VICTORIAN SEXUALITY: CAN HISTORIANS DO IT BETTER?

During the past several years, alert readers have been asked to do an almost complete about face in their views of Victorian sexuality – at least the sexuality of women. From strange or viciously repressive museum pieces – a standard against which all sensible moderns could rebel – the Victorians bid fair to become sexually normal, even quietly liberated. This change of view has been brought about by several major histories, duly hailed by most reviewers. But the result has been a rather unintegrated view of Victorian sexuality, which must be improved upon, and a serious lack of connection between the history of sex and current issues and problems.

Thus one recent *New York Times* reviewer urges us to see that the 19th-century bedroom was not "a place greatly different from the bedrooms of today," urging that we correct "our tendency to exaggerate the differences between ourselves and people of the past."[1] Her assumption is that sex drives are sex drives and that the kind of expressive sexuality we think we enjoy today was also experienced by the Victorians. Which sounds good, but only if we are sure that, in sexual history, some of the differences we are familiar with are surface only. In fact we cannot yet be sure, and it is important to our understanding of both bedrooms to keep key issues open – despite the interesting popularity of the most recent effort to recharge Victorian sexual batteries.

This essay evaluates recent work in the field of Victorian sexuality, with particular attention to the problem of interpreting the relationship between Victorian and contemporary patterns. Important studies by Carl Degler and most recently by Peter Gay have opened up the issue of this relationship without, however, exploring it. Their work raises exciting new interpretive possibilities, which we briefly explore, but also important problems which neither these authors nor most of their reviewers have adequately treated – and these problems set the framework for the most promising exploration which is sketched in the final portion of the essay. It is vital now to discuss how to build further, toward a fuller view of Victorians themselves and of the passage from Victorian to contemporary sexuality.

The first historians who wrote on the subject of Victorian sexuality, such as Stephen Marcus and Peter Cominos, portrayed the Victorians as almost entirely repressive and repressed.[2] They based their interpretations on reading a few writers of marriage manuals, such as William Acton, often quoted for his belief that "As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. . . ."[3] Abundant Victorian pornography might be used, as with Stephen Marcus, to show the dirty underside of repression, and to remind us that among men, at least, there were some outlets which strictest Victorianism did not condone. But these revelations largely confirmed the view of mainstream Victorian prudery, and its strict enforcement on respectable women. This view certainly persists, in efforts to ridicule Victorian oddities,[4] or in the currently-popular fashion of berating male doctors for their brutal enforcement of Victorianism on hysterical or "deviant" women.[5]

But the most important histories of the subject have altered and almost reversed the earlier conventions, to the extent that standard Victorianism becomes virtually an invention of radical critics bent on justifying new manners by belaboring a mythic past. No longer are we to believe that the typical Victorian girl felt compelled to drape

piano legs with pantaloons to protect her modesty. Far from it. Starting with Carl Degler's path-breaking article in the *American Historical Review* in 1974,[6] and following with the publication of the now widely cited Mosher report, in 1980,[7] we have been told that Victorian women, far from being revolted or frightened by sex, took it as a normal and pleasurable part of married life and were often orgasmic. Most recently the sexual revisionists have been joined by Peter Gay, who in his *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud, Education of the Senses*,[8] uses the material from the Mosher report and adds compelling corroboration from the diary of Mabel Loomis Todd. This lady, who recorded her sexual encounters with a short-hand that includes notation for orgasms, enjoyed a heady and successful relationship for many years with her husband, and then went on to employ the same sexual athleticism in a long-lasting affair with Austin Dickinson, Emily's brother.

The Mosher report, unpublished in Mosher's own time, was the result of a survey by a female physician on the sexuality of her comperes. Based on questionnaires answered by 45 women, 70% born before 1870, the forms were completed between 1892-1920. Most of those who answered were upper middle class college graduates, and as such not necessarily typical of Victorian females. The fact that they replied to the survey at all also suggests that they may not have been typical. Still, neither Degler nor Gay is naive, and they are far from making the claim that all Victorian women had a great time in bed. Nonetheless, they are both asking us, on the basis of just the type of evidence we have cited, to revise our views of Victorian female sexuality. Thus, Degler:

> A frank and sometimes enthusiastic acceptance of sexual relations was the response from most of the women...[intercourse was seen as part] of healthy living and frequently a joy...the great majority of them...experienced orgasm as well as sexual desire.

And thus again, Gay:

> the answers Dr. Mosher elicited carry conviction and have a meaning beyond the group of forty-five...they have the authenticity of awkwardness. Their artless and earnest candor is a clue to desires and fulfillments of which they were only partially aware...it is congruent with other, more informal testimony...Mabel Todd, in short, spoke for a substantial population of married middle-class women.[9]

Degler read Mosher to say that 35% of the respondents usually or always had orgasms in intercourse, and another 40% sometimes did. Gay reads this to mean that a third almost always did and another 40% were only marginally less satisfied.[10]

Neither Gay nor Degler dismisses all traces of a distinctive Victorianism. Degler notes, from Mosher, the women who had to abstain from sex during periods when conception could not be risked. Gay rather approvingly discusses the hypocrisy of Victorian culture, which said one thing about sex while doing another. But both interpretations present actual sexual behavior and values in a strikingly modern guise. It would be easy, reading them, to assume that Victorianism barely existed, describing 19th-century sexuality no more than, say, papal pronouncements describe the birth control attitudes and practices of contemporary American Catholics.

For the most part, the response of the historical community to this revisionist view has been favorable. To be sure, the new interpretation is still ignored by those who enjoy using Victorianism as a foil for a critique of modern males and modern medicine. But few critics have actually attacked the central findings about middle-class sexual behavior. There are several reasons for this. Historians learned some time ago that Victorianism was not as pervasive as once believed. It never described mainstream working-class sexuality during most of the 19th century, and indeed was partly directed at some fairly accurate perceptions of working-class indulgence in premarital sex and rising rates (to 1870) of illegitimacy.[11] It does not come as a total surprise, then, to

find the Victorian code even less descriptive than this first modification allowed.

And historians do like revisions. We may have grown bored with the stereotype of uptight Victorians and open to a newer and hence more interesting stereotype. Some implicit dismay about contemporary sexuality, which derives part of its justification from ringing attacks on Victorian prudery (see Gay Talese for a recent example),[12] may also fuel the revision. A statement that Victorians were, in the main, sexually healthy might restrain contemporary penchants for sexual experimentation. Certainly it is a useful corrective for some exaggerations to know that Victorianism was partly invented in order to make 20th-century sexual achievements look good. Scholars like Carl Degler, sympathetic to feminism, may have been uncomfortable with the notion that female sexuality could have been so totally annihilated by a repressive culture as historians like Cominos had claimed. Or a Freudian true believer like Gay can enjoy the idea that biology or anatomy, even female biology/anatomy, must override culture; certainly a large portion of Gay's particular interpretation rests on assumptions of psychological constants such that history, rather than seriously testing a particular theory, must simply confirm it.

But, however attractive, revisionism often goes too far. In this case, we believe that significant interpretive problems remain which have not yet been addressed with any seriousness. It is amusing to reverse images, and we would certainly agree that some modification of the older conventions is now essential. But several problems remain, before we abandon Victorianism as an ill-tempered artifact.

Three avenues of inquiry tend to shed some doubt on the idea of the sexy middle-class Victorian. One, most obvious, is the evidence that Gay has chosen to ignore, and Degler to minimize, about Victorian preachments. Two, which follows in part, is what we know or suspect about the way children's sexuality is socially influenced. Three is the accumulated wisdom we have about rates of sexual dissatisfaction among contemporary women, which raises vital questions about the relationship between 19th-century sexuality and more recent trends. Let us examine each of these areas.

First we have the problem of the massive literature the Victorians published on the lack of female sexuality. These views were not buried in academic treatises or even medical journals; they entered into popular manuals, magazines and fiction. Female sexuality was seen by many Victorian physicians, clergymen and novelists as abnormal. To be sure, Acton himself, the most noted proponent of the asexual view of women, has been overquoted. Degler and Gay discuss authors such as Dr. George H. Napheys and Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell who believed quite differently, arguing that female sexuality was normal and expected. A large middle ground embraced authorities who admitted the possibility of female sexual pleasure but found the female sex drive, nevertheless, much less vigorous than the male, and usefully so in keeping sexuality within proper bounds. In sum, the Actonites themselves were hardly silent, and their views were echoed in part by a still larger group. Without pretending to know exactly which school of thought was most popular, it is fair to note that the few who really undertook a more radical view of female sexuality knew full well that they were bucking the mainstream. So if we are going to revise our views of Victorian female sexuality, we need to explain how it was that a substantial literature existed which denied that the sexuality existed, supplemented by other works which were only slightly less extreme in judging women's sexual needs. What was the function of this literature in its culture?

Degler has made much of the relationship between the repressive Actonites and the need for women to use the limitation of sexuality as a form of birth control. This he sees as part and parcel of the rising power of women within their marriages over the course of the nineteenth century. We agree, for the most part, with his view that the notion of asexual womanhood was to some extent fostered by women, and beneficial to them. We cannot, however, concur with his cheerful assumption that the Actonites,

while they helped women to achieve greater control of sexual relations, had no deleterious effect on those relations. For instance, Degler in his 1974 article insisted that most people disregarded the admonitions of the Actonites for "the attitudes of ordinary people are quite capable of resisting efforts to reshape or alter them." Degler avoids quite such definite statements in his revised view of the Mosher report as discussed in the 1980 book, *At Odds*, but in this case he simply leaves the problem unaddressed. How can it be true that Victorian women used the myth of sexless femininity as a method of birth control and a means to achieve moral superiority over their husbands, but at the same time did not find their sexual pleasure inhibited by this same stereotype? Degler, optimistic and sympathetic toward women, is perhaps unwilling to face an unpleasant contradiction.

Gay, if anything, has been more oblivious to the problem than Degler. He does present us with a chapter in his book detailing the vast difficulties the Victorians experienced with pregnancy, childbirth, and ignorance over birth control, but he nowhere integrates this with what he says about Victorian sexuality. Does he really believe that a woman's feelings about the results of sexual intercourse have nothing to do with her feelings about intercourse?

Gay is far less satisfactory than Degler in his attempt to explain the Actonites. At one point he dismisses them as physicians who were simply anxious about their own lack of "professional potency." Perhaps realizing that this seems a bit flippant, he then does admit that there may have been more to the view which was, after all, widely accepted by non-physicians. Perhaps, he says, it can be explained as part of the general Victorian anxiety about the issue of control versus expression. This is not very satisfactory, however, after we have been regaled with several chapters on the uninhibited sexuality of many Victorian women. Gay's statement on the Actonites, contained in the parts of the book arguing the true sexuality of the Victorians, is more worthy of a polemicist than a historian:

> Few of the physicians pronouncing in this delicate area . . .were wholly disinterested . . .the medical literature . . .runs counter to the revelations of sexual pleasure that diaries, journals, fiction, and surveys disclose . . .By the end of the nineteenth century, the controversy over female sexuality . . .had become wholly unproductive . . .the real world left the debaters behind.[13]

It certainly is strange to see an intellectual historian such as Gay telling us that a widely debated Victorian controversy was not part of "the real world" and acting as though books written a hundred years ago should be berated rather than explained.

Victorian views on sexuality – if not always rigorously Actonite – certainly went beyond intellectual discourse alone. They affected, indeed largely determined, longstanding legislation on censorship and the publicity of birth control, both of which could influence actual sexual behavior.[14] And a similar Victorianism pervaded middle-class childrearing, such that well into the twentieth century school authorities, listing problems with female charges, attended to sexual issues above all. During the Victorian period itself, we still have every reason to believe that girls were taught about the horrors of masturbation, frightened about bodily functions such as menstruation, and denied frank discussions about female anatomy and the prerequisites of sexual satisfaction. And we have every reason to believe that this childrearing style is a good way to inhibit the enjoyment of adult sexuality. Degler and Gay give us no indication that they challenge the historical wisdom in this area, which is that Victorian girls would have been forcibly corrected if caught fondling themselves; that they would not have been encouraged to examine their own bodies or to discuss the sexual functions of their own bodies; that nobody would have taught them about the pleasures or necessity of foreplay. In helping women who are sexually dysfunctional today, Masters and Johnson and others have stressed the importance of undoing just these Victorian

deficiencies. Self-examination of the female organs, then masturbation and learning to reach organsm are now seen as important waystations toward orgasmic satisfaction with a partner.[15] How did Victorian women manage to function so well when they were forbidden from childhood to do exactly what we think women need to do in order to function well today? If Degler and Gay know, they certainly do not explain.

Finally, there is the issue of the ongoing problem of female sexuality even in our own more open society – an issue easy enough to understand if we assume a genuine Victorian legacy in childrearing, but far harder if we are to believe in widespread female satisfaction a century ago. Shere Hite gained national attention in 1976 by claiming that more than two thirds of married women never achieve orgasm with sexual intercourse alone, and by recounting the great difficulty with which many others managed to achieve that potential for pleasure. Hite was widely criticized for taking a sample of women who had a complaint to typify all women, and in fact her problem was not unlike that of Dr. Mosher years earlier: how do we know if the women who answer a survey are typical of women in general? But in the contemporary case, more scientifically organized inquiries into the question of female orgasmic dysfunction have produced startling results not dissimilar to those of Hite. Three University of Pittsburgh researchers inquired about sexual function from 100 predominantly white, well-educated couples defining themselves as happily married. The questions relating to sexual adjustment were a small part of a large questionnaire covering many aspects of marriage. The project was specifically designed so as to avoid selecting for those who had a particular sexual axe to grind, as Hite's respondents may have had. This study, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1978, revealed that 46% of the women had difficulty, and an additional 15% reported a complete inability to have an orgasm – in total 63% reporting some difficulty with orgasm. Since these researchers did not discuss the method used to reach orgasm, it is possible that those who easily attained orgasm with intercourse alone may have been even fewer than the remaining 37%. In short, although disagreeing on the importance of sexual difficulties in marriage, this scientific study was in substantial accord with Hite's findings on the specific subject of the statistics of orgasmic achievement.[16]

Obviously, this accord, juxtaposed with the new reading of the Victorian experience, raises fascinating interpretive problems. For women, at least, the twentieth century becomes not even a tentative step forward, but a massive regression in terms of sexual pleasure and orgasmic ability. Here is a reversal, not only of standard teachings about Victorianism, but of successive twentieth-century proclamations of sexual revolutions or at least increasing sexual freedom, stretching from the Bloomer girls of the late nineteenth century to the flappers to the premarital adepts among middle-class girls of the 1960s. Could it really be true that for all our hype about the sexual revolution, and the undeniable improvements in middle-class birth control knowledge and technology, the female majority, at least, is less orgasmic than their Victorian great-grandmothers? The prospect is worth considering, if only because of excessive brainwashing about our sexual prowess today. It can feed some recent feminist complaints that the current sexual revolution is actually male-dominated, for all the public concern about greater equality of pleasure. And the possibility of a sexual reversal, as against our ingrained expectations of progress in this area at least, is genuine; it cannot be dismissed out of hand. But possibility does not make certainty; the problem must be discussed, particularly in light of the undeniably different sexual culture and probably somewhat different socialization of the Victorian period. It is odd and unsatisfactory that the historians who have rediscovered Victorian sexuality not only have not offered a plausible interpretation of the Victorian-contemporary relationship, but do not seem to have noticed what a strange problem they have created for our understanding of ourselves.

There are some serious avenues to explore concerning the possibility of a decline in women's sexual pleasure. Perhaps when people viewed sex as part of a larger spiritual experience and allowed it to retain an aura of mystery, a lure of the forbidden, sex was better. Perhaps the current emphasis on the physical aspects of sex, on the mechanical requirements, has done us in. This would not be totally implausible. Masters and Johnson, in *The Pleasure Bond*, did argue to some extent along these lines and even Hite concurred at least in suggesting that sex would be better in the context of a generally meaningful relationship and with less emphasis on mechanics. Recent findings on the continued two to one disparity between women and men concerning the emotional connotations seen in sex raise related issues about whether women have been somewhat misled by contemporary sexual standards, into accepting male-oriented mechanics disguised as mutual pleasure-seeking. To be sure, it would be hard to argue for a full return of Victorianism, with punishments for little girls' masturbation, long dresses, whispers about menstruation and childbirth, and ignorance of genitalia; but perhaps, despite what we think we know now, these are desirable concomitants of a better female sex life. We might ponder other Victorian imitations, including greater average disparity between male and female marriage age, such that the husband has more paternal overtones; and a clearer double standard, whereby men are commonly initiated to sex first, often by female professionals. These Victorianisms, too, might have aided marital sexuality, even though they displeased nineteenth-century feminists.

The contemporary sexual culture may also have erred, in contrast to Victorianism, in emphasizing frequency of sex (and the amount of marital sex almost certainly began to rise in the 1940s or 1950s, creating a generational gap still visible among older people today).[17] Despite recent glee in discovering women's capacity for multiple orgasm, women might have done better, and felt themselves in fuller control, when intercourse took place less often, in part for contraceptive reasons. Current sexual frankness may also have raised the standards for women's evaluation of their own sexuality, creating new anxieties that can be counterproductive.

Certainly, the issue of female sexuality is complicated, and it is not at all clear that we know enough about the factors that influence it. Seymour Fisher's book on the subject, perhaps the most ambitious effort to search for those factors, admitted to disappointment in coming up with many negative results. Particularly striking, in view of widely held beliefs about the importance of liberal sexual education and an attitude of approval toward sexual functions on the part of parents, is that Fisher found those factors utterly unimportant. His most striking discovery was that it was a girl's relationship to her father which was crucial in determining her ability to achieve orgasm. She would be more successful if she had a father whom she could trust not to withdraw his love, and from whom she felt consistent care and supervision,[18] even if she experienced the father as authoritarian and intrusive. This is particularly interesting in relation to Christopher Lasch's evocation of the ideal Victorian father in *Haven in a Heartless World*, a father type he and others now find in decline. Is it possible that Victorian women actually had a more favorable childhood experience in terms of the development of sexual potential than contemporary women, the daughters of liberal but relatively (at least Lasch would argue) uninvested fathers? One does not know, but here, at least, would be a fruitful line of investigation, and one avenue by which to explain the Victorian-contemporary disparity. It remains disappointing, however, that Degler and Gay have not canvassed this possibility. Both have largely overlooked the question of the relationship between childrearing and sexual success as an adult. For Degler, this seems to be because he has not thought about the general problem of female sexual dysfunction, for Gay because he is aware only of the Freudian literature, which cannot be integrated with his other notion that highly repressed Victorians were also highly sexual. Nevertheless, it may prove illuminating, for an

understanding both of Victorian and of contemporary sexuality, to explore the possibility that Victorian childrearing was more conducive to sexual adjustment than we once believed.

Without pretending to have all the answers to the new questions raised about Victorian sexuality, we do confess some hesitation in totally reversing the commonplace assumptions about the contemporary relationship to past sexuality. And there are two other, possibly related ways to deal with the Victorian evidence.

One approach to the newly discussed sources, particularly the Mosher report, is to question that these women meant the same thing we do when they talked about orgasm. In our reading of Mosher, of those who say they "always" had an orgasm, we find more than half (10/18) difficult to take at face value. We doubt that these women mean the same thing modern women mean by orgasm when we find that they consistently wish for a lower frequency of sex, are skeptical that pleasure is an important part of the sexual relationship, and are either silent or strikingly unenthusiastic in describing how orgasm makes them feel. We know that many of Hite's women report being uncertain as to what an orgasm is and are often confused as to whether they have had one or not. Seymour Fisher also attested to the great variety of experience which is actually encompassed when women use the word orgasm. It is clear that Mosher's respondents were trained to think of sex as part of a total marital experience, and that it was very important to them to view that marital experience as satisfactory. We wonder, then, if they did not overestimate rather than underestimate in their claims to orgasm. Their precision may also have been hampered by embarrassment at dealing with sexuality at all openly, even though their survey participation was voluntary.

What we can surmise about Victorian sexual practices is certainly in accord with our doubts. Marriage manuals and childhood training would certainly have prepared neither husband nor wife to think in terms of lengthy foreplay and clitoral stimulation, especially during the act of coitus. (Interestingly, even doctors daringly interested in female orgasm seemed confused about the functioning of the clitoris.)[19] How can it be that Hite's subjects so often have needed clitoral stimulation during coitus, while Mosher's, reporting no concommitant clitoral stimulation, had less difficulty? Interestingly enough, those few of Mosher's subjects who do discuss the need for forplay or difficulties of timing, also seem more frank in answering that they don't "always" but do "sometimes" reach orgasm. They also seem to have more to say about what an orgasm does for them than those who claim "perfect" satisfaction.

It is unpleasant to assume the role of sexual interrogator to the Mosher women, but one cannot help wondering if there was not a self-deluding quality in some of their responses. There is always reason for skepticism about what people say about themselves on surveys, and Degler and Gay have been surprisingly naive in their reading of this one, admittedly fascinating, Victorian approximation of survey data.

Of course the numerical approach to the data may be essentially misleading, encouraging an apples and oranges comparison among surveys. We cannot be sure, for example, what Mosher's respondents meant when they said they had orgasms but not "always:" are these 40% "not always" women the equivalent of Hite's women who complain if they cannot reach orgasm "regularly," or Kinsey's 41% of women in their twentieth year of marriage who have orgasm in between one and 90% of coital encounters?[20] In other words, it may be possible that about the same percentage of women have usually achieved orgasm from coitus through the last 100 years, but that their attitudes about their percentage achievement have changed. Certainly, it is clearer that expectations have changed, among other things increasing dissatisfaction, than that actual sexual experience has deteriorated. This conclusion is enhanced by evidence about changes in the sexual attitudes of middle-class women during the early decades of the twentieth century. In Britain, Marie Stopes, a botanist bitterly disillusioned by her own failed marriage and subsequent discovery of the possibility of orgasmic

pleasure, drew thousands of letters after 1918 from women who wanted to know more about this interesting but unfamiliar physical phenomenon. The women stressed simultaneously their lack of regular intense sexual pleasure from marital intercourse and their happiness with marriage and with their husbands – thus serving as a waystation between Mosher's marriage - first women and Hite's dissatisfaction - first group.[21] The suggestion – and it cannot be more at this stage of research – is that the twentieth century has produced increasing knowledge of female orgasm without commensurately increased ability to achieve it in marital practice, and that gradually the definition of the role of sex in marriage has shifted as well. This focus on changes in attitude is not to say that historical inquiry into percentage of orgasm is unimportant, but simply to recognize the complexity of interpreting the significance of any statistics discovered. Victorian women may, in sum, have had happier sex lives than contemporaries but because of a different outlook, not because of more abundant orgasm.

A note of caution must assuredly be introduced into the "new" interpretation of Victorian sexuality, and more complicated questions explored than have been undertaken to date. Victorian culture cannot be dismissed too lightly. It had purpose, not only as a lament against modernity (which it was for some advocates), but also an encouragement to birth control and a protest against lower-class behavior patterns. The impact of perscriptive literature – repressive in the Victorian period, permissive and sometimes even erotic during the past three decades – poses a difficult interpretive problem, but one that must be faced. If it is true that early histories of Victorianism simplified the prescriptive literature and took it too much at face value, scholars like Gay and Degler have gone too far in the other direction. In fact, we know that prescriptions had real impact on some individuals, like the Frenchwoman described by Theodore Zeldin who tried to divorce her husband for seemingly modest sexual advances, or the many parents who punished masturbation.[22] The Mosher report certainly suggests that the number of middle-class women who took Victorianism literally may have been limited. But we argue that it also suggests that, compared to contemporary expectations of orgasm, the attitudes of most such women also incorporated a large slice of modified Victorianism, which made them look at their sexual experience in distinctive ways.[23] To be sure, another minority undoubtedly defied Victorianism altogether, and wrote diaries to prove it. But the most interesting group, the complex majority, must be sought with subtlety, through evidence that includes prescriptive advice and socialization, evaluative language as well as apparently measurable experience.

And of course the interpretation of Victorianism has important bearing on our understanding of ourselves. We cannot revise our views of the Victorians and at the same time ignore the issues of contemporary sexuality. We cannot reinterpret the Victorians at the cost of abandoning all our notions about the results of childrearing, at least without explicit discussion. Those who simplify the Victorian experience miss a precious opportunity to contribute to vital theoretical issues including the relationship between culture and behavior and the variability of behavior itself over time. We will never have all the answers we want, just as we remain ignorant of much in our own sexual experience and that of a partner. But it is important to press forward, to ask a wider array of questions than either the conventional or revisionist approach to Victorianism has yet produced. Precisely because we inevitably use past standards to measure current directions of sexuality, it is important to assess these standards with due awareness of complexity. Victorian sexuality once inspired fear and revulsion; now some Victorian practitioners can actually titillate. We have yet, perhaps, to find the balanced analysis that can truly inform.

Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic Carol Zisowitz Stearns
Carnegie-Mellon University Peter N. Stearns

FOOTNOTES

1. Diane Johnson, review of Polly Longsworth, ed., *Austin and Mabel: The Amherst Affair and Love Letters of Austin Dickinson and Mabel Loomis Todd*, in *New York Times Book Review*, March 4, 1984. p. 3.

2. Stephen Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-19th Century England* (New York, 1977); Peter Cominos, "Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict," in Martha Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington, IN: 1972).

3. Peter Gay, *Education of the Senses, Vol. 1: The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud* (New York, 1984), p. 163.

4. Duncan Crow, *The Edwardian Woman* (New York: 1978); see also Bernard I. Murstein, *Exploring Intimate Lifestyles* (New York, 1978).

5. G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1976); Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (New York: 1976).

6. Carl N. Degler, "What Ought to Be and What Was: Women's Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," *American Historical Review* 79, no. 5, (1974): 1468-1491; also Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York, 1980).

7. Celia D. Mosher, *The Mosher Survey* (Salem, NY, 1980).

8. Gay, passim.

9. Gay. pp. 143-144. Degler, "What Ought to Be," 1486-90.

10. Degler, *At Odds*, p. 263; Gay, p. 136.

11. Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York, 1975).

12. Gay Talese, *Thy Neighbor's Wife* (New York, 1980).

13. Gay, p. 164.

14. James Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society: From Private Vice to Public Virtue* (Princeton, NJ, 1983).

15. William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (Boston, 1970), passim.; Helen Singer Kaplan, *The New Sex Therapy* (New York, 1974), pp. 47ff, 388.

16. Shere Hite, *The Hite Report* (New York, 1981). Ellen Frank, Carol Anderson, Debra Rubinstein, "Frequency of Sexual Dysfunction in 'Normal' Couples," *New England J. of Medicine* 299:111-115 (July 20), 1978. See also Kaplan, *New Sex Therapy*, pp. 340-341, 378ff, 397ff.

17. Linda K. George and Stephen J. Weiler, "Sexuality in Middle and Late Life: The Effects of Age, Cohort, and Gender," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 38 (1981): 921-923.

18. Seymour Fisher, *The Female Orgasm, Psychology, Physiology, Fantasy* (New York, 1973), pp. 404-405.

19. Denslow Lewis, "The Gynecologic Consideration of the Sexual Act," and William H. Masters, "Half a Century of Unnecessary Sexual Myths," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 250:2 (1983): 222-227, 244.

20. Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia, 1953), Table 112.

21. Ellen M. Holtzman, "The Pursuit of Married Love: Women's Attitudes Toward Sexuality and Marriage in Great Britain, 1918-1939," *Journal of Social History* 16 (1982): 39-52.

22. Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848-1945: Ambition, Love and Politics, V. 1* (New York, 1973); R.P. Neuman, "Masturbation, Madness, and the Modern Concepts of Childhood and Adolescence," *Journal of Social History* 8 (1975): 1-27.

23. Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, 1982). Rosenberg is the only historian to date who has read the Mosher report in this frame of mind, and she too has been struck with the reservations most of the respondents had about marital sex, their wish to decrease its frequency and their general anxiety. See pp. 181-85.