

Name

Course

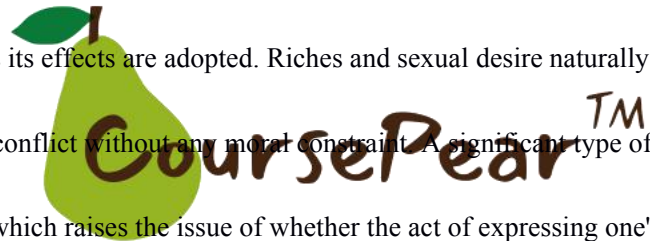
Prof

Date

Consistent Morality Despite Differing Opinions of Sexual Desire Expressions

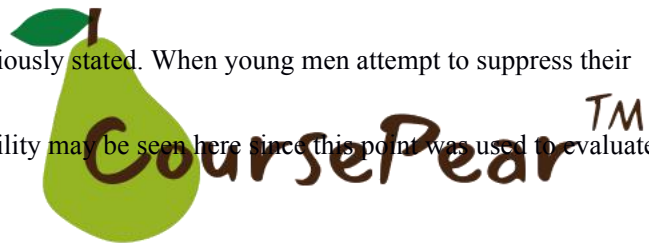
Today's Americans have the ability and freedom to express themselves verbally. This was made possible by major historical developments, such as the diverse voices in sexual discussions during the Antebellum era, which enabled individuals to discuss sexual issues openly via paper. Contradictory views on sexuality were apparent among the authors in Horowitz's *Attitudes Toward Sex in Antebellum America*. The sexuality issue was exacerbated by the nineteenth century's fall in moral standards in comparison to ancient times. It is critical to notice the constant focus on morality that pervades much of the debate about sexuality. While antebellum Americans had varying degrees of acceptance for sexual desire expressions during the nineteenth century, morality remained the central concept. It demonstrated its consistency throughout debates over issues of sexual portrayals such as the need to control impulses, the use of contraception, masturbation, and prostitution.

According to Lyman Beecher, the nineteenth-century fall in moral standards would negatively affect the whole country unless mitigating measures to address its effects are adopted. Riches and sexual desire naturally influence men's minds. As a result, men will live in conflict without any moral constraint. A significant type of restriction is the management of their sexual urges, which raises the issue of whether the act of expressing one's sexual instinct should be regulated, and if so, to what extent. Both Thomas L. Nichols and Mary S. Grove Nichols emphasized the need for males to express their sexual urges openly. Conformity to God's rule and



man's entire use of all his inherent abilities and satisfaction of all his natural desires were central to their view of morality. Abstinence from sexual expression exemplified the morality of civilization, in which men disobey the rule of nature. This was strongly discouraged by Nichols' concept of natural morality. If humans fail to fulfill their natural intrinsic inclinations, they are thought to have failed in their duty to God and have brought injustice upon themselves. On the contrary, Robert Dale Owen claimed that although sexual impulses are natural and necessary for humanity's survival, control over them can and should be attained for the greater good of society. For example, men's control over their wants may help future generations by enabling competent parents to offer better care for their children. Children born into impoverished slave-working households as a consequence of men's inability to control sexual urges will never know comfort or comparative prosperity. This reaffirmed Owen's view that, although nature dictates that males should reproduce without regard for calculation or constraint, men should make choices to suit their circumstances, not just be slaves to them. It was only moral for people to restrain their desires in order to preserve society's long-term well-being.¹

Divergent views on contraception were expressed, but the discussion about the need for sexual impulse control continued. Contraception, according to Robert Dale Owen, is the act of total abstention from sexual activity. He advocated for this self-control technique because he was worried about the overpopulation of children born into impoverished households, as previously stated. When young men attempt to suppress their sexual urges, this is a sign of honor. A high moral utility may be seen here since this point was used to evaluate



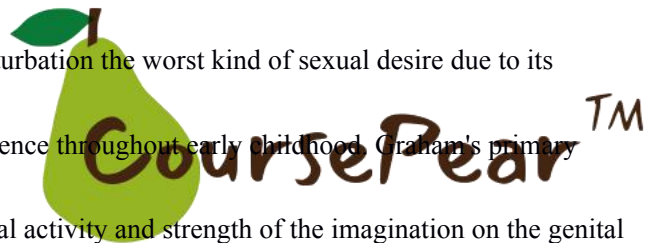
¹ For ideas about the decline in moral standards, see Lyman Beecher, "A Reformation of Morals Practicable and Indispensable" and "Resources of the Adversary and Means of Their Destruction," 43. For man's morality, see Thomas L. Nichols and Mary S. Grove Nichols, "Marriage," 121. For benefits of controlling sexual instinct, see Robert Dale Owen, "Moral Physiology," 54.

and appraise a man's social reputation. Additionally, women play a critical role in contraception. Because males alone have authority, women cannot protect themselves from the repercussions of men's negligence.

As a result, they must possess the capacity and determination to avoid associations with individuals devoid of honor. The little reduction in bodily pleasure seemed to be worth the long-term wellbeing of the community. Owen believed that the effort was beneficial, moral, and would civilize social life. On the other hand, Frederick Hollick, a sexual fanatic who advocated for early marriage and sexual activity, hated the concept of contraception. His conception of contraception was focused on abortion, and he decided that there was no safe method of obtaining it without jeopardizing the woman's life or wreaking havoc on her health if she survived. One method of preventing conception without resorting to abortion was called "coitus interruptus," which occurs when males withdraw ejaculation before. Hollick strongly warns against this since it resembles unsatisfying, harmful, and immoral masturbating. Both alternatives for women to get injections after intercourse and/or to introduce an instrument into the vagina with the intention of removing semen cannot be depended upon completely since semen will eventually be retained in the folds of the vagina, resulting in conception. Both writers' arguments included elements of morality.²

Masturbation was also a topic of discussion among Antebellum writers. The majority voiced disdain, such as Sylvester Graham. He considered adolescent masturbation the worst kind of sexual desire due to its complete lack of naturalness, immorality, and prevalence throughout early childhood. Graham's primary interest was for the welfare of young men. The mental activity and strength of the imagination on the genital organs were very strong and harmful, as represented in the whole neurological system. These impacts were

² For ideas of contraception, see Robert Dale Owen, "Moral Physiology," 54. For "coitus interruptus" and ideas of abortion, see Frederick Hollick, "Marriage Guide," 108.



more severe and pervasive in developing bodies than in mature ones. This includes feelings of humiliation and intense self-loathing for anybody who was a victim of the crime. Young males will retain an awareness of their defilement, which will forever impair the growing psyche and very certainly result in voluntary self-destruction. Masturbation was very harmful since it harmed men's intellectual and moral capabilities and corrupted the psyche. Charles Knowlton, a freethinker, was unique in maintaining a neutral position on masturbation. He highlighted the tragic consequences of inexperienced young men's mistaken assumption that wet dreams were a kind of masturbation. Knowlton saw masturbation as acceptable but nonetheless immoral rather than as enormously damaging and sinful. While irritation may result in masturbation, Knowlton observed that masturbation was not the primary cause of involuntary seminal discharges. As sinful as masturbation was, it was allowed if it assisted in coping with the involuntary discharges.³

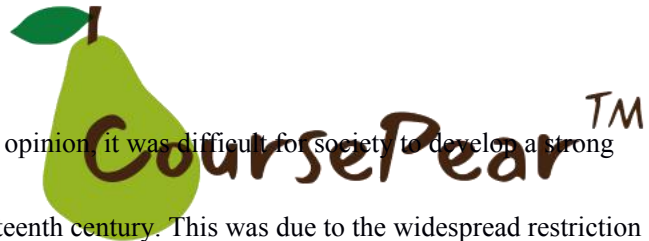
During the Antebellum period, prostitution was a big and flourishing industry. Brothel life was financially lucrative and attracted young girls who were banned from most other kinds of remunerative work. McDowall's Magdalen Report informed the otherwise ignorant people about the prostitute industry in New York. This sparked outrage among some who believed the study harmed children by giving an overview of brothel life. Prostitution was formerly seen as one of the most heinous kinds of moral depravity. The majority of prostitutes were daughters of impoverished parents or widowed moms forced to seek work in this manner by necessity. However, it was difficult to entirely blame females for the popularization of prostitution. It's a profitable economic incentive, compounded by the fact that some prostitutes are descended from the daughters of rich, respected, and devoutly religious people who were duped into brothels via the crime of rape. A scene from the

³ For perspective of youthful masturbation, see Sylvester Graham, "Self-Pollution," 72. For neutral opinion on masturbation, see Charles Knowlton, "Gonorrhoea Dormientium," 85.

Mysteries of Bond Street exemplifies this kind of deceit. Mary Sanders, whom John Mickle described as pure and innocent, was first captivated by Hurdell, her first betrayer. She ultimately became a prostitute as a result of her many disappointments with guys she believed might be her spouse. Sanders' moral fortitude gradually waned when men failed to fulfill her expectations and desires. She continued to live in a constant state of conflict between luxuries and desires, which shaped her into the immoral prostitute she was. ⁴

According to the Magdalen Report, it only took a few prostitutes to whole corrupt towns, implying that female prostitutes introduced more young men into this immoral behavior than male prostitutes. However, it's worth noting that males contributed substantially to the trade as well. Female interest in the business would not have soared there had not been such a strong demand for prostitutes in the first place. Prostitution was fueled by men like John Mickle and his friend, Fred Bevans, who expressed an interest in brothel life. Amanda Green's prostitution experience is an example of males seducing young women. She was a six-year-old educated prostitute who was abducted and subjugated by a guy called Chambers. Green returned to her mother after her discovery of Chamber's infidelity but soon fell prey to temptation once again. She was ejected from her home by her mother and left with little option but to engage in open prostitution in order to support herself. Contrary to the Magdalen Report's assertions, it was clear that both women and men share responsibility for the popularization of prostitution.⁵

Due to the mismatch between facts and popular opinion, it was difficult for society to develop a strong philosophy on sexual repression throughout the eighteenth century. This was due to the widespread restriction



⁴ For facts on prostitution, see John R. McDowall, "Magdalen Report," 126. For example of deceit into brothel life, see George Thompson, "Mysteries of Bond Street," 144.

⁵ For example of seduction of young women, see Sunday Flash, "Lives of the Nymphs, No. 11: Amanda Green," 130.

of publications containing any kind of sexual knowledge. The 1873 Comstock Law prohibited the sending of sexually explicit publications, which included all papers critical to understanding pre-Civil War sexual views. For example, Knowlton was tried several times in Massachusetts for obscenity in connection with the sale of his book *The Fruits of Philosophy* and spent time in prison. The writings of Thomas L. Nichols and Mary S. Grove Nichols, which detailed contraceptive methods and advocated for free love, are not available for purchase or reading in their entirety. Regardless, the authors persevered in disseminating their expertise. In conclusion, we can see a consistent presence of morality in the authors' works when they debate their perspectives on sexual desire manifestations, despite divergent views and prevalent restrictions.⁶



⁶ For censorship, see US Congress, "An Act for the Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use," 157. For Knowlton's prosecution, see Charles Knowlton, "Fruits of Philosophy," 60.