

## **Inexpensive Sex and Its Impact Upon Society**

**By Norm R. Allen Jr.**

### **A Book Review**

*Cheap Sex: The Transformation of Men, Marriage, and Monogamy*, by Mark Regnerus (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, ISBN-978-019-067361-1) 261 pp. Cloth \$29.95.

In the blurb on the back flap of this book, Mark Regnerus is described as being “no stranger to challenging subjects and controversy.” Readers of this book will certainly find this to be the case.

The author maintains that though marriage will continue to last, it has undergone great changes, as have sexual relationships in general. However, the changes have mostly benefitted men and harmed women.

Regnerus is a conservative and prefers the “exchange relationship” between women and men in which women view sex as a valuable prize to be shared with men only when women can reasonably expect romantic dates, improved finances, security, gifts, and at least competent fatherhood. By having sex with men too soon, the author contends, women are decreasing or even destroying the likelihood that they will get what they prize greatly – marriage. Ideally, women would wait until marriage to have sex with men. However, the author realizes that those days are long gone, and he does not long for them wistfully. He claims that he merely wants to understand modern relationships and where they might be headed.

Regnerus stands firm in his belief that there are clear biological differences between the sexes. For example, on page 23 he quotes writer Catherine Hakim: “Nationally representative sex surveys carried out around the world confirm that the ‘myth’ of men having greater sexual motivation/drive/interest than women is fact, not fantasy.”

The author contends that it is this incredibly strong male sex drive that has historically driven men toward marriage. In the past, women valued virginity

before marriage, and most men could only hope to get enthusiastic consensual sex with women by marrying them.

Today, however, many men can hook up easily (or cheaply) with women by meeting them online, in clubs, and so on. They don't even have to date them. The author further contends that many men even prefer another form of cheap sex – porn -- to having sex with real women. Add to this the use of sexbots, or sex robots, and the likelihood that even holograms will be used for sex in the future, and the numbers of people marrying are likely to continue to fall, as the author sees it.

Regnerus says we associate cheap sex with the lowered risk of pregnancy. He says that the birth control pill gave women more sexual freedom. This made sex easier for men to procure. With cheap sex comes little incentive for men to marry.

Confusingly, Regnerus acknowledges that women have made great strides in business, education, employment, and other major areas. However, he seems oblivious to the fact that those achievements were led by women who were fighting against conservative and reactionary – and religious – forces. And though he does not necessarily wax nostalgic about what he sees as the good old days for women, he continually argues that women were better off in the days before the Pill and women's liberation.

The author maintains that sexual permissiveness and secularization go hand-in-hand. Cheap sex deadens religious impulses. Moreover, he contends that, not science, but sex-related technology leads to secularization. He even believes that perhaps the New Atheism arose naturally along with Internet porn and sex-related technology!

Regnerus asserts that there is a correlation between men that view porn and liberal views. (He does, however, make it clear that correlation does not mean causation.) He claims that men that watch porn are more likely to support same-sex marriage and to believe that same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt and raise children. Remarkably, he also draws upon research to claim that men who watch porn tend to be feminists! He claims that porn does not lead to violence against women and does not make men want to dominate women, at

least not “in the West.” He asserts that men who watch porn tend to embrace religious skepticism and engage in immoral behavior.

However, the author finds that religious people are also having a lot of sex out of wedlock. Young evangelicals watch a lot of porn. Congregations are struggling with changing sexual morality. Catholics are increasingly permissive and out of step with the Church.

Regnerus is especially critical of polygamy and polyamory, and he makes important distinctions between the two. He asserts that though polyamory is supposed to be fair and liberal, it is “restrictive, misogynist and backward.”

This might be what is most perplexing about the author’s work. He condemns patriarchy and polygamy, but he seems oblivious to the fact that the Bible is all about patriarchy and polygamy. Indeed, Christianity has been sexually repressive *and* patriarchal. As history has often demonstrated, repression often leads to explosive rebellion and wild behavior. One cannot seriously condemn a rebellion without also condemning the repression that led to it. In other words, ironically, Bible-sanctioned patriarchy and sexual repression ultimately led to the sexual revolution and women’s liberation – for better and worse.

The author believes that the only way to change the huge differences that supposedly exist between the sexes would be through draconian, authoritarian social engineering schemes. In fact, he contends that, despite “the effects of socialization and social structure,”

...a recent review of 21 sources of data revealed that most sex differences are actually larger in magnitude and variability in cultures with more egalitarian sex role socialization and greater gender equity. (p. 213)

Regnerus asserts that when adults try to make boys more like girls, what actually happens is that girls become more like boys. I believe that males and females are much more alike than the author can imagine. However, leading humanists should become much more involved in the discussion about real and imagined differences between the sexes and how best to build a fair and just society for all.