen to embody the idea of rationality, whereas women, on the contrary, have been associated with sensibility since the eighteenth century. Although men’s tears flowed freely right up to the breakthrough of the bourgeois morality and code of behavior, from the end of the nineteenth century, it became impossible for men in good social circles to shed as much as a single tear (Ekenstam 1998). To display too much emotion was no longer socially acceptable. Emotions were cut off along with the umbilical cord and were thereafter punishable in the name of good upbringing. These problems have provided thematic material for many literary works in the past century.

The combination of a hard body and the lack of a vocabulary for male sensitivity inevitably results in a dry and unresponsive skin impervious to caresses. Men are developing a parchment-like sensibility, impervious to touch, as opposed to a porous sensibility in which the skin allows for openings and intimacy. For such men, stimulation of the body as a whole, including sexually sensitive areas such as toes, nipples, and neck, is perceived as a waste of time. Focused on genital pleasure as the source of sensuality, other forms of physical stimulation remain underexplored, while the genitals themselves become oversensitized. It is as though all the body’s thousand areas of pleasure are being centralized and stored in one place, which works as an overfilled drawer, its contents spilling out even when it is opened very carefully.

This is made no better by the circumcision that millions of men around the world are subjected to as small children, cutting off the natural protection of the most sensitive area of the body. However, although there are comprehensive initiatives in place against female circumcision, the same is not true of male circumcision. As a consequence, many men are exposed to hypersensitivity at a young age and reduced sensitivity at a later age. However, when genital disfigurement is linked to power, it becomes harder to establish it as a theme for discussion than when it is linked to powerlessness.

**Biological Fantasies**

One of the great myths about male sexuality is linked to biological fantasies regarding men. As early as in the first comprehensive work on sexual practices in the Western world by Masters and Johnson (1970), sexuality as such is linked to biological/physiological phenomena: “Full penile erection is, for the male, obvious physiological evidence of a psychological demand for intromission. In exact parallel, full vaginal lubrication for the female is obvious physiological evidence of a psychological invitation for penetration” (p. 195). Seeing male (and in Masters and Johnson also female) sexuality in terms of physiology in this way has heavily impinged on men’s perceptions of themselves. Many men believe that an erection equals sexual desire, which means that the center of pleasure is placed in the penis rather than in the brain. Yet one could argue that the male sexual organ is the only
part of the male body that is not controlled by the will but instead governed by a complicated interaction between blood, nerves, and muscles. Men cannot control the raising or lowering of the penis by force of will. This means that men can experience erections in the most inconvenient situations. At least our culture, to a great extent, has made a taboo of the erect male member. Men may get erections when they cry or when they are angry or in many other situations in which the flow of blood is increased and the body is activated—situations that have nothing whatsoever to do with lust or sexuality. Perhaps the most common, and for many, the most difficult, of these situations is when a man has a child on his lap who moves continuously in such a way that an erection is produced. Some may misunderstand this, particularly in a culture that sees men’s feelings of physical pleasure in terms of physiology to such a great extent that too much bodily contact with children becomes a problem for men. However, in such situations, an erect penis is no more significant than getting a stiff knee from sitting too long in the same position.

Men’s sexuality is, to the same extent as its female equivalent, governed by the brain’s pleasure centers, which must be stimulated in various ways through sight, smell, taste, touch, and so on. That physicians, biologists, and cultural fictions have caused men to turn this upside down, associating the experience of pleasure with the penis, and referring to their penises as their brains, has created the basis for misunderstandings, self-deceit, a lessening of the real brain’s capability of pleasure, and the potential for sexual abuse. Sex becomes not just a weapon but a weapon that controls itself.

The biological viewpoint also functions as a justification for men’s use of pornography and prostitution. This is a main theme in Ingrid Smette’s (2003) recent report on prostitutes’ clients, *Den Seksuelle Slavestand? (The Sexual Slaves?)*. In her excellent report, in which she takes seriously men who frequent prostitutes, it turns out that the most important self-justification is their biological need for sex, instilled by nature. Smette writes of the men who buy sexual services:

Many also attach importance to the role of sex hormones in making a difference between the sexual drives of men and women. In the interviews, several of the men also claim that testosterone is the basic force behind the fact that men purchase sexual services. Testosterone makes the sex drive stronger in men, and this often leads to an imbalance between the man and the woman in a relationship when it comes to the need for sex. . . . Some of the clients refer to the strong sex drive as a burden. The sex drive makes it more difficult for men than for women to do without sex. (p. 81)

The clients are using their great drive to have sex, the biological pressure that forces them to go out and satisfy their urges, to legitimize their purchase of sex. It is therefore interesting when the same men state that they buy sex only once or twice a month: the “urgency” of their biological needs approximates the average sexual activity found among 80-year-old men.
These men’s arguments for their own sexual practices, then, have nothing to do with what they actually do but are instead taken from what are seen as culturally legitimate descriptions of male sexuality. The idea thus creates its own reality. This idea comes from the field of evolutionary biology, whose theoretical basis runs somewhat like this: because men produce millions of sperm cells, they have a biological predisposition to wish to mate with many women to spread their genes and increase their chances in the battle for the survival of the fittest. On the other hand, women produce only one egg per month and therefore have a biological predisposition to protect and preserve this one egg so that it may be shielded on its way toward reproduction. This means that men need many sexual partners, whereas women are predisposed to monogamy (and, on the next level, to staying home and taking care of the children).

This argument belongs to a host of theories based on an attempt to give natural explanations for an existing reality, with the following logic: it is an observable fact that men are unfaithful more often than women, therefore we must find a theory that will fit this reality. The answer is seen to be one of quantity versus quality; that is, men are built for quantity, women for quality. The problem, however, is that there is something the proponents of this theory fail to mention: no connection has been found between the production of sperm or eggs and sexual desire.

One might as well, then, turn this argument upside down and say that because women produce only one egg per month, they will have a biological need to mate with as many men as possible so that they can be certain that the egg will be fertilized with the best possible sperm available and that the family is carried on strengthened in the evolutionary struggle. It is not biology that creates such myths—it is culture (Kimmel 2000).

In a modern world, there are other forces and mechanisms that govern reproduction, and most people have the ability to produce the two children expected by a modern welfare society without having to resort to fantastical explanations about the number of sperm or egg cells. Medical science today has advanced far enough so that one does not need to produce one’s own sperm or eggs to reproduce. Thus, male sexuality has very little to do with biological predispositions. Nor are testosterone and estrogen of such a nature that they create systematic differences in men’s and women’s sexual drives. In the same way, men’s problems with premature ejaculation or impotence are only to a slight extent biological problems. They are, first and foremost, linked to mental processes. Impotence, for example, is a much greater and more comprehensive mental problem for men than most people are aware.

Additionally, when impotence is attributed to a physical or biological indisposition or flaw, anxiety increases for what is mostly a temporary incidence of impotence. Such impotence is commonly linked to the fact that a man does not want sex at a particular moment but nevertheless feels under pressure to perform. Impotence is therefore paradoxically the greatest problem in pornography and partly in prostitution—areas in which one would think that male sexuality is at its most masculine or in which the situation seemingly is tailored to the virile and superpotent man.
Susan Faludi (1999) writes in her comprehensive book *Stiffed*—which is concerned with the situation of masculinity in the United States in the 1990s—of the difficulties men in the pornographic industry have in getting erections. “Getting wood” is a slang phrase for getting an erection, which says a lot about how the male organ is viewed in terms of “nature.” In this instance, it is turned into a wooden stick. Often, shooting a pornographic movie may take a long time simply because the actors’ penises do not stiffen—a problem that is also one of the main reasons why several heroes in the business have taken their own lives. In this way, many men’s perceptions of the Mecca of sexuality as the venue for the cultivation of male sexuality are diametrically opposed to what actually goes on in the business.

**Masculine and Feminine**

In a report by Svein Mossige (2001) on young people’s attitudes toward sexual violation and abuse, 18-year-old boys and girls responded to questions about the traditionally masculine or feminine characteristics they ascribed to themselves. The responses are very interesting, because they reveal that in relation to what has traditionally been considered masculine qualities, the report shows no significant difference between the girls’ and the boys’ perceptions of themselves. When it comes to descriptions such as *independent*, *strong personality*, *strong*, *domineering*, and *aggressive*, the percentages of boys and girls who felt that they had these qualities were about the same. Actually, a slightly greater percentage of the girls than the boys attributed these qualities to themselves. This would indicate that old explanations of men’s behavior, linking it to ideas of male dominance or aggression, need to be modified. In our modern world, young women are as masculine as men in most areas, and it therefore becomes difficult to link a distinct male sexuality to existing concepts of masculinity.

In the case of so-called feminine qualities, however, the differences are notable. With respect to key terms such as *warm*, *tender*, and *comfort giver*, there was a striking difference between the girls and the boys, whereby the boys did not see themselves as providers of comfort or care to any significant degree.

This indicates that in a modern and egalitarian culture, such as that of Scandinavia, women have acquired masculine qualities (as traditionally understood) in such a way that the idea of masculine qualities no longer has any meaning. By contrast, men have not adopted qualities traditionally thought of as feminine to the same extent. In relation to sexuality, this implies that women take part in what is seen as a more masculine way of practicing sexuality, with more partners, increased infidelity, and a greater separation of sexuality and love. On the other hand, men have, albeit to a lesser degree, adopted the language of intimacy in their understanding of their own sexuality. Men have realized that a sexual relationship involves two parties and that both have the right to pleasure, but this has happened in such a way that men have
increased their knowledge of the female body but only to a small degree that of their own bodies and sexuality.

A good example of a woman who has conquered a new area of sexuality is Catherine Millet. Catherine Millet’s (2001) autobiography, *The Sexual Life of Catherine M.*, which was published in Paris, is a tale of comprehensive sexual experiences. The book is really a sexual autobiography rather than a full autobiography of the 54-year-old Millet, because we are told nearly nothing about Millet’s other activities or her position in France as a well-known editor, curator, and writer on art and cultural subjects.

In her book, Millet (2001) approaches sexuality like a gourmet would describe her recipes. It may be that she manages to create a language for sexual enjoyment precisely because she enters into a practice in which quantity leads to quality. This does not mean that quantity necessarily must lead to quality—drinking copiously does not necessarily lead to an appreciation of good wine—or that quantity is necessary for quality; one does not necessarily have to eat a lot to appreciate good food. However, with Millet, it is her absolute abandonment to sexuality that has enabled her to break the barrier posed by the absence of a language of sexuality and to create an integrated story of sexual life in which the reader is given very little other biographical information.

Often, intercourse itself, at least when it occurs between Millet (2001) and many men, is just a canvas for specific observations about point of view, the self, and the possibilities contained in the self. In such scenes, little is said of eroticism or the sexual act as such. It is the surroundings and the inner reflections of Millet that are important. In other situations, when the copulation involves the man she eventually chooses as her lifetime companion, which results in her losing interest in group sex, or when she masturbates, the description of the pleasure becomes more detailed and precise. In one of the chapters, she describes the act of making love under an open sky in which she gives us the following passage:

> Even the gentlest attention to the often ignored area which links the anal depression to the triangle where the labia meet—that underrated rut between the arsehole and the begging of the cunt—is guaranteed to subjugate me, and feeling the air against that part of my body is more intoxicating than high altitude. (p. 102)

Thus, she is capable both of sensing minute areas of the body and of creating a language to describe the sensation. From the point of view of Christian morality, much of the sex she engages in will probably be so objectionable for many readers (who secretly enjoy it, in the way Michel Foucault points out the contradiction between restrictions and the perpetual talk of sexuality) that they are unable to absorb a story that may provide readers a possibility of expanding their perceptions of sexual matters. It requires readers to free themselves of either their disgust or their envy of the fact that Millet has made love with many partners and often many simultaneously.
Millet’s (2001) book is concentrated on herself. She gives very scanty descriptions of the men (or women) with whom she has sex, and her accounts of the male participation in the group sex situations are brief. Not even in those situations in which a relatively random group of men form a relatively well-ordered line(-up) (organized and supervised by Millet’s close friend) to have sex with her one after another in a randomly chosen parking lot does she consider how men might experience the situation. Here, the male aspect is very clearly present, as the men let themselves be ordered into a line whereby they will perform precisely the same act in turn at a given point in time and must, in order not to disturb the system, carry out this act in a relatively short time. Millet never reflects on the mixture of discipline and pleasure this must entail. On the whole, she gives little attention to the men; they are only objects of her own sexual enjoyment and journey.

It is, however, absolutely necessary, if one wishes to understand male sexuality more clearly, to try to discover what is happening to those men who might be, for example, numbers 10 and 11 in the line(-up). What are they thinking? What are they saying to each other as they are standing in a public parking lot, in a well-organized line? In what way are they, collectively and individually, contributing to establishing a perspective of male sexuality? What kinds of feelings of pleasure are involved?

In this context, heterosexual line fucking is quite different from what goes on between lines of homosexual men. Gay men form sex lines that are based on reciprocity between men in a different way altogether, which is also to a significant degree based on play and games between men. In the line of heterosexual men, there is quite obviously a consciousness of the fact that the men belong to one group and the woman to another. Whereas the homosexual men maintain their individuality to a great degree in their sexual game, the individuality of the heterosexual men disappears in the parking lot line. This is something that Millet (2001) emphasizes in her book, as she maintains that she does not remember any of the men she had sex with in such situations. For her, the men become men without subjectivity or individuality.

Without having any more knowledge of such situations than my own imagination, I would think that any conversation between these men would be minimal and that rather than conversation, which brings out individuality, they would prefer the anonymity of silence. Dialogue also requires thought and reflection, something this type of situation will not allow. In other words, the men are willing to sacrifice their individuality on the altar of sexuality in exchange for maybe two minutes of sex in the back of a truck with a woman who is a complete stranger. If you are number 11 in the line, you will most likely be waiting for more than half an hour before emptying yourself into a woman you do not know and are not likely to meet again.

It is difficult to accept that this has anything to do with biology, be it hormones or sperm. In such a situation, the possibility of carrying on the family line, and any hormone-based urge, would have to be extreme to overshadow the humiliation these men would suffer if the police should happen to pass by (or their mothers).
Pleasure

However, the scene described by Millet (2001) says a lot about the significance of penetration and conquest in men’s sexual fantasies. It also says a good deal about how marginal a role pleasure plays in men’s sexual fantasies. In a situation such as this, in which the other men are waiting impatiently behind you, any sexual pleasure will be minimal (the excitement of doing something forbidden is probably far greater), and what little excitement the men experience will very quickly turn into remorse and shame as they hurry away afterward.

If pleasure were central to their sexuality, men would not be satisfied with a quick discharge but would have to engage in more time-consuming processes of enjoyment. In addition, it is this pleasure that provides the basis for a possible orgasm. Unfortunately for most men, the culture bolsters a myth of masculinity in which quantity is valued more highly than quality and the conquest of a new woman builds more masculine capital than the continuous conquest of the same woman over the course of twenty or thirty years. To satisfy the requirements of such masculine myths, men must be willing to perform according to given demands of a market all the time (often through the use of Viagra, penile enlargements, hormone products, silicone injections, and pornography), which gradually creates a separation between intimacy and sexuality. The problem is not necessarily that it should not be possible to have sex without or with limited emotional investment (there is no need for moralizing, either in relation to one-night stands or multiple partners) but that men’s relations to themselves, their own bodies, their own emotions, their own sensitivity, are gradually being weakened and worn down in a way that hinders a full and complete sex life.

In many ways, Millet’s (2001) book is an attempt to describe impenetrable pleasure. Pleasure can seem impenetrable because in a sense, it is enclosed around itself. During orgasm, one is fundamentally turned inward, with eyes closed, showing the world a caricature-like grimace. The feelings that flow through the body cannot be articulated. The pleasure of orgasm is without language and therefore indescribable. Millet does her best, through her accumulated language skills born of many years as a writer on art and culture, to present the horizon of pleasure she encounters within sexuality. In addition, the physical sensitivity and readiness for pleasure she shows through her story could just as easily have been attained through experience with a single partner as with multiple ones. In her description of sexual pleasure, it is not quantity that matters but rather the reflections on what is happening to her and her body in the meeting between herself and others.

Yet the most important description of sexual gratification in her book is precisely the description of masturbation in which she has plenty of time to devote herself to the experience of the interaction between the mental buildup and the body. For many, it may be disappointing to learn that after having had sex with hundreds of men, her conclusion is that sexual pleasure is best experienced through a masturbation scene.
This Sex That Is Two

Even though much could be said about the taboo in our culture against masturbation (which is still quite strong), attention should be drawn to the absence of something else: the absence of descriptions of the male sexual organ. Few things have been so seldom depicted and described and perhaps as strongly tabooed as the erect male member. Perhaps there is a connection between the psychoanalytical link between the most vulnerable part of the male body and the power (phallocentricity) that has made it impossible to approach the penis with tenderness and love. The male member all too easily becomes a tool or an instrument in the description and understanding of it. It becomes the necessary instrument of reproduction, an objectified part of the male body.

In literature, there are very few intimate and sensitive descriptions of the male sexual organ. Even in Jan Kjærstad’s (2003) defense of sexuality in his novel The Seducer, in which Aunt Laura’s favorite maxim, “cock is art,” governs large portions of the thematic material, there are few descriptions of the penis as such. On the other hand, the female sexual organ, the “yoni,” as Kjærstad likes to call it, is given a great deal of attention. In particular it is Rakel, the older sister of the main character, Jonas Wergeland, who takes it upon herself to educate her two younger brothers in the construction and function of the female genitalia, so that they will not go into the world ignorant of the important things in life. This is yet another example of the focus on and fascination with the female sexuality.

In more vulgar literature or in pornography, the male organ is by and large referred to as “big and quivering,” “blood-filled,” “throbbing,” “hard as iron,” and so on. It is rare to encounter the vulnerability and softness of the organ. If there is something that typifies the male genitalia, it is precisely the combination of the soft and the hard and of the swollen and insistent and the tender and unprotected. A man is extremely exposed when he has an erection—completely naked and therefore also mentally exposed. These contrasts and somewhat problematic positions in a man’s erotic world are nonsubjects.

Among those who have discussed the male sex organ is Susan Bordo (1999) in her book The Male Body. Here, precisely this duality of the soft and the hard is an important theme, and it is pointed out that this double-sidedness forms a clear contrast to Luce Irigaray’s (1985) contention that the male sex is one (in contrast to the female, which is characterized by a duality, with its two labia). The focus on the phallic hides and represses the dualism contained by the male anatomy, by favoring hardness over softness. Again, this is an example of the construction of the hard body.

Bordo (1999) finds almost no depictions of the soft penis in literature. There is, nevertheless, a beautiful passage in D. H. Lawrence’s ([1928] 1961) Lady Chatterley’s Lover in which Connie Chatterley is talking to the penis of her lover:
“And now he’s tiny, and soft like a little bud of life!” she said, taking the soft small penis in her hand. “Isn’t he somehow lovely! so on his own, so strange! And so innocent! And he comes so far into me! You must never insult him, you know. He’s mine too. He’s not only yours. He’s mine! And so lovely and innocent!” And she held the penis soft in her hand. (p. 114)

Lady Chatterley’s tender treatment of the man’s penis shows the way toward an acceptance of both the big and the small in the male body and psyche. The penis becomes a physical metaphor for the duality in men’s lives, whereby the small and soft is hidden and felt as a danger to masculinity, whereas in reality, it has the potential for another kind of access to the body and thus the ability of the skin to register and receive pleasure. The soft penis is also in a sense turned inward, in rest and in repose.

When the penis is raised and hardened, it refers to something outside itself, something beyond the self. It becomes a bridge that connects to the other, a link of flesh and blood between the self and the other. The penis in this state is very vulnerable both to the touch of the other and to mental blocks in the self. It is put in a situation in which it becomes an object both of the nearness of the other and the openness of the self.

**Fragmentation of the Body**

My earlier work considered the French psychoanalyst Michèle Montrelay’s understanding of male sexuality (Lorentzen 1998). She plays on the term *appareil*, meaning “apparatus” or “equipment,” when approaching masculinity. Through this term, it is possible to frame a set of elements that are part of sexuality: the noun *appareil* is also a term for the male sexual organ; the verb *appareiller*, which means “to get ready,” “to get outfitted,” “to gear up” and has a significance for the male state of readiness to carry out the sexual act and the act of setting sail, leaving the harbor, has a number of links to male fantasies, the relationship of a man to his mother, fear of commitment, or problem complexes directly linked to the phenomenology of orgasm, the ejaculation of semen, which thereby leaves the body as fragments of the male body; the semen as bits and pieces of the male body.

Very few philosophers or psychologists have examined the question of the importance of the concrete physical preparedness for the act of reproduction or for sex may have for men’s mental health. Montrelay does this by combining phenomenological and psychoanalytic points of view. Masculinity is supposed to be able both to produce an erection and to send out parts of itself on an unsafe journey toward union with the other. This involves two important things: pleasure and trust. Additionally, it is not the case, as many people believe, that there is a connection between erections and male aggression or will alone. The sensation of pleasure is a more comprehensive physical readiness, which is not linked to the lust for a woman alone but is built up through participation in a network of pleasure, which the man feels part of, according to Montrelay. (All references to Montrelay refer to a two-day seminar she gave in Oslo in 1993.) This network of pleasure is established in male
communities in which men see themselves as part of the symbolic heritage, which is passed from father to son or from man to man through the generations. Montrelay calls these networks of pleasure “fluid communities,” in which lust is transferred as a part of life without necessarily becoming an explicit theme. These fluid communities may be anywhere men gather, either in action, prayer, or meditation, and they are fluid because knowledge, experience, and feelings of lust flow between the men on a conscious as well as on an unconscious level.

These fluid communities are, however, vulnerable to various kinds of breaches, which can have disastrous consequences for individual men. Breaches may occur through fathers leaving their families and leaving voids, through violence, or through other forms of interventions or invasions, which hinder the free communication of ideas on an unconscious level. A community of men will therefore be as important in developing the ability to feel pleasure as the relationship between a man and a woman.

This state of preparedness for pleasure is part of the process of getting equipped for the sexual encounter and being capable of embarking on the journey that sexuality entails. This occurs both in the form of sexual devotion to the other and for ejaculation to feel like an orgasm sent out toward the other like a gift from me to you. In this meeting, the feeling of trust and security is a prerequisite, in the sense that the man must feel that there is the possibility of being cared for, so that the voyage out contains the possibility of returning. The opposite of security would be like a boat leaving harbor without the possibility of returning to shore and having to sail the open sea forever. This can be experienced as fragmentation, a split from various parts of the self, a division between body and mind, and may ultimately be felt as a menacing dissolution of the self. The man will have to protect himself against this through various compensatory aspects of the relation between himself and the woman.

Different stories about the fragmentation of the body are found throughout practically all of our cultural history. In mythology, there is a fascinating concern with fragmentations of men, as though it were conscious of the phenomenology that is the basis of the male sexual existence. In Greek mythology, Cronos separates his father Uranus (the sky) from his mother Gaia (the earth) by cutting off Uranus’ genitalia and flinging them far out into the sea. From the drops of blood are formed various mythological figures, and from the member itself, which drifts ashore on Cyprus, springs the goddess of love, Aphrodite.

The giants in Norse mythology are killed in the same manner, but Bjarthjelme, one of the giants, remains as a remnant in the shape of a seed hiding in a log. In Christian mythology, we find the story of Onan, who spilled his seed on the ground in his sexual relations with his wife Tamar because he did not want any offspring. For this, God makes him die. The fragmentation of the male body is both known and feared. The semen has a mythical dimension, and its misuse may lead to the death sentence. These myths must be considered figurative and metaphorical of the relation between masculinity, sexuality, and ideas about death within sexuality itself. The reason Onan refuses to reproduce is not found in his relationship to women but in the relation to his older brother, who dies childless and thereby causes Onan to
have to step in and marry Tamar, the wife of his brother. Therefore, Onan’s children may be recognized as his brother’s children and thus his brother’s heirs, which Onan does not want. His semen will not be cared for as a part of his body and the basis for continuing his line. This is a threat to Onan’s existence. Onan is an example of how male sexuality forms part of relations both to the male and female sides, and when the community of men is disrupted, it also threatens the relation to women. Onan was concerned only with himself in the sexual encounter, but he was punished for it, and this has become the master story for the moral guardians in their fight against masturbation.

A different but extremely important question raised by this example is the phenomenology surrounding the penetration itself. Onan does not wish to enter Tamar. He does not wish to let himself loose in such a way that parts of him enter Tamar. Our language and our very anatomy enable the woman to let the other come in. She opens herself up in such a way as to let the other in—into her body and into her soul. She surrounds the other and cares for the other’s body. The man is built to enter, to abandon himself in such a way as to give his body to the other. This situation contains an important existential question. Men are tricked into believing that their sole task is to penetrate, pierce, plunge into, or otherwise invade the female sphere, while not recognizing or opening up to the fact that they have an equally important choice to make about allowing the other into themselves. This is in a sense in direct opposition to the basic anatomic structure. How the man is to let the woman into himself in the sexual encounter is the man’s challenge. To be both physically and mentally prepared, and equipped, to set sail toward the other in a genuine coming together, the man must also have an idea of how to let the other into himself in the sexual encounter as such. This will be nearly impossible to achieve through the constant building of a hard body. The skin will become impenetrable, and the psyche intent on pushing away and penetrating the other. The porous structure of the body must be such that it is possible to let the other in. This requires the man to be hard and soft at the same time, both directed at the other and able to care for the other’s journey over to and into himself. Only then will a true meeting between an “I” and a “you” be possible.

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