

Love in the Afternoon

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Recently, Elaine Hatfield has begun to publish a variety of short stories and novels on psychological themes. In one comic novel (Hatfield & Rapson, 2000), Rosie (the heroine, who teaches Psychology 459, a class on Research Methods, at the University of Hawaii) discovers that a scholarly article written by Rosie and her best buddy, Mike, has hit the Web:

Rosie St. Giles sat in front of her ancient Macintosh. Nothing to do and no time to do it, so she started fooling around. She gave Rosie St. Giles and Michael L. Horowitz a try. She tapped a few keys, and an *aurora borealis* of symbols danced over the screen. She punched in Mike and Rosie, just for the hell of it, and to her surprise, when the confetti of ads, print, and cartwheeling letters settled down, she read:

"You searched for: Rosie St. Giles or Michael L. Horowitz Documents: 1 to 1 (of 1) in order of relevance."

Men Are Sorry Assed Specimens—[http://www2.hawaii.edu/~St. Giles or Horowitz](http://www2.hawaii.edu/~St.Giles/orHorowitz) (Score: 79, Size: 1K.) Today, Rosie St. Giles and Michael L. Horowitz, professors at the University of Hawaii, reported in the *Archives of Sex Research*...

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For a split second Rosie savored that atavistic delight, that little blush of pleasure, that sweeps over people when they unexpectedly come upon their names shimmering out at them in Day-glo color.

She excitedly double-clicked and the Web press release swirled into view—a clipping from some cheap tabloid, filled with typos, the smudged type bleeding into the cheap pulp paper. The posting was titled: "Men: As Sorry-Assed as Ever!" Scanning the article, recognition turned to perplexity and then to stunned incomprehension.

The previous year, the Center for Disease Control had asked Mike and Rosie to assess their latest AIDS campaign. The CDC had heard ominous reports that many UH [University of Ha-

waii] students, certain "It can't happen to me," were taking chances. Were they? Mike and Rosie had volunteered to find out. The plan was simple: Mike and Rosie's students would simply wander into student hangouts and strike up a conversation with whoever happened to be there. After a few minutes, they would ask one of two questions: (1) "Would you be interested in going to the movies with me tonight?" or (2) "Would you be interested in coming over to my apartment for sex tonight?"

It had come as no surprise that most college students were willing to risk going to a movie with a pick-up or that women never said "Yes," when men made a crude sexual pass. What was a surprise was how reckless men were. In spite of the AIDS crisis, more than 75% of them were willing to risk sex with any and all comers!

Originally, Mike and Rosie had published their findings in the prestigious *Archives of Sex Research*. But now this reprint! Rosie cringed. It was the kind of posting you'd expect from a street-tough with a spray can.

She licked her lips, concentrating. What was Chairman Nik, her department chair, going to make of this? A flush of shame crept from cheek to neck to chest, mottling her pale skin, as she imagined her colleagues' epithets: "Man-hater." "Malcontent." "Lightweight." "Unethical and immoral." Then a direct hit: "An all-round embarrassment."

Rosie stared transfixed at the screen, as if imagining that if she concentrated hard enough the too solid text would break up into a confetti of glossolalia.

Her mind raced ahead, trapped in some HyperSpace road-kill game, frantically trying to steer her way through a high-speed obstacle course of freak accidents, roadblocks, and pregnant women pushing prams. She couldn't slow down, couldn't stop.

Maybe Chairman Nik had already signed her two-year renewal.

Maybe Infoseek Corp. had at this very moment withdrawn the story.

Maybe Chairman Nik wouldn't find out. (Hatfield & Rapson, 2000, pp. 4-6)

When Rosie's research hits the talk shows, Rosie (a timorous little thing), is totally unprepared for the feeding frenzy that engulfs her. Sound familiar?

Because science, by its very nature, challenges the comfortable political status quo—and worse yet, because social psychologists and human sexuality researchers generally deal with “hot” topics—the dilemmas Rosie faced are probably all too familiar to our readers. Many of you, having carried out a study you considered to be theoretically important, exciting, and well conducted, have faced a barrage of rude questions: “Is this study worthwhile?” “If your study is so fantastic, why do the scientific gatekeepers hate it?” “Will publishing it ruin your career?” In this article, we confront just such a *Perils of Pauline* (Wharton & Wharton, 1914) scenario. We discuss how Russ Clark conceived of the “Gender Differences in Receptivity to Sexual Offers” study (Clark & Hatfield, 1989), the firestorm of criticism that greeted him when he first attempted to publish its controversial findings, Elaine Hatfield's joining in the fray, Russ and Elaine's attempt to convince a variety of scientific journals to publish their findings, and the controversy that this small study continues to provoke until this day.

Our saga begins with Russ Clark, standing in front of his classroom, pointer in hand—as innocent as our hapless Rosie—blissfully unaware of the trouble about to befall him.

A Brief History

In the spring of 1978, Russ Clark was teaching a small class in experimental social psychology at Florida State University. In this class, students were required to conduct a field experiment. “Priming the pump”—by discussing social psychology field experiments and projects that previous classes had conducted—Russ happened upon Jamie Pennebaker's (Pennebaker et al., 1979) classic study. In this field experiment, student researchers dropped by an array of singles' bars in Charlottesville, Virginia—timing their visits for early in the evening, a bit later (when things had just gotten going), and late in the evening (at “closing time”). Students were assigned to approach men and women sitting at the bar and ask them how attractive they judged the other patrons to be. Early in the evening (at 9 p.m. and 10:30 p.m.), men and women were fairly critical of the other patrons (members of the opposite sex were thought to be “fairly attractive,” at best). Come midnight, men and women, realizing it was “now or never,” became more charitable. To rephrase Gillley's (1975) old country and western song “Don't the Girls All Get Prettier at Closing Time,”

they all get better looking at closing time. So said Jamie Pennebaker's study.

As Russ discussed the study, one young woman raised her hand, proposing a clever alternative possibility: Maybe, patrons were better looking later on. Perhaps plain men and women (who have little else to do), hang out in bars all night. Good looking men and women spent the early evening going to dinner, to movies, and out on dates only to appear later on, for a nightcap. Russ praised the woman for her research smarts but observed that alas, when Pennebaker checked out just this possibility, he found patrons to be of equal attractiveness, early and late in the evening.

Then, Russ dropped a bomb. “A woman,” he said, “good looking or not, doesn't have to worry about timing in searching for a man. Arrive at *any* time. All she has to do is point an inviting finger at any man, whisper ‘Come on 'a my place,’ and she's made a conquest. Most women,” he said, “can get any man to do anything they want. Men have it harder. *They* have to worry about strategy, timing, and ‘tricks.’”

Not surprisingly, the women in the class were incensed. One woman sent a pencil flying in Russ's direction. In one of Russ's finer moments, he observed: “We don't have to fight. We don't have to upset one another. It's an empirical question. Let's design a field experiment to see who's right!”

After a brief discussion of cultural and sociobiological perspectives, Russ and the class conceived a simple experiment. Class members would approach attractive men and women (of the opposite sex) and ask one of three questions: (a) “Would you go out with me tonight?” (b) “Would you come over to my apartment tonight?” Or (c) “Would you go to bed with me tonight?”

Weeks later the results came in—and they surprised almost everyone. When class members asked, “Would you go out with me tonight?” men and women were equally receptive: 56% of the women and 50% of the men agreed to go out on a date. Yet, when confederates asked, “Would you come over to my apartment tonight?” or “Would you go to bed with me tonight?” the gender differences were striking. Whereas few women were willing to risk going to a man's apartment (6%) or to bed with him (0%), a full 69% of the men agreed to go the woman's apartment and 75% were willing to go to bed with her.

The Original Manuscript

The 1960s and 1970s were periods of social transformation. Many social psychologists, repelled by the chauvinistic notion that men and women are destined by God to be different “species,” were convinced that men and women are more similar than different; that both care about love, romance, and sexual adventure.

Scientists dedicated to demonstrating gender differences in attitudes, emotions, and behavior were viewed as slightly suspect. (In the 2000s, the pendulum seems to have swung the other way. To many, evolutionary psychology is now the received wisdom. To question the notion that *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* [Gray, 1993] provokes a quizzical look. This too, we suspect, will pass away.)

In the late 1970s, Florida State was a hotbed of the then "radical" sociobiological theorizing. Thus, although Russ was fully aware of (and sympathetic to) feminist perspectives, in his original write up, he played devil's advocate, arguing for the wisdom of the new sociobiological perspectives and arguing that gender differences in sexual attitudes and behavior may well be "wired in." (In 2003, Russ's contentions spark only a "ho-hum"—but that was 1978 and now is now.) Russ wrote enthusiastically for the pathbreaking work of theorists such as Wilson (1975), Darkin (1976), and Barash (1977).

By June 1978, the 5-page manuscript (taking a distinctly evolutionary psychology slant) was complete.

The Quest for the Holy Grail—A Publisher

Three scientific journals seemed a good "fit" for this small paper: *Sex Roles, Ethology and Sociobiology*, and *Representative Research in Social Psychology* (an innovative methodology journal). From June 1978 to September 1980, Russ tackled them all.

The reviewers were not amused. Reviewers' reactions came typed or angrily scrawled on notepaper. Typical of the scornful reviews was this:

had this paper been based on a federally funded grant it would have walked away with the Golden Fleece Award of the decade. Apart from the rather comical nature and situations of the study and the debriefing which are regrettably not discussed for they should be hilarious [sic], there is no value to this study. The propositions (no pun) on which it is based are incredibly naïve, the conclusions unwarranted, etc. This paper should be rejected without possibility of being submitted to any scholarly journal. If *Cosmopolitan* won't print it (with the anecdotes of encounters, documenting # of rapes of females by males who were propositioned, males who were slapped, etc.), then *Penthouse Forum* might like it. But, not _____ [name of journal omitted].

The other journals responded in kind. For a time, Russ stuck the manuscript in the drawer.

Elaine Enters the Fray

Many scientists are most comfortable in a black-and-white world. You either believe in nature or nurture. Woe to the scientist who answers, "Both."

In 1980, Elaine gave a talk on "Passionate Love and Sexual Desire: Cross-cultural and Historical Perspectives" at Florida State University. When Russ described his study, she was entranced. Russ and Elaine possessed fairly similar theoretical perspectives: Both assumed nature and nurture to be of critical importance in human affairs. Russ tended to focus on evolutionary explanations, Elaine on cultural and historical factors in shaping human affairs. Yet their essential approach was the same: nature and nurture.

Best yet, from Russ's perspective, Elaine insisted the study not only deserved to be published, but that it must be published. She promised to do what she could to ensure that would happen.

Why did Elaine think the study of such critical importance? By the 1960s and 1970s, the gender differences in male-female sexuality that had once loomed so large had largely disappeared (Oliver & Hyde, 1993). Yet, Elaine felt convinced that one difference remained: young men still tended to risk more "kinky," "daring," "experimental" sex—call it what you will—than did women. When scientists asked people if they would like to try sex in some "odd" place, in some "strange" position, with some "unusual" partner, men were still more likely to say "Yes" than were women. Or so Elaine thought. Sex differences, she insisted, had weakened but had not completely disappeared.

It was also easy for Elaine to sympathize with Russ's dilemma. By the late 1970s, Elaine was no stranger to political attacks. She had already "won" Senator Proxmire's Golden Fleece Award, for her research on love, and she had been publicly attacked for her feminist views by one early evolutionary psychologist, Lionel Tiger, an anthropologist and true believer, who took a radical evolutionary perspective—assuming men and women were wildly different in attitude, emotion, and behavior. She had also spent long hours lamenting the Fates with colleagues and students who had risked their jobs, had grants rescinded, and reaped community scorn by insisting on publishing studies whose unpalatable results offended community standards (see Hunt, 1999).

So Elaine meant it when she assured Russ that this study would get published, one way or the other. "I guarantee it," she said—overconfident, it turns out, that "dogged does it" and that everyone would recognize the merit that she saw so clearly.

When Russ asked Elaine if she'd be willing to take the manuscript in hand, crafting it in a more felicitous style (designed to appeal to readers of mainstream social psychology and human sexuality journals), she immediately said, "Yes." In rewriting it, she made clear

that Russ and she had no ax to grind. She acknowledged the fact that either social learning theory and/or evolutionary theory provided equally compelling accounts of the data. *Nature and Nurture*. She detailed the scientific importance of charting cultural and social changes in men's and women's sexual attitudes and behavior and closed by noting the critical importance of "promiscuous" or "experimental" sexual behavior in determining which populations were most vulnerable to the ravages of sexually transmitted disease—although in the 1980s clinicians were far more worried about STDs than AIDS (which had not yet appeared on anyone's radar).

From there on in, it was smooth sailing. We had a winner—almost. In fact, we were not prepared for the long, winding, dark road that lay ahead.

The Holy Grail—One More Time

Two journals seemed a good "fit" for our manuscript: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

In March 1981, we began sending the manuscript out yet again. This time, editors were more positive: close but still no cigar. As one editor observed: "I feel the paper should (and almost certainly will) be published somewhere. I regret that I cannot tell you we will publish it." NIMJ.¹

A second editor claimed that "on the basis of the reviewer's recommendation," he and the Editorial Board had voted to reject it. Alas, the reviewer had advised, "Accept." Never mind. Again, it was NIMJ.

And Yet Again

In the years since Russ conducted Study 1, a new critique arose: "The Times They Are A-Changin'" (Dylan, 1964). Some critics claimed that Study 1 was now dated: Gender differences may have been important in 1978, but by the enlightened 1980s, they had all but disappeared. In addition, the prevalence of new and virulent STDs as well as the discovery of AIDs may have made young people far more cautious than before.

Thus, in Spring 1982, Russ's students decided to run the study yet again—same protocol, same time, same place. Whatever results we secured were bound to be interesting. Gender differences remain the same? That argued for the stability of cultural and evolutionary imperatives. Gender differences disappear? That would argue that social factors (such as the women's movement and deadly diseases such as AIDs) had had a profound impact on men and women's sexual behavior.

The gender differences Russ reported in Study 1 were replicated almost exactly in Study 2. We rewrote the paper yet again.

Once More Into the Fray

By now, because we'd been slapped around pretty badly, Elaine proposed that it might be a good time to try women's studies journals (such as *Psychology of Women Quarterly*), social psychology journals (such as *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*), or close relationships journals (such as *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*). So from November 1981 to January 1984, we worked our way through these journals. Each time the manuscript was rejected.

One reviewer observed the following:

The study itself is too weird, trivial and frivolous to be interesting. Who cares what the result is to such a silly question, posed in such a stranger-to-stranger way in the middle of the FSU [Florida State University] quadrangle? I mean, who cares other than *Redbook*, *Mademoiselle*, *Glamour*, or *Self*—all of which would cream their jeans to get hold of this study. This study lacks redeeming social value.

There was a call for more research. Reviewers raised questions: How did we know the 18 student experimenters were credible actors? Why were the men saying "Yes" and the women saying "No?" Were we sure debriefing was effective?

For 4 years the manuscript lay fallow. Then, in July 1988, Elaine sent it to the *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, and the manuscript was accepted. The reviewers were not enthusiastic, but they were willing to publish. The long quest was over.

Reaping the Whirlwind

Times have changed. *Sex and the City* (King, Chupack, & Melfi, 1998–2004). MTV. The Global Village. AIDs. Today, most scientists recognize the importance of scientific knowledge about topics that were once considered taboo—love, emotions, sexual desire, sexual behavior.

Elaine has won a number of awards for her "taboo" research: She served as president of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality (SSSS) and has received Distinguished Scientist Awards from the Society of Experimental Social Psychology, the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex, and the University of Hawaii, and the Alfred Kinsey Award from the Mid-Western Region of SSSS. Two of her books have won the American Psychological Association's National Media Award.

Russ and Elaine have been invited to present their work on love and sex at a number of prestigious universities—Harvard University, Stanford University, Oxford University, Cambridge University, and the University of Tokyo, among others.² Russ has also

¹Not In My Journal.

²Russ has continued to conduct research in this area. For a review of further research, see Clark (1990).

been the distinguished commentator on a variety of talk shows. Generally, young men and women who call in can't believe the results. Women tend to say, "Certainly *my* boyfriend isn't like that!" Older men and women are not often surprised. For many of them, "That's the way men are."

In the popular press, the Sex Study continues to reap a whirlwind of publicity. Let Rosie explain it.

"It's been five months," Rosie said, "since all those news stories began swirling around like some kind of toxic cosmic dust. Senator Kuszek fires off his press release on January 17. A Wednesday. By Thursday morning, we're reeling from its aftershock. On Friday, the fallout is settling in near Tokyo. Stories appear in the *Asahi Shimbun*, *Mainichi Shimbun*, and *Yomiuri Shimbun*. A few weeks later, *The Bangladeshi Standard's* Geiger counters are clicking out the news. Each time an editor in Japan, Bangladesh, or Mozambique translates the story, a name gets misspelled here, a word is altered there, and the next thing you know, the *Honolulu Advertiser* has picked it up. It's so altered that they think it's a new story—and the cosmic dust starts swirling around the earth again. It's unnerving."

"One more time through," Mike said, chuckling, "and the Rosie St. Giles' story will be buried under so much cosmic dust that even Senator Kuszek and you won't recognize it!"

"Now," said Rosie, "when I get criticized, it's usually for something I didn't do. Other psychologists usually get blamed for the things I did. I guess it all balances out." (p. 144).

Log on to the web today and you'll still find the study being debated—in all its distortions. In the early days, a few feminists decried the study because it seemed to justify male chauvinism and sexual license ("The Devil [or Darwin] made me do it"). And they had a point. The powerful seem able to turn any and all research to their advantage. Now, some women insist that it just goes to show what idiots these men be. Go to your Web site today and you will find:

- Indirect evidence that men are stupid... [<http://home.attbi.com/~brynoh/MainSite/men.htm>.] Yep! It's the study.
- Guys = Icky: The definite proof. [<http://www.rpi.edu/~baere/guys%20are%20icky.html>] Yep! Right again.

The Moral

We hope this cautionary tale serves as solace and encouragement to young researchers. The fact that our study was chosen as a "classic" study, destined to be discussed 20 years into the future, is enormously pleasing. Yet, as Sandy Koufax once said, when praised: "The older I get, the better I used to be." When young research-

ers' ideas are mocked, their methodology criticized, and their studies denied publication, such rejection ought to be considered par for the course. The *Perils of Pauline* story of the fate of this study echoes the problems that many young researchers face when politics confronts science. It is always difficult to settle on the right recipe: to measure out a dollop of prudence, a smidgen of integrity, and shovelfuls of political cunning in figuring out how to survive in academia. The trivial, uninteresting, and morally suspect research of today oft turns out to be the "classic study" of tomorrow. In any case, scientists can choose no other path but courage and honesty. There is no way to predict how scientific results will be received with the passage of time. The idea that seems so "chauvinistic" in 1978 may well end up in 2002 being seen as providing "proof" that "Men are stupid" and "Men = Yucky." Go figure!

Note

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