

# Sexual Economics: Heterosexual Sexual Behavior As Predicted by Basic Economic Principles

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# The Study of Money

There has been much research on

- o Materialism
- o Desire for Money
- o Income
- o Financial Strain
- o Maladaptive spending habits

Although these are important, the psychological consequences of money had been yet unstudied

“Everywhere sex is understood to be something females have that males want.”

-D. Symons (1979)

# Sexual Economics: Core Ideas

- > Sex is a female resource
- > Male sexuality has no exchange value
- > Men give women other resources in exchange for sex (money, time, attention, love, commitment, status)
- > Local sexual marketplaces exist that interlink the sexual decisions of many couples

# Economic Approach to Human Behavior

As defined by Gary Becker (1976), 4 assumptions:

- 1) Behaviour of individuals is interconnected in market systems in which individual choices shaped by costs and benefits in context of stable preferences
- 2) Scarce but desirable resources are allocated by price shifts and other market influences
- 3) Sellers of goods or services compete with each other (as buyers also sometimes do, but not as much)
- 4) People seek to maximize their outcomes

# Sexual Economics: Core Ideas

- > Sexual interactions are not equal: She gives sex, he receives it (she is supply; he is demand)
- > Sex will have a market price (can be money, but not necessarily)
- > Price will fluctuate with supply and demand, and other factors
- > High price favors women, low price favors men
- > Sellers compete and collude more than buyers

# Theoretical Context

- > Social exchange theory “Principle of least interest”
- > Men have much stronger sex drive than women  
(Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001; Pers Soc Psy Rev)
- > Nature, evolution: resources for sex
- > Cultural material resources controlled by males; women need access
- > Local sexual norms are “going rate” - but kept secret somewhat; hence gossip about who does what and distortions about amount

# Prostitution & Paying for Sex

- > Widespread gender asymmetry: women don't pay for sex
- > Even male prostitutes mostly have male clients
- > Multi-method searches of johns found two women
- > Rare reverse cases must be heavily camouflaged
- > \$ for kiss from movie star (Loewenstein, 1987):  
substantial #s of women reported that there is no price  
they would pay for a kiss

# Infidelity and Divorce

- > Females punished for infidelity (although not for other sexual misdeeds) more than males
- > Divorce for female infidelity (54 vs. 2 cultures) versus male failure to provide
- > Offerings of sex with host's wife to guest; severely insulting if refused. No evidence of reverse
- > Penalties for adultery have involved male interloper compensating cuckolded man with goods, money
- > Male interlopers vs. female interlopers

# Courtship

- > A time when men try to convince women to have sex
- > Women condemn other women who give sex without love (rate busters)
- > Women's vs. men's preferences about when sex should commence and when sex actually occurs
- > Male complaints about accepting gifts but no sex; female complaints about empty relationship promises before sex
- > BC pill and abortion increased rates of out-wedlock births
- > Virginity as gift (women) vs. virginity as stigma (men)

# Unequal Status

- > Marriage gradient: man has higher income, status, age, education than woman
- > If man and woman were totally equal, her contribution of sex to relationship would make it unequal
- > Groupies (both genders fantasize about sex with celebrities, but only women can do it)
- > Anna Kournikova: “I’m like an expensive menu: You can look at it but you can’t afford it.”

# Mate Shortages: When Supply and Demand Don't Match

- > Price of sex fluctuates with sex ratio: When there are many men around, women's skirts get longer, but when there are few men around, skirts get shorter
- > Teen pregnancy rates also covary (opposite of skirt length)
- > Also seem among macaques in Indonesia: males groom females longer when female:male ratio is small vs. when it is large
- > Dowry (paid by bride's family) in male scarce locations versus bride-price (paid by groom's family) for female scarcity

# Rape

- > Men take sex from women, akin to stealing
- > Gender asymmetries
- > Men often rationalize rape as if sex was owed to them
- > Statutory rape mainly to protect girls, not boys (*next*)

# On age of consent laws

“...when two teenagers have sex, the boy is by definition a rapist, the girl by definition a victim -- even if they were both completely willing or even eager to do the deed.”

--L. Friedman

(incompatible with any view of sex as interaction between equal partners)

# Accumulating Partners

- > Female virginity has high value, male virginity not
- > Social exchange theory: Value of social rewards depends on scarcity
- > Dilemma for women: Must have sex to gain benefits, but too much sex reduces her value
- > For men, more partners indicate either wealth or great deal-making
- > Gender differences in how to count number of sexual partners reflect different motivations

# Sex and Violence

- > More sex in violent couples (bribery), but gender asymmetry
- > Australia: public whippings in penal colony
- > Mixed-gender youth gang initiations

# Prostitution, Pornography

- > Low-cost alternative sources of satisfaction for men
- > More opposed by women
- > Pornography degrading to women?
  - > Message of low-cost sex
  - > Undercuts women's ability to demand more for sex

# Competition Among Females

- > Appearance, flirting as advertising
- > Stimulate more demand than intended supply
- > Aggression: derogate rival as low quality (promiscuous, unattractive)
- > Physical fighting is preceded by accusations of promiscuity among females, never among males

# Cultural Suppression of Female Sexuality

- > All proximal restraining influences are female:  
Mothers, female peers
- > Women support double standard more than men
- > Female genital surgery enacted and supported by women
- > Women perceive reputational and other pressures from women

# Cultural Suppression of Female Sexuality: Why?

- > Standard cartel/monopoly tactic
- > Restrict supply to increase price
- > Punish 'cheap' women who undermine other women's high asking price
- > Economically rational response to dependent circumstances
- > Note genital surgery, etc., decreases when women gain economic independence

# The Sexual Revolution: Why?

- > Multiple factors, including birth control advances
- > But also linked to socioeconomic advances
- > Women did not need to rely as much on sex to have resources
- > Therefore liberation reduced need for women to get maximum price for sex; could have sex more freely
- > Market correction of sorts

# Market Factors and Price

<u>Market Factors</u>	<u>Effect on Price of Sex</u>
- Larger pool of women than men (supply exceeds demand)	Lowers
- Permissive sexual norms (low market price)	Lowers
- Men easily access pornography or prostitution (low-cost substitutes)	Lowers
- Larger pool of men than women (demand exceeds supply)	Raises
- Female collusion to restrict men's access to women (monopolistic manipulation)	Raises
- Men have few opportunities for sexual satisfaction	Raises

# Individual Factors and Price

<u>Individual Factors</u>	<u>Effect on Price of Sex</u>
- Woman's age is past young adulthood	Lowers
- Woman is unattractive	Lowers
- Other women also want the man (competition)	Lowers
- Woman has high sex drive	Lowers
- Man has much higher status than the woman	Lowers
- Woman lack alternate access to resources	Lowers
- Woman has had many prior sexual partners or has reputation of having many sex partners	Lowers
- Woman is attractive	Raises
- Woman is in young adulthood	Raises
- Woman wears sexy clothing	Raises
- Other men want the woman (competition; scarcity)	Raises
- Man has high sex drive	Raises
- Woman has had few or no prior sexual partners or has reputation of having few sex partners	Raises

# Original Data: Watch experiment

- > Do men's and women's perceptions of sex being used to sell differ according to Sexual Economics Theory?
  - > Women want sex to be used sparingly to connote specialness and therefore high price
  - > Men want sex to be used commonly to connote ease of obtainment and therefore lower price

# Method

- > Male and female subjects viewed a series of ads, including an ad for a ladies watch.
  - > Two conditions: Subjects either saw a mountain scape or a highly sexual setting (No one saw both.)
- > Subjects are told the watch is quite inexpensive (\$10) or expensive (\$1250)
- > Dependent measures: Liking for ad, mood measures

# Results

- > Men's ratings of the ad do not differ with watch price
- > Women's ratings do:
  - > They dislike the cheap watch using a sexual ad.
  - > They tolerate, however, the expensive watch being advertised with a sexual ad: Ratings in this condition are equal to ratings of the mountain ads.
- > Women are also in a negative mood after seeing the ad using sex to sell a cheap watch
- > In sum, women are accepting of sex to sell if the product is very expensive, thereby connecting sex to high price

# Conclusions

- > Female sexuality has exchange value (although price fluctuates)
- > Male sexuality does not
- > Sexual marketplace exists, subject to economic principles and practices
- > Individual differences in product quality influence price
- > Responses to everyday settings involving sex vary in accordance with each gender's motives for getting sex either cheaply (men) or for a high price (women)

Citation: Baumeister & Vohs (2004). Sexual Economics. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 8, 339 - 363.