

EPISODE 70

SEX IS BAD

Hi there. Welcome to the beginning of the end of all this. And by ‘all this’ I mean to say, My name is Michael Folz. And this is Episode number 70 of my podcast Dial It Back Or Die. Now at the beginning of all this I promised that at the end I wasn’t going to punt. I wasn’t going to close with vague generalities, such as ‘we should have more Civics classes in high school’, or ‘People should learn to be nicer to each other’. After all, if the name says ‘Dial It Back’, then there are going to have to be some specific dial backs. And for the most part most of the people who will need to dial it back—which does include both you and me—are not going to appreciate my getting specific about it one bit.

So get ready. Because this episode promises to be the least popular one yet. Because it’s going to require that just about all of us are going to have to take one for the team.

Because it has to do with dialing back sex.

Now let me start by saying as clearly as possible that little to nothing of the following has anything to do with my personal morality, proclivities, or practices. After all, as you’ll recall, what we’re doing here is trying to set the proper parameters, so that society can not only hold together, but actually have a chance of moving forward. That is to say, I’m trying to write the rules of the game in a way so that the game can be real and interesting, instead of just degenerating into a complete mess. And in doing so, therefore, I’m not going to be appealing to morality per se. Instead I’m going to be trying to stick with what science has to say about the subject, with what cultural history has to say about the subject, and also with how the need to prioritize social harmony affects the subject.

In other words, personally, I could care less if you’re having sex with a goat. Just so long as it’s an adult, consenting goat. And just so long as you don’t tell me about it. I mean, there’s a good reason why, when they build houses, they include a lot of closets in them.

And let's use the example of a slightly less weird behavior so as to make my point as clearly as possible. Because I can't think of any moral argument as to why a person shouldn't be able to sit around their house naked on Sunday afternoon watching football games.

But if you are such a person, and you happen to be working next to me in the office, I really don't want to know about it. I don't want to have to unthink that image. And most people would no doubt think that you would probably have to be at the minimum a little unbalanced if you felt the need to tell me about it. So that, in this instance at least, Don't ask, Don't tell, would certainly seem to be the most socially harmonious way for us to all get along.

Okay. Hopefully you'll now find the following to be clinical and not moralistic. Although I kind of doubt it. But I do think it far more important to get the truth out than to worry about how any particular person might emotionally react to it.

So let's start with what science says about sexual activity and the orgasm which results from it.

Well, first off, as you may be aware, orgasms for women are somewhat harder to achieve than they are for men. And the reason for this is because the amygdala, which is the part of the brain that mediates fear and distrust, has to be shut down before the process can proceed. Which is why women have to feel relaxed and secure for any sex to be pleasurable. What's more, when women do achieve orgasm, their brain produces the hormone oxytocin (which it also produces during nursing), which promotes a feeling of warmth and personal bonding.

Now I've told you before that in many ways men's brains and women's brains are wired differently, and their bodies are set up differently. And when it comes to sex the difference is stark. First off, the 'sexual' area takes up twice the volume in a man's brain than in a woman's. Next, women average around one sexual thought a day; men around twenty. As just pointed out, women require much more 'context' for sex to be pleasurable, or even desired. Men, as you may be aware, not so much.

And then there's testosterone. As you'll recall from Episodes 46 to 49, we all start off with female brains. But then in utero a burst of testosterone literally rewires the fetus's brain, among other things making males tend to concentrate more on things than on people, and also to be more prone and able to compartmentalize.

More importantly, in terms of the present discussion, testosterone is almost entirely responsible for mediating, to use the old terms, both lust and anger. And it's not that women don't have any

testosterone in them. It's just that they have only about 5% that of men. (And, interestingly, those females born with Turner's Syndrome, a rare condition that leaves them with zero testosterone, are totally placid creatures with zero assertiveness and zero sexual desire.)

Anyway, what all of this means is that the 18th Century fantasy that, were it not for stuffy tradition and religion women would want to have just as much promiscuous sex as men do is, scientifically speaking, just utterly false.

And then there is that evolutionary point which I also made back in those earlier episodes. Because remember that since the soft, gentle creature that our ridiculously premature birth requires human females to be, also makes them rather defenseless in this otherwise harsh, cruel world, and thus also requires a father, who provides both physical protection and other paternal duties for the children that he knows are his. Which means that for the past approximately million years a promiscuous woman would tend to become mate-less. And therefore would also tend to become a dead woman. Along with her child. Which would also mean the end of that particular genome. Which, in evolutionary biology, is a big no no.

Therefore, evolution would have necessarily had to select for a natural, inborn modesty in women. Which would help explain that amygdala thing. And it could also, by the way, help explain the intense horror of rape among women. Because unsafe or insecure sex could very well be pretty much a death sentence.

And, once again, fifty years or so of birth control isn't going to change a million year's worth of DNA.

Which also might help explain that 'walk of shame' phenomenon, which happens all too often after one night stands. Because in order to be comfortable with, let alone excited by, having sex with a stranger a woman has to at least some extent pretend that he cares about her. And then when it's over, and it's obvious that the man never remotely had any interest in her as a real person, the truth of the matter immediately hits her. And she realizes that she's lied to herself once again, and is filled with that deep sense of self loathing. She can't escape that deeply ingrained sense of modesty.

Well, it certainly would be nice if that didn't need to happen any more.

So, first, if we are going to re-construct a society that works, then we have to stop pretending that both sexes have the same sex drives, sexual desires, or sexual outcomes. And if we really believe in the equality of the sexes, then we have to create social norms that conform to the less naturally promiscuous of the two sexes, not that of the more promiscuous. After all, for example, you might

prefer baseball, which is a harder, faster, more intense game than softball. But if you were wanted to play with a bunch of people who only enjoyed themselves when playing the softer, slower, more laid back game you probably wouldn't object. And you would then not only probably have a good time playing at their level, but you would no doubt feel even better that you weren't pushing them to do something which they really didn't like.

So that, guys, if you really do believe in sexual equality, and it's not just some performative BS, then you're going to have to suck it up. And learn to be gentle men again.

Anyway, that's one aspect of what science has to say about sex. Here's another:

Because for both women and men the overwhelmingly most dominant neurotransmitter associated with sex is, you guessed it, good old dopamine. Which does make perfect evolutionary sense. After all, as with, say, eating, no animal would be motivated to perform such a bizarre action unless they were highly motivated by pleasure. Although, for the reasons just discussed, plus because of the male animal's intense need to disperse his seed, in practice the dopamine rush for women isn't nearly as large for women as for men. So for the rest of this part I'm just going to deal with the men.

Because, as you are no doubt aware from your own life, as with all of the other naturally occurring dopamine releasing actions, we free will possessing men have figured out how to separate the dopamine releasing action from the purpose it was meant to serve—namely reproduction—and just create one of those endless dopamine feedback loops. And just like those rats pressing that lever, many of us men end up at where all of those feedback loops end up. With addiction.

Now the more intense the dopamine release, the more likely it is that there will be addiction. For example, most people can gamble or drink alcohol and not get addicted. However, very few people can smoke crack cocaine and do it occasionally. So that it stands to reason that the more that sexual activity becomes solely about the dopamine release, and/or the more intense, and/or funky, that one can make that dopamine release, the more that one will get addicted to the feedback loop.

And I don't know of any studies which find any correlation between addiction to dopamine feedback loops and general happiness. Actually, of course, it's exactly the reverse. Because, as with all other addictions, once there is that intense dopamine release, the brain is now depleted, emotional exhaustion and unhappiness set in, and the brain now wants a quick fix. Which, as with all other addictions, becomes an intense urge to repeat whatever it was that intensely released the dopamine before.

Nor does dopamine feedback loop addiction therefore correlate with satisfaction. So that, inasmuch as the sexual act is independent of such ameliorating factors as love and affection, the term ‘sexual satisfaction’ is another one of those oxymorons.

And if your postmodern sensibilities make it difficult for you to accept the idea that sex is just another one of those dopamine feedback loops, then consider the analogy of another bodily function, namely eating. Because a certain proportion of us humans, as the saying goes, have turned ‘eating to live’ into ‘living to eat’. And it may be difficult to know exactly where to draw the line between ‘gourmet’, ‘gourmand’, and ‘glutton’. But I don’t believe that anyone thinks that someone who is always stuffing their face with food is happy about it, let alone satisfied with their life. No, they are just another form of the addict, forever chasing their tails, forever seeking that dopamine rush, which ever diminishes, and which is ever harder to achieve.

But let’s say that you agree with those philosophers and psychologists who conclude that happiness or peace of mind has little if anything to do with pleasure. Still, what’s so wrong with a little pleasure? Or, on occasion, a lot?

Well, actually, when it comes to sex, a whole bunch. Because, as it turns out, in real life sexual pleasures are of a completely different order of being than are other everyday pleasures.

To illustrate: Say that you and your significant other both really enjoy ice cream. And while you’re on a business trip you find a place that sells particularly delicious ice cream. When you tell your mate that you went there and had a giant dish of it, they will probably be very happy for you.

Now let’s change that a little and say that while on that business trip you met someone who provided really great sex. When you tell your mate about that they probably won’t be quite so happy. Even if you assure them that condoms were used and there was absolutely no emotional attachment. You know, just consumer product enjoyment, good clean fun. They’re still not very likely to congratulate you.

In fact, I will go further, and venture to guess that some of the unhappiest moments in your life had to do with sex. With the person who you thought was your significant other cheating on you. Or you cheating on them. Or that someone who you were doing it with because you thought they really loved you dumps you. Or divorces you. Or you being drunk or stoned, and having sex with someone who you wouldn’t dream of having sex with if you had been sober. Or, if you are a woman, getting

pregnant as a result of dumb sex. Or, if you are a man with at least half of a conscience, getting a woman pregnant under the same circumstances.

And I could go on and on. As could you. But... Really? Does any of the foregoing make you think of pleasure or happiness or satisfaction?

Okay. The reality that the pursuit of sexual pleasure—for men at least—has everything to do with that dopamine rush, and absolutely nothing to do with happiness or satisfaction, is one aspect of the situation. Here's another:

Suppose you had a person who, for whatever reason, just couldn't control a car. Way too often when they try to drive a car it ends up in a ditch. Or worse.

So... would you give such a person a driver's license?

Now think about every man you've ever known, especially when they were under the age of, say, fifty. Can you think of a single one of them who was ever really in control of his sex drive? A single one? Therefore—to ask a rhetorical question—why in hell should we be giving men sexual license?

Again, if sex actually were harmless, no fault fun, then I'd be the first to say, hey, the more the merrier. With whomever, whenever. But the plain fact is that it isn't. And you are just plain lying to yourself if you're still trying to pretend that it is. In fact, it is a very strange energy. One that, especially if you are a man, you are not in control of. Nor that virtually anyone else in this world is in control of.

In fact, it's an energy which controls the rich, the powerful, the famous. And everyone else.

So that if we're going to try to set the parameters for a future society that works, especially in our postmodern situation, with all cats now out of all bags, we're going to have to somehow deal with the reality.

Now, as you might recall, in those earlier episodes I speculated as to why, as opposed to just about every other animal, humans are so highly sexualized. Even chimps, which actually are naturally promiscuous, only do it when the female is in estrus. But humans, with much larger penises, breasts, and other sexual paraphernalia than all other primates, can and do get turned on by just about any young and healthy member of the opposite sex irrespective of whether the sex could result in pregnancy. And in biological terms this is just very weird. Especially inasmuch as, what with our evolutionary needs to

both pair bond and, given the need of at least two years of nursing, etc., for each infant, for each women to have only one child every two years, one would think that our sexual drives and equipment should be less than that of other animals.

So what's going on?

Well, as I speculated back then, perhaps it's another one of those delicate evolutionary balancing acts, such as the compromise between women's hips getting too wide and our heads getting too large. Only that in this instance it has to do with all other primates being almost entirely non-monogamous, and with none of them having any paternal duties or instincts. Because if men were constantly horny, then that would certainly give them extra motivation to not only hang around the mother when not in estrus, but to also do the father thing so as to get her in the mood for even more sex.

Of course, that only works if the men are only allowed to have sex with the mother of their children. And since, at this stage of evolution, this doesn't come naturally to probably the majority of men, the only way that *that* works is if their larger society more or less forces them into the straight and narrow by mandating some form of marriage.

And I'm not totally stupid. I am well aware that some people have always cheated. And usually, the higher the status and wealth, the higher likelihood of cheating. But the fact that some people also cheat at cards shouldn't obscure the larger reality that card games wouldn't continue to exist unless most people didn't cheat.

Further, I am well aware that many cultural anthropologists still maintain an 18th Century fantasy that human societies are 'naturally' polygamous. As I've mentioned previously, though, in certain ways cultural anthropology has rather tenuous links with actual science. Further, even they will admit in their footnotes that in practice the vast majority of most societies are indeed monogamous. Again, the fact that certain high resource individuals can get away with polygamy doesn't really affect the norm. And, in all such instances, the father is still held to be responsible for all of his offspring.

Anyway, now let's take a small look at history once again. Because, as I went over earlier, apologists for the promiscuity which has now taken over the postmodern mindset are always preaching that if it weren't for stuffy Victorian mindsets, or Puritan religious fanaticism, we would have all found eternal happiness and satisfaction through anything goes sexuality long ago. You know, like in all of those other civilizations which practiced it.

Oh yeah? So which literate civilizations did you have in mind?

Because I can't think of any. Not Japan. Not China. Not India. And those purported Dionysian bacchanalia that rippled through Greece and Rome? Those few people who actually did participate in such activities were pretty much universally looked down upon by the vast majority of the rest of society.

Even the bloodthirsty Aztecs, who were in the process of killing off virtually their entire population in human sacrifices when the Spanish showed up. Even they thought that their women should be chaste and modest.

What's more, throughout history, those rulers who were obsessed with sex were usually mocked by both their subjects and their enemies as being weak and effeminate. And this was even among those people who weren't particularly into ethics or religion themselves.

And, gosh darn, once again I don't want to come across as a Puritan or a stuffy Victorian. But the plain historical fact is that those church people are right. There has never been a civilization which has lasted very long once those sexual mores have loosened. For that matter, I can't think of any civilization that has lasted that long once any dopamine feedback loop addiction has become ingrained in a significant part of the population.

Anyway, let's come back to the present and now deal with the social harmony part. Because, remember, as I've gone over extensively in previous episodes, it's simply impossible to have social harmony without those relatively strictly observed social norms. In practice you can only have a genuine and long lasting feeling of community and of 'us' if all of us are following the same basic rule book. Social norms are the constituent ingredient of social glue.

And we've already decided that, sexually speaking at least, since women prefer softball and men prefer hardball, but since men can learn to play softball, whereas most women really don't like hardball, it's up to the men to man up and when it comes to sexual activity we have to honor the woman's standards and ideals.

And, once again, I am certainly not talking about fantasy promiscuous postmodern women, either. After all, the landmark University of Chicago survey of sexuality in the mid '90s found that the more sexual partners a woman had had, the unhappier she was. Direct and absolute correlation. And I haven't heard any reports that the current hookup culture is resulting in any satisfaction of any kind for anyone.

Further, as we've established, giving men sexual license is like giving chimps driver's licenses. In societal terms, it's just nuts.

So that, whether we like it or not, if we're going to get out of this brain addled and sex addicted dump which we have gotten ourselves into, then we're going to have to re-establish that straight and narrow. And, as with last episode, the only way that I can see that happening is if the women lead.

And here's how they can start. Right here right now. Because, remember ladies, A) Women 'need' sex way less than men do, B) What you are looking for is love and affection anyway, and C) You are the ones who have to deal with unwanted pregnancies and all that other stuff. So here's another chance to reclaim your dignity. Go old school after a fashion. And, before you're about to have sex with somebody, ask yourself 'Am I willing to spend the rest of my life with this person?'

And if the answer is no, then don't do it.

And yes, I know that, once again, being the first isn't going to be easy. But in the past mothers, often from their own bitter experience, used to tell their daughters such things. And I think that, deep down, at least some of you know that what I am saying is dead on true. For everyone, but especially for women, bad sex is far worse than no sex at all.

So, again, here is that chance to actually be strong and independent. And to not do what your culture and your peers keep trying to force upon you. If there's not going to be love and commitment, then Just Say No.

And for all of us: Stop thinking that Sex is some sort of sacred human right. Nobody before Jeremy Bentham ever thought that. Instead start realizing once again that men and women living together harmoniously, and respecting one another, is a sacred human need. Get it into our skulls that without social norms there is no social glue. Without social glue there is no coherent society. And if we don't hold together, then we all fall apart.

And that's not going to be very pretty. And it ain't pretty right now.

Okay. Now, before I leave the subject, I still have to address one more postmodern topic. Before I do that, however, I should probably re-state as strongly as possible the following points:

First, the sex act in itself has absolutely nothing to do with love.

Second, the sex act in itself has everything to do with dopamine.

Third, men have little to no control over their sexual energy. Which means that their sexual energy can be—and often is—directed anywhere. To women's shoe fetishes. Or young girls. You name it.

And now let me add a corollary to that: However you could quantify the lack of control men have over regular sex, you could probably square that quantity when it comes to man on man sex.

So now let's deal with the gay question.

And I'll start by wholeheartedly agreeing that if there were a certain percentage of people who were born gay, and who could therefore do nothing about it, then a compassionate society would be right to not only tolerate them, but to normalize them.

But that's a rather large, even preposterous, 'if'.

Because the first thing about genetics is that a gene only survives if it is passed on to the next generation. And the plain reality that the vast majority of gay people don't reproduce means that if there ever were a gay gene, then it would immediately disappear. Period.

And if you don't like that extremely basic reasoning, then try this: In the past year MIT concluded a vast study, which was headed up by a scientist who was himself gay. And what did they find? The largest genetic component attributable to gayness was 1%. And it was very likely that even that 1% was spurious.

So how's this for an alternative hypothesis: People might not be born gay. But science now knows that people are born with specific personalities. And if one's surrounding culture says that certain personality traits are 'gay', then a person born with those traits will thus think that they were 'born gay'.

For instance, in the 19th Century no one thought that loving poetry or flower arranging meant that you was gay. So that there were a lot of manly, happily married men who wrote poetry or who liked having their rooms filled with flowers. Nowadays, however, if you are heterosexual and you are drawn in such a direction, you'd better keep it to yourself.

So that explains those stereotypically 'fey' kids who you knew growing up. But, if you've known any number of gay people in your life, you also know that not all of them are fey. In fact, if you bother to look into it, you'll find that they entered the gay realm from all sorts of different directions.

For instance, here's a line of thought that's a little more subtle. And to understand it, consider this analogy: If no one knows how to play music properly any more, and no one is committed to holding down the bass line, then some people will start playing whatever, however.

But that doesn't mean that it turns out to be real music. I mean, how many guys have you heard of who want to become transsexual so that they can spend a lot more time playing with babies and young children, which is what virtually every real woman loves doing? Probably not too many.

However, I would suggest that the largest source of gayness is that, as with any other dopamine feedback loop addiction, before you can get addicted to anything, you first have to start playing around with it. You first have to decide to cross that line. After all, you can't get addicted to meth unless you first start taking meth.

And most people can see from the lives of others who have gone down paths of high addiction that they don't want to end up there themselves. So they never cross that line.

But some people, for whatever reason, always will. And once you are addicted to something which is highly addictive, it certainly *seems* like you can never shake it. It certainly seems like life will never be real or meaningful, or that you can ever again experience happiness, unless you first get another hit. And that's why people hooked on meth, or opioids, or even alcohol, can go to rehab time and again and still not be able to kick the habit. So that it makes perfect sense that people who are gay will swear on good faith that they can never be 'cured'.

But dopamine is dopamine. Addiction is addiction. And no society can long exist which, for whatever reasons, political or ideological, validates any form of severe dopamine addiction. And that's just a fact, Jack. I mean, just imagine what would happen if we decided that some people were just born to be meth heads, and/or we encouraged people to try meth out. You know, check out the fantasy, and see if it suited their life style.

So validation of gayness, like the validation of any other highly addictive behavior, is out. *Toleration*, on the other hand, is something else. Because, when you think about it, we only tolerate behaviors which we don't think are valid. For instance, you don't tolerate my love of hiking, because you no doubt think that hiking is a perfectly legitimate behavior. And I know that, just as with the idea of loving the sinner and hating the sin, achieving that right balance between toleration and validation can often be way harder to achieve in practice than in theory.

But as I intimated in the beginning of this episode there are, and always have been, gray areas in the human condition. Behaviors that you don't want to throw people in jail over, but that you also

don't want to encourage. So that a wink, wink, or a 'don't ask, don't tell', keeps the social order orderly. As I said, there are good, practical, useful reasons why closets exist.

And what about the gay guy who says that all that he's really looking for is love and affection? Well, he should have figured out by now that if love and affection is not already happening, then having sex with someone isn't going to magically make it happen. And if love and affection is already there, as with a mother or other family member, there's no reason or need for sex to follow.

And if two gay guys are in a truly loving, committed, truly monogamous relationship, then they shouldn't feel the need to tell me about their sex life. Any more than I feel the need to tell them about my sex life.

As for marriage? Listen, every religion and ethical system which I am aware of has always idealized marriage not as some sort of legal contract, but rather as a complementary union of the yin and the yang, of a harmony achieved from combining two disparate and qualitatively different essences. So if you think that you can achieve a stable, real union of, as it were, yang and yang, then go for it. But, by definition, it ain't marriage. So that if you can pull it off then, by definition, it would be something else. So that then you should be able to come up with some suitable alternative name for it.

Finally, if you are one of those gay people who truly does just want love and affection, then you should also be one of the people most disturbed by the mindless promiscuity going on around you. And you should be intelligent enough to understand that, in order to re-form a society which has any chance of working, then accepting the mantra of 'toleration, not validation' is one concept which you can and should willingly take for the team.

Because, remember, I'm not just picking on the gays here. My restrictions also apply to all sex outside of a committed, loving relationship. No porn. No fetishes. No sexualized advertising. The works. Because the yin/yang harmony thing is just too damn central in order that society not become completely atomized.

And I am fully aware that, even if you happen to agree with this episode, you will still find it hopelessly Utopian. As if. At this point in time.

But you know what? For thousands of years, up until the middle of the 20th Century, untold hundreds of millions of humans somehow found meaning in lives which were not continuously obsessed with promiscuous sex. So that there's really no reason not to think that it couldn't happen

again. After all, as any expert on addiction can tell you: You may think that you can't go forward without whatever it is that you are addicted to. And/or that otherwise life will be gray and meaningless.

But, as those experts will also tell you, you can go forward. And when you finally successfully do, then that's when life actually stops being gray and meaningless.

Okay. Time's up. And next time, at least for some of you, I'm going to be even more controversial.

But that is for next time. For this time, if you're still there, I'd like to thank you for being still there. And also, of course, for so far having listened.