



# **What Do Women Want? Adventures in the Science of Female Desire**

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Women are the monogamous sex. Women crave intimacy and emotional connection. Women don't want sex with strangers. Right? Wrong. Could 'the fairer sex' in fact be more sexually aggressive and anarchic than men? In *What Do Women Want? Adventures in the Science of Female Desire*, critically acclaimed journalist Daniel Bergner looks at the evidence. Recent research, he finds, dismantles the myths to reveal an unprecedented portrait of female lust- the triggers, the fantasies, the mind-body connection (and disconnection), the reasons behind the loss of libido and, most revelatory, that this loss is not inevitable.

## **What Do Women Want? Adventures in the Science of Female Desire Details**

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**Daniel Bergner**

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# From Reader Review What Do Women Want? Adventures in the Science of Female Desire for online ebook

## Anna says

I despise evolutionary biology because it often works backwards, suggesting that we can understand human behavior by imagining an evolutionary reason for it. I loved how Berger showed that what women say they want and what their bodies respond to are very different things. Women were traditionally considered the more sexual sex because the mind was prized over the body. The idea that women are less sexual actually dates to the Victorian era. Nevertheless, pop psychology loves to suggest that women are inherently more interested in intimacy and that men are naturally less well-suited for monogamy. It should then not be surprising that women have learned to suppress their own urges for fear of being viewed as a whore or aberrant.

As women have gained more cultural and economic power, they have also become markedly more sexual, and our culture always views this as a problem. The thousands of articles about hook-up culture are all based on the idea that women are being harmed by casual sex. Berger's books argues that women are much more sexual and that their sexual urges are much more "promiscuous" than men's. He's not suggesting that women may not still prize intimacy for other reasons, but he suggests that intimacy certainly does not increase libido, which most women already know.

Although I wish the book were longer and did not sound quite so much like a long magazine piece, I still found the overall argument and science fairly compelling. Some may argue that the book is suggesting that women shouldn't be in long-term relationships, but I'd argue that the book is simply trying to say that women should be honest about their desires and open with their partners. They shouldn't believe there is something wrong with them or fall into the trap of believing that greater emotional intimacy will lead to increased desire--which will only leave them feeling worse about themselves and their partners.

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## Shaun says

The ideas Bergner presents suggest that if we take away the cultural and societal veneer, we are left with the raw biology of how women act and react sexually. So what tests are being done, and how do women act naturally (meaning without the social conditioning)?

### I: Plethysmograph Tests

This test is mainly done through a plethysmograph: a tube that is inserted in the vagina to measure blood flow, moisture, and wetness. The idea is that the more blood, moisture, and wet the vagina is, the more it is prepared for sex. The test is to have this plethysmograph inserted while women watch various things to measure blood flow and wetness. Images varied between porn (both soft and hard), a naked man, a naked woman, lesbian porn, gay porn, masturbation (of both men and women), and a pair of bonobos having sex. In all cases, the women—both straight and lesbian—measured an increase blood flow and wetness. The presupposition is that they were all turned on by it. In fact, comparing the images of a man with an erection or a man without an erection, the test suggested that they were more turned if the man had an erection. In other words, for men (both straight and gay), their bodies and their psychological, subjective expressions of desire were the same. They said they were turned on, and they had more blood flow in their penis. In other instances where they reported not being turned on, they had less blood flow in their penis. With women, if you ask them whether they were turned on or not, they will straight away say that there were some where

they were not turned on. Yet, the plethysmograph showed that their body was always flowing blood around the vaginal walls, suggesting that their body was turned on. So what's going on here? Why were women's bodies saying "yes", but their minds were saying "no"? Were they secretly turned on, but they were taught to keep a psychic distance from themselves? Bergner suggests that this was "objective evidence that women were categorical after all." The women's body was turned on, even if she was psychologically not. Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jethá suggest that some women are lying to themselves about what they secretly desire in their latest book, *Sex at Dawn*. However, there is one portion of desire that is tricky to explain: rape fantasies.

How do evolutionary biologists account for some women who have rape fantasies? Why do some women have them? One theory is that since sexuality has been associated with guilt (especially for women), the fantasy was a way to remove the guilt and the shame associated with sex. Another theory is that it's breaking a taboo. Another plethysmograph was used. Women listened to rape scenes in a lab. Genital blood flow spiked tremendously. Again, the body was turned on, but the mind was not. So why was body turned on with the male having the erection (even if the woman herself reports that she is not turned on)? Bergner gives an insightful answer from sexologist Meredith Chivers: because the woman's body—through years of evolution and cultural patriarchy—has geared itself to get ready for sex. Women had constantly been sexually attacked in the past, and the ability to get ready for sex, even if the women didn't want to, had an evolutionary advantage to protect the vagina against tearing, infection, infertility, or even death. This, however, does not mean that the woman desires sex. Rather, the body seems to get ready for sex as part of a reflexive system that had nothing to do with the desire for love or sex. Indeed, there have been numerous cases where rape victims have felt their body getting ready for sex. Some women have even reported experiencing orgasm during their rape. But we can't conclude that just because the body is ready for sex, the woman herself desires sex. In other words, arousal does not equal consent. Otherwise, we get to the weird and grotesque conclusion that women secretly want to be raped.

## II: Monogamy

In another scenario, women seem to have their desires waned after being in long-term relationship. Even after marriage and kids, the women didn't have the passion or the same level of desire as the men. The conclusion that Bergner reaches is that women's desire—despite the narrative that they are natural caretakers and faithful to their spouses—has evolved women to be nonmonogamous.

First test: there is a famous example by evolutionary psychologists to suggest how women are more selective than men when it comes to sexuality. The test was to have a male approach an unknown female and ask her if she would have sex with him. The results suggested that a huge majority of women said "no." Switching the sexes where the female approached the male and ask him if he would have sex with her, the males most likely said "yes." Therefore, according to these evolutionary psychologists, males were more lusty, promiscuous, and naturally nonmonogamous whereas females were more reserved, monogamous, and sexually conservative. But Bergner rightfully shows that there's a bias in these results. If a random male approached a female, she would say "no" because of cultural or social dictations: he could harm her or her reputation could be ruined. However, change the scenario where one would imagine Johnny Depp, Donald Trump, or Brad Pitt. No one would know, and these strangers are more well-known. More women would then say "yes" (more to Johnny Depp and Brad Pitt). This suggested that if one takes away the social expectations, you have pure fantasy which leaves open for a better view of what one desires. This bias suggests that evolutionary psychology has been reinforcing Victorian morality toward women's sexuality. Throughout history and even through science, women are told how they should feel.

Bergner converses with women (both gay and straight) about how they had a lusty appetite toward their

partners at the beginning of the relationship, but then the lust had waned over time. But why is that? Some women mentioned that over time, the respected partner had grown comfortable with them, meaning that the woman slowly got to know her partner better. Thus, there was no need to constantly express desire for the woman; rather, the relationship was more about admiration, compassionate love, and respect. The lusty appetite had waned, so much so that simply being naked in front of each other didn't spark up desire; rather, nakedness just spoke to their comfortability toward each other. And yet, one woman had said that "the male without an erection is announcing a lack of arousal." It is as if to say that the heart of women's desire is to be desired. Indeed, women may choose to be in a relationship, but don't conclude that this is the heart of their desire.

There is even a disorder about this problem: "hypoactive sexual desire disorder" or HSDD. Is it that women really have a lower libido than normal, or is it that they are just bored with the relationship? What's interesting is that women who are usually diagnosed with HSDD report about the longevity of their relationships. But this disorder didn't seem to fit with other type of disorders. The condition was not psychiatric, "but created by our most common domestic arrangement." The women were happy with the relationship, and they never stopped desiring, they just had trouble wanting their partners. Investigating other primates, there is a possibility that monogamy may actually be cultural cages for women. Indeed, women swiftly feel a wane of desire in their committed relationships. Why is this? One theory is that within fidelity, the passion and the feeling of being desired grew more remote. But this isn't because the partner lost interest; rather, it was because the woman felt that her partner was trapped, that the partner did not choose her, but was impelled upon the partner because the partner was in the relationship.

So what's the solution? There is the pharmaceutical answer. And with money pouring into it, there is a race to find a drug to cure monogamy. But what's astonishing is the fact that monogamy needed a cure in the first place? Bergner is making too much of a leap here. Sure, the libido has lessened, but why tie this up with monogamy? The stories that Bergner mentions come from women who already have their libido down. This is probably why they were test subjects in the first place. The sample is skewed then: it seems that Bergner only talked to women who have already low libidos within their relationship. So what's the solution? Curing monogamy? That doesn't follow. The solution, presuming everything else is valid, is to increase libido. Indeed, that's what the pharmaceutical companies have been trying to do. To say that it's curing monogamy is a stretch. Through these test subjects, Bergner wonders why some women were affected, but others weren't? Why are some women affected by different oral contraceptives, but others aren't? It never really occurs to Bergner that it is perhaps because different women have different chemicals and different drugs affect them differently. Bergner is treating all women like an essence by reifying them. Indeed, he even suggests that different women have different testosterone levels and that these levels play a key to women's desire.

### III: Sexual Fluidity

Women seem to have a much more flexible sexuality. While growing up, boys will gain information through their environment and what they gain will fully inform their sexual development. Thus, men's fetishes and sexual quirks are more or less permanent. Women's sexuality, however, doesn't have this permanent streak. This is why most women don't have fetishes, but their sexual orientation seems to be flexible too. In fact, through the work of Lisa Diamond, female desire was more about the emotional involvement. In fact, it's so powerful that female desire could override sexual orientation. Thus, female desire has a sexually strong emotional component, strong enough to the point that the gender of the other person may not matter. Diamond's subjects didn't stay close to the same person, their orientation changed, and their sexual fantasies were not constant.

Why are women more fluid? Perhaps a better question is why are males not fluid? Males have typically defined female sexuality in a way that is favorable to themselves.

So what to think from this book? I admire Bergner for tackling the scientific studies of women's sexuality and trying to explain them in a readable book for a general audience. Women's sexuality has not been researched well enough. On the other hand, Bergner's conclusions based on the articles are astoundingly invalid. He reaches conclusions that do not follow from the data (especially his take on monogamy). Moreover, the reading does make a few connections. There were nice anecdotes to grab my interest. Other times, however, I felt like I was reading a bunch of magazine articles. It follows through a string of hypotheses that Bergner somehow tries to tie it all together, but it isn't great. It is as if he tries to capture a simple formula of what women desire. Indeed, at one point of the book, he mentions a scientist using the data he's collected about women's sexuality and reducing it down to an 11-point equation. Imagine that. Taking all of women's experience and history and it can all be explained through an equation. Yet at the same time, Bergner also mentions that women's sexuality is so complex. The complexity, it seems, cannot be really be captured to something neat and simple.

Would I recommend this book? Maybe. I guess you could read it for the interesting research of investigating women's sexuality, but I'd quickly leave as soon as Bergner makes conclusions about this research. I would suggest reading Meredith Chivers or Lisa Diamond to get the gritty details of their work, and perhaps better conclusions than Bergner does.

So then, what do women want? Probably not to be reduced to a single homogenous category where some guy tells them what they want.

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## **Asho says**

I read this book for one of my two book clubs. I wavered between giving it 2 and 3 stars. I have to admit that it provoked probably the best discussion our club has had so far this year. However, I was hoping it would tell me something I didn't already know. Instead, the author primarily discussed scientific studies that provide biological evidence of things I already know, because I am a woman: females often initiate sex (although not always in the same obvious peacocking ways males seem to tend to initiate it), women don't need an emotional connection to enjoy a sexual one any more than men do, women are not inherently more suited to monogamy than men are, the physiology of female desire is complex and tricky to replicate artificially. I think the only part of this book that came as a surprise to me was the study that found that women are just as turned on by visual stimuli as men are. I find it hard to believe that many people in the twenty-first century western world would be truly surprised by the studies in this book, but maybe I'm wrong and people really are still that close-minded and puritanical about women and sex.

Parts of this book were unnecessarily salacious, even considering the subject matter. I'm far from a prude, but I couldn't figure out what the author was trying to accomplish by the salacious passages other than trying to hype up the subject matter to draw greater attention to his work. I also felt like the random interviews with women about their sex lives didn't add much to the book. The anecdotal stories mixed in with the scientific research findings seemed to undermine the science and made the book seem less serious and its findings less important. Another downside to this book is that it paints an unfairly bleak picture of monogamy. I know it's only supposed to be about desire, and I suppose it only makes sense that after decades together sexual desire would naturally wane. But I feel like it's impossible to look at desire separately from all the other facets of a marriage that make it such a worthwhile social construct.

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## **Helen says**

This is an interesting book combining research on women's sexuality with anecdotes, many quite colorful. Unfortunately, reading it is somewhat unsatisfying because so little is known about the sources of desire and many of the things we think we know are either probably or definitely wrong. Apparently women's sexuality is not considered a worthy research topic at prestigious universities and many of the studies we have are flawed in some profound way. One example he gives is the belief that women are pickier about partners based on analysis of speed dating events. In the usual format, the men rotated through the room while the women stayed put. The men were interested in more second dates than the women were. Finally somebody thought to change the format, with the women rotating through the room. All of a sudden, the women were just as interested in second dates as the men were.

Bergner claims that beliefs that women are more suited to monogamy than men are basically wishful thinking on the part of men.

The saddest stories are about the waning of desire in long-term relationships, distressing both partners and often leading to breakups. The holy grail for this research is to come up with the magic pill that brings back those old feelings.

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## **Melissa Stacy says**

Please be warned, this book is not for people who get easily enraged when conventional wisdom is questioned. In fact, if you are someone who cherishes conventional wisdom, DO NOT READ THIS BOOK. Bake brownies, walk the dog, call a relative, play with the baby, watch a movie, read your Facebook wall, do the dishes. But DO NOT READ THIS BOOK.

Because What Do Women Want? is the most empowering book I've read in a long time. I gush about all kinds of books that I read, but I got something like a heroin rush from this one, or maybe I should say heroin, cocaine, and meth all mixed together—because mind = blown.

Why do I love this book so much? Because women are amazing. Because understanding desire is key to understanding who we are, as women, as men, as transgender people. And that's all this book is doing—talking about how science blinded itself for so long, and how some scientists are taking off their blinders.

There are so many things I learned in this book. I learned that scientists still don't really understand how female genitalia work. I learned how scientists ignored, for so long, how big the clitoris really is (which holds true for the public today). And how women have so many different pathways to orgasm. How even paralyzed women can still have orgasms. How women are much more able to orgasm without even touching themselves than men are. (Seriously. Women's bodies are just amazing.) I learned that birth control significantly diminishes a woman's testosterone levels, and scientists still don't understand why that kills desire in some women, but doesn't matter to others.

And I learned about monkeys. I learned stuff about monkeys I have never read before.

I was fascinated by these monkeys.

And I learned that monogamy is actually harder for women than it is for men. I learned that the loss of desire is so profound in some women that they just feel dead inside. I learned all these things women are doing to try to regain their desire. How incredibly difficult that can be.

I listened to women talk about their lives. Their real lives. And their sexual lives. I was simply amazed. In the best way possible.

This book is awesome.

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### **Amy Raby says**

This is one of the better books I've read about the science of female sexuality. Female sexuality is poorly understood because there aren't many sex researchers out there (because of the stigma), and the ones who do exist mostly study men. It has long been conventional (patriarchal) wisdom that men crave lots of sexual partners while women crave close, intimate relationships.

But anyone who has been through a long-term relationship or two knows that desire tends to wane over time, and this may actually happen faster for women than for men. This book tells the story of countless women who genuinely love their husbands but have lost their sexual desire for them and desperately want it back.

Some of the concepts here were new to me, but made sense, like the idea that female lust is stimulated in part by a feeling of being strongly desired by her partner. And there was some exploration of the concept (not new to me) that arousal in women does not equal consent. I particularly recall a story about a woman who found herself unexpectedly in a sexual situation and was aroused but nonetheless did not want to go through with it. She extricated herself, and later the incident provided endless fantasy material.

I also didn't know about Bremelanotide, a drug that appears to strongly stimulate sexual desire in women. It failed FDA approval because of dangerous side effects, but the company is still working on it. The idea is to solve the problem of women who want to stay in their marriages but need their sexual mojo restored. And while such a drug could solve a lot of problems, even save a lot of marriages, it doesn't take much imagination to envision the problems it might create.

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### **E.C. McCarthy says**

Bergner's assimilation of current research on women's desire and libido is fascinating. When he sticks to cross-referencing the growing body of science he's giving readers unprecedented access to the seeds of another sexual revolution (or the next phase of one, depending on your point of view.) I was confused, however, by the repeated reference to the idea of "curing monogamy." I think he means monotony, if I understand the information he lays out. Curing monogamy would mean the end of single partner relationships, and that's not what this book is about at all.

This book gets three stars because Bergner violates the inviolable in his third person narrative. He fictionalizes the thoughts and feelings of real people, which is more than distracting in a data-oriented book,



and undercuts everything he presents. The reader is left to wonder what other liberties he has taken in the information he's presenting. (I expect not too many, but it's not a question you want your readers to ask.) To Mr. Bergner and his editor I'd say only this: the book is great, but no more "she felt" "she trusted" or "she believed" only "she said she felt", "she said she trusted" and so on. Good journalism is key, especially on groundbreaking subject matter for a historically maligned population. Anything less feels disrespectful.

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## **Jennie says**

I picked this up after listening to a Savage Lovecast episode that features Bergner as a guest expert. He's an insightful researcher, and here he's put forth some fascinating information. But I can't quite recommend this book because the writing is really uneven. Bergner's ideas are organized in a strange and jumbled fashion. For example, he sometimes opens a section with a vague partial anecdote and then meanders through 20+ pages of scientific discourse before circling back to wrap up the opening story (which the reader has now forgotten). Also Bergner relays his interviewees' personal stories in a strangely lurid and melodramatic way. The tale about the basketball coach's wife in particular just seemed rambling and unnecessary.

One last complaint, I understood what Bergner's was driving at - this idea that long term monogamy and stability unfortunately marks the end of many women's sexual desire, and it's a valid point. But the second half of the book is pretty depressing, he hammers on it a bit too hard without providing an alternative viewpoint. I've said it before and I'll say it again, why do these types of books never speak to practicing nonmonogamists?

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## **Eric says**

There's no arguing with Bergner's central premise--that our culture is guilty of minimizing the existence of female lust, and this shortcoming has led to some pretty bad science and some truly awful social norms.

However, Bergner's attempt to answer the question "what do women really want" goes nowhere. He's guilty of three of my major pet peeves for popular science writers:

1. He picks and chooses his trusted sources seemingly at random, and dismisses opposing viewpoints with a couple glib paragraphs without genuinely engaging their arguments.
2. He too quickly equates behavior observed in animal experiments with human behaviors. Worse, he focuses on a motley collection of species that closely mirror his own belief about human behaviors. This tactic has bugged me forever; it's pretty easy to find any kind of behavior in the animal kingdom and then say that because it exists in other species it must be natural in humans.
3. He completely misunderstands how evolution works. I've read a lot of bad evolutionary theory, but this quote is a truly awful example:

"Animal species have been designed by evolution to perpetuate themselves, to reproduce, but in the individual animal, it isn't reproduction that impels."

There's so much wrong with that statement I could write a whole thesis about it.

Finally, be warned: this is not a self-help book or a relationship guide. I actually feel like I know even less about what women really want than I did before reading this book.

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### **Laura Jordan says**

Yet another confirmation of my long-standing animus against evolutionary psychology. God forefend any behavior be the result of millennia of social conditioning, as opposed to something we must be "hard-wired" to do.

So, yeah, back to the book. Somewhat fluffy, but on the positive side, bound to irritate and anger cultural conservatives. It was both hilarious and disturbing where the drug researchers looking into a female Viagra wanted to make sure that their drug worked well, but not too well, as the world might not be able to deal with the idea of a bunch of over-horny women.

Really liked this bit where Bergner strays into the existential:

Meana, a researcher, "returned to a phrase, a dream, she had criticized before: 'You complete me.' The seeking of a lover to embody these words; the pining for a love that will be unconditional; the search for a union that is absolute; the sense that our partners should give us what we were given -- or what we believe we should have been given -- by our parents; the craving for reassurance -- *tell me I'm special, tell me I'm beautiful, tell me I'm smart, tell me I'm successful, tell me you love me, tell me it's forever, no matter what, till death do us part* -- these were, for Meana, scarcely more than a child's cries. Yet most of us could not stand to relinquish the yearning for someone to be our fulfillment, our affirmation, because to turn away from such hope would be to acknowledge that we are, inescapably, navigating our lives alone, supported by love if we are lucky but, finally, on our own. Few of us want to navigate this way" (144-5).

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### **Melstress says**

Informative. In some cases, erotic. Probably the best work of non-fiction I have read on female sexuality. I take issue with the title however. It is really hard to take a book seriously when the title alludes to how difficult women are. Really, we aren't much different than men, except perhaps our sexuality is more repressed.

Probably a good read for everyone - male and female alike.

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### **Olivia says**

I loved this book. It was a very fast read, and I enjoyed hearing about the kind of work that is being done in exploring female sexuality. It does a great job of tweezing out what we think we know about female sexuality and what can be proven, which is not a lot. The book raises a lot more questions about the topic than it answers, but the overall thrust of it is that much of what we as a society believe about female sexuality is BS. Comforting BS, but still BS. Perhaps it is confirmation bias on my part, but I'm so relieved to read a book that doesn't try to convince me of the same old crap about what I'm supposed to want. That's a relief in itself.

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## **Will says**

I'm not sure how it was done, but this book made desire boring. Each chapter is an interview with a different researcher or scientist, and every chapter almost immediately veers off from the science to a discussion about the scientist's personal fears and interests, and a long and totally uninteresting description of a Woman Who Wishes To Have Desire But Does Not, framed in flowery language and with a totally unnecessary personal background. And he talks about the existence of female lust, simply to say that yes, it does exist. And then it goes nowhere.

The real unforgivable sin here is that the most fascinating result -- when women approached men, they felt desire more keenly -- is buried at the end, with no thought of the implications. And that the desire for women to have rape fantasies and feel desire is all about feeling the man's desire for them. And he goes to great lengths to explain how it's not "really" a rape fantasy.

So I'm going to veer off here and stop doing a review, because frankly what the trope of rape fantasy says to me is that women want agency in sex, but can't even conceive of having that agency directly. That force of desire is their own, but they don't own it -- it's a "fantasy man" that wants them and who they are helpless before. Women, in the sexual world, are at each and every point told that the man makes the first move, the man feels lust, and their role is to accept and yield. But even when writing about bonobos, rhesus monkeys and rats who clearly like and seek out sex, the massive and overwhelming role of cultural programming doesn't get center stage. Instead we get stories about unsatisfied housewives and a single couple that decides to try swinging.

And I'm not saying my theory is "right." It's a half-assed theory from reading a pop science book. The point is that there is no theory in this book -- the author has not done the work to have a point of view about what he's seen. Dan Savage may have had this guy as a guest speaker, but it's stunning just how vacuous this book is compared to Dan Savage's work, who clearly thinks and loves what he does. Reading this book, you get the feeling that the author will never return to the subject, and would be just as happy writing about income tax reform.

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## **Buck says**

In university, I once overheard a couple of female friends talking about guys. One was trying to get the other to set her up with somebody. There was the usual question: 'Well, what kind of guy are you looking for?' My one friend hemmed and hawed for a minute, and then said, 'Oh, who am I kidding? I just need to get fucked.'

It was an eye-opening moment for me (granted, I was a pretty clueless 19-year old.) On one level, it was liberating to realize that women could be driven by the same imperious desires as men. On another level, it was kind of terrifying. And I think most men, if they're honest, would admit to some ambivalence about female sexuality. We're uneasily aware that there's this powerful force out there that affects our lives in all sorts of ways, for good and ill, but we can't even begin to understand it.

If there's one consolation here, it's that women themselves don't understand it either. Or so says Daniel

Bergner in this poppy but fascinating little book. In one of the more prurient experiments he summarizes, female subjects were shown a range of porn—gay, straight, animal, whatever—while hooked up to vaginal sensors that measured their state of arousal. When the women were asked which scenes turned them on, their answers wildly diverged from what the sensors were indicating (‘Nope, sorry, that bit with the monkeys didn’t do anything for me.’) Whereas, when men were shown the same clips, their reported reactions closely matched the sensor readings. So what’s going on here? Why do women apparently misconstrue what their own bodies are telling them? The sexologists don’t rightly know. It could be an effect of sociocultural repression. It could be some kind of psychosomatic disconnect between loins and brains. Or maybe women just don’t like having scientists mucking around in their lady bits.

My guess is that this book will make a lot of female readers feel a little better about themselves, a little less weird and ashamed. On the other hand, it’s going to freak out some male readers, especially those in long-term relationships. There’s emerging evidence that, contrary to popular belief, monogamy may be even harder on women than it is on men. Not that monogamy is necessarily wrong – just that its costs are very high and, for many women, simply intolerable. In that respect, *What Do Women Want?* is a surprisingly melancholy book. There are threads of sadness and desperation running through it. It’s a vivid reminder, in case you needed it, that life is tough, even for the luckiest among us.

Here’s my own two-bit theory, cobbled together out of Freud and failure: you’re never going to be satisfied – not for long, and probably only in retrospect. A Korean proverb goes: *get married and you’ll regret it, stay single and you’ll regret it*. Sounds about right. What Plato called ‘the pursuit of the whole’ takes place down here, in the realm of the incomplete, among the half-assed. Frustration is the norm.

As I see it, this isn’t an invitation to cynicism. It’s an invitation to acceptance. In the ordinary course of things, there’s no mingling of souls. There’s Chinese takeout and perfunctory sex. And that’s still pretty good, isn’t it?

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## Book says

*What Do Women Want?: Adventures in the Science of Female Desire* by Daniel Bergner

“*What Do Women Want?*” is the unsatisfying science book on female sexual desires. A surprisingly neglected area of science, this book covers the latest scientific research on female lust. The book however suffers from being uneven, lack of flow and quite frankly scientific negligence. There is some interesting research and some findings are enlightening but ultimately this book fails to answer the premise of this ill-titled book to satisfaction. This disappointing 224-page book is composed of the following ten chapters: 1. Animals, 2. Bodies and Minds, 3. The Sexual Fable of Evolutionary Science, 4. Monkeys and Rats, 5. Narcissism, 6. The Alley, 7. Monogamy, 8. Four Orgasms, 9. Magic, and 10. A Beginning.

Positives:

1. A fascinating topic.
2. A welcomed book on a neglected area of science, female sexual lust.
3. Debunking myths. “And that one of our most comforting assumptions, soothing perhaps above all to men but clung to by both sexes, that female eros is much better made for monogamy than the male libido, is scarcely more than a fairy tale.”
4. Use of some of the most recent scientific fields to come up with models of behavior. “Sticking with

neuropsychology, she wound up doing a thesis experiment that added to fledgling evidence: that homosexual men perform less well than heterosexuals on a type of test involving three-dimensional shapes, just as females, on average, perform less well than males.”

5. There are some interesting stories and findings. “Freund didn’t make a career out of hunting homosexuals. Early on, he tried to cure gays through psychoanalysis; eventually he called in his patients and gave their money back.”

6. A brief history of sexuality, the prevailing ethos of some eras. The thinking behind what was meant to be female.

7. Parental investment theory under the magnifying glass. Not afraid to be critical of other pop-science books.

8. Does a good job of putting functional magnetic resonance imagining (fMRI) in the proper perspective.

9. Does point out some missed opportunities in science. “What science had managed to miss in the monkeys—what it had effectively erased—was female desire.”

10. Some interesting social observations. ““Female desire is not governed by the relational factors that, we like to think, rule women’s sexuality in contrast to men’s.”

11. The thrill of fear and sexuality. Fantasies.

12. The relationship between marriage and monogamy toward women’s libidos.

13. An interesting discussion on the anatomical origins on the varieties of bliss.

14. A discussion on how science and in particular pharmaceutical companies are searching for female libido enhancement medication.

15. Readings provided.

#### Negatives:

1. An uneven and in my opinion a poorly written book.

2. The book just wasn’t fun to read; a waste of a fascinating topic.

3. Not a criticism directed toward the author but the truth is that we know so little about our sexuality. As a society we should back more studies in this fascinating field.

4. Some minor spelling issues.

5. Some readers will have issues with the at times necessary explicit nature of the book and some topics are difficult.

6. It doesn’t answer the premise of the title to a satisfactory level.

7. Weak explanations on neuroscience. Poor use of good science.

8. No links to end sources or reading material for that matter.

In summary, I’m very disappointed in this book, such a waste of a fascinating topic. The uneven writing style coupled with scientific negligence left me, well...unsatisfied. Simply, I didn’t enjoy this book. During the ride on this rollercoaster of a book, there are some interesting findings, some myths were debunked but it ultimately brings you right back where you started and it never answers to satisfaction the premise of the title, What Do Women Want? In a mild defense of the author, he is not afraid to be critical of some well-known pop science findings and putting fMRIs in perspective. That being said, I’m sorry, I can’t recommend this book. Thankfully, it’s a short ride if you so desire to ride this unsatisfying rollercoaster.

Further suggestions: “The Science of Love” Robin Dunbar, “The Red Queen: Sex and the Evolution of Human Nature” by Matt Ridley, “Sex and Punishment” Eric Berkowitz, “Work with Me” by Barbara Annis and John Gray, “Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us” by Daniel H. Pink, and “Half the Sky” by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn.

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