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Book Reviews: Popular Books Section



...A THOROUGH AND EXHAUSTIVE STUDY OF NYMPHOMANIA ...Sir Francis Bacon (1561 - 1626), English author and philosopher is reputed to have said, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." Groneman's excellent book comes in the final category. I certainly chewed it, and am now in the process of gradually digesting it...

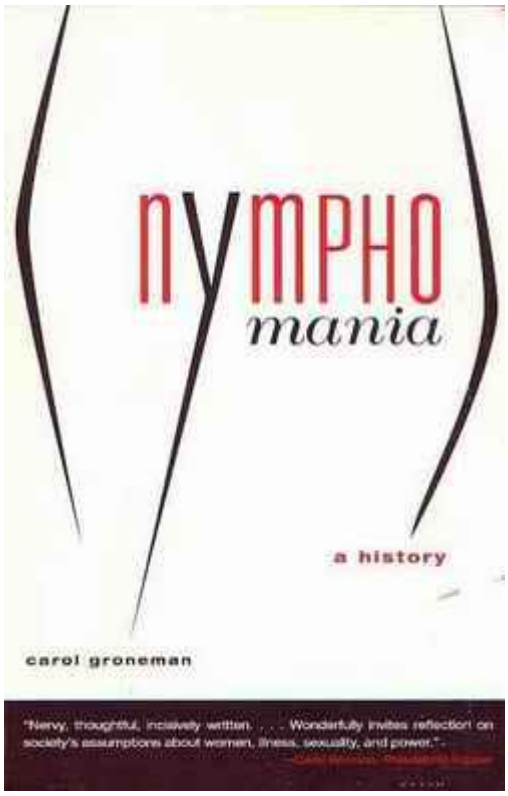
Nymphomania - A History *by* Carol Groneman. softcover, 8.4 x 5.7 x 0.7".
W. W. Norton & Company, 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110, , . Publication Date September 2001. xxiv+238 pages, ISBN-10: 0393322424. ISBN-13: 978-0393322422. Price $13.95

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Nymphomania - a female's excessive and almost insatiable interest in sex - is a topic, which interests all of us. Why? For one, it is human nature to be attracted to the unusual and bizarre. And isn't it bizarre for a female - traditionally considered the subdued partner in matters of sex - to be overinterested in sex! For another, most, if not all, of us have an overt or covert inclination towards sex. And what better topic to study and explore than hypersexed females!

Popular imagination have weird notions about nymphomaniac females. In comics, literature, and several films dealing with this theme, we see gorgeous, shapely women suffering from this disorder, inviting men after men for sexual intercourse. Perhaps it is the secret desire of many men to meet such women, but it is so rare to find them. Catherine II of Russia (1729 - 1796) is reputed to be a nymphomaniac, and there is a popular rumor that she died while attempting sexual intercourse with a horse. We all know this is wrong, but somehow this rumor refuses to die; such is the charm and attraction of nymphomania.

Back in 1974, all of us in India, saw the movie *Hawas* (The Lust), where the actress Bindu was shown as a nymphomaniac. It was with this movie that most people in India came to know that there indeed was a condition called nymphomania. Medically speaking this condition is no more listed in DSM-IV-TR now, but way back in 1974, the "enlightened" amongst us "knew" about the existence of this condition. The very respectable DSM-III published in 1980 talked about this condition, and although in the revised edition, DSM-III-R, published in 1987, the word "nymphomania" was dropped, it was substituted by a phrase meaning almost the same, "sex addiction". Although even this phrase was dropped from the next edition, DSM-IV (published in 1994), this phrase somehow refuses to die. Today we even have a journal entirely devoted to sexual addiction (Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity).

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Despite a plethora of literature on nymphomania in popular culture, TV, cinema, urban legends etc, strangely, we find very few scientific treatments of this topic. Before I got hold of Groneman's

highly readable book, I was aware of just one scientific study on nymphomania. The book is called *Nymphomania (a Study of the Oversexed Woman)* , and is authored by Dr. Albert Ellis and Edward Sagarin. However this is an old book (it was published in 1965), and we were all looking for a new and fresh treatment on this subject. Thankfully Groneman comes out with an entirely new and fresh book on this subject. When it reached my desk, I leafed through it for about half an hour, and immediately realized I had a bestseller in my hands. How detailed, thoroughly researched and scientific is Groneman's work can be gauged from the fact, that out of 238 pages, she spends as many as 39 pages to notes (pages 185 to 223). A further 14 pages (Pages 225 to 238) are devoted to a very comprehensive index. Well, I was not surprised, when I read in the acknowledgments section that Groneman spent a decade conducting research for this book.

...Although the entire book is highly readable, the section that interested me most as a medicolegal professional, was chapter 4 (Nymphomania in the courts). I was curious, how the plea of nymphomania came in courts in the first place, and in which type of cases. Carol gives some remarkable cases in this book, and I would imagine this chapter alone is worth several times the price of the book...

Although the entire book is highly readable, the section that interested me most as a medicolegal professional, was chapter 4 (Nymphomania in the courts). I was curious, how the plea of nymphomania came in courts in the first place, and in which type of cases. Carol gives some remarkable cases in this book, and I would imagine this chapter alone is worth several times the price of the book. We get to read fantastic real cases involving nymphomania. Three types of cases make their appearance here - one in which the defense in rape cases takes the plea that the girl making rape allegations was a nymphomaniac and due to her high sex drive, she merely imagined that she had been raped; two, in which fathers facing charges of incest with their daughters alleged that their daughters were simply nymphomaniacs and finally the most interesting category, in which the plea of nymphomania, instead of being taken by the defense, was taken by the prosecution itself. The most interesting case in this category is the so-called "Cable car nymphomaniac case", of the 1970s, in which a 29 year old San Francisco woman alleged that she became a nympho as a result of an accident she suffered due to the negligence of San Francisco railway. The cable car in which she was traveling somehow got detached and started careening backwards. It finally crashed, and the "buxom blonde" - as she came to be known later - although showing no signs of any brain injury, somehow became a nympho afterwards. The damages? Well, she asked for $500,000 and even got $50,000! One-tenth of the amount claimed, yet a big amount in those days.

Carol goes in some detail while describing the case, and it makes an interesting reading. When I came to this case, my wife actually brought me dinner and so engrossed was I in the book, that I completed this case, while simultaneously having the dinner. Four psychiatrists were brought in by the prosecution, among them Dr. Andrew Watson, who quoted a scientific study which claimed that depressed people - as the unfortunate lady had become after the accident - often needed cuddling including sex. The defense only brought one tired psychiatrist, Dr. Knox Finley, who was perhaps too fatigued defending city of San Francisco repeatedly - he routinely examined claimants against the city - to put up much of a defense. He argued that to become a nympho, one must suffer brain damage and the lady had suffered none. City of Francisco lost the case by 9-3.

...In other chapters, Groneman dwells on many other areas dealing with nymphomania. So many and so exhaustive are these, that this book could quite well be called "an encyclopedia of

nymphomania". She even discusses movies dealing with nymphomania. And surely among them is "Deep Throat" (1972), in which the protagonist, Linda Lovelace, the nurse, thinks her clitoris is in her throat!...
The other cases, which caught my attention were *People v. Cowles* , 246 Mich 429, 431, 432, 224 N.W. 387 (1929), *People v. Bastian* , 330 Mich 457, 47 N.W. 2d 692 (1951), *Chew v. Texas* , 804 S.W.2d 633 (Tex. App - San Antonio, 1991), *State of Maryland v. Giles and Giles* , 239 MD 458, 474, 212 A. 2d 101 (1965), *Iowa v. Myers* , 382 N.W.2d 91 (1986), *Hampton v. Wisconsin* , 92 Wis 2d 450, 285 N.W. 2d 868 (1979), *Porter v. Nevada* , 94 Nev 142, 576 P2d 275 (1978) and a host of others. Carol goes in great detail in most of these cases. I am tempted to give details of some of these cases in this review, but then, it might spoil the fun for those of you who would like to buy the book and read the cases for themselves.

In other chapters, Groneman dwells on many other areas dealing with nymphomania. So many and so exhaustive are these, that this book could quite well be called "an encyclopedia of nymphomania". She even discusses movies dealing with nymphomania. And surely among them is "Deep Throat" (1972), in which the protagonist, Linda Lovelace, the nurse, thinks her clitoris is in her throat! We are informed in the notes section, that Linda later joined the anti-pornography movement and testified at the 1983 Minneapolis hearings that she had been held captive and forced to perform in porn movies.

This is one of those rare books, which I read from cover to cover in one go - the day it came to me. This highly cerebral study of nymphomania by Groneman is one of the best books I have read in recent times. Buy it today, and quite possibly you too would read it one go, like I did. Sir Francis Bacon (1561 - 1626), English author and philosopher is reputed to have said, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." Groneman's excellent book comes in the final category. I certainly chewed it, and am now in the process of gradually digesting it.

Get in touch with the author Carol Groneman, Professor Emerita of History, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Graduate and University Center/CUNY by clicking here

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