



A young
Kate Moss
photographed by
Mario Sorrenti

*what we talk about
when we talk about*
DESIRE

In the post #MeToo world we find ourselves in today, author *Vanessa Grigoriadis* explores the new rules of modern dating and seduction... PLUS, on the eve of *Mario Sorrenti's* book of intimate, previously unpublished portraits of KATE MOSS from their time together in the 1990s, the duo talk about what makes a woman desirable, while one of Moss's closest friends, stylist *Katy England*, examines the enduring allure of the iconic supermodel

sex, love & dating

Vanessa Grigoriadis asks the question: how do we navigate sexual relationships today?

Over the past year, a historic reckoning about women’s experiences of sexual harassment and assault has swept Western countries. Today, particularly in the US, victims such as actresses Rose McGowan and Ashley Judd have moved from the shadows to the spotlight, making news as they refuse to remain silent about the past any longer. The public response has been dramatic: a hell of a standing ovation for the victims and a trip to the guillotine for film producer Harvey Weinstein, TV star Charlie Rose, comedian Louis C.K., and many other top players of the male cultural intelligentsia.

Raising consciousness about ugly secrets has had the nifty side effect of ushering in a new-era sex-positivity. The culture is now awash with female stars, from pansexual rocker Janelle Monáe to rapper Cardi B to actress Jessica Biel, proclaiming that they will no longer remain mere acted-upon objects of fantasy. This makes a lot of sense: reclaiming one’s sexual power, previously ripped away, should organically lead to rethinking one’s genuine sexual needs and wants, and what dynamics in the bedroom could be created from these imaginings. But this is where many of us have found the answers in the public domain a bit lacking, particularly when it concerns the thorny issue of desire. Do our love lives need to become transactional, or is there a way we can negotiate this new terrain without losing this necessary human emotion?

What do women want in their sex lives now, and how do we articulate it in a way that lets us preserve adventure, seduction and excitement, but also keeps us safe? Statistics about sexual assault show that the most dangerous sexual experiences are those that happen with semi-strangers – one-night stands beginning at a bar after meeting a friend of a friend of a friend. It could be safest to purely avoid such experiences. But if we’re being honest, some of the high points in our lives involve those formless, endless nights, with male (usually) suitors who proved to be exceptional lovers and perhaps later even became friends.

I’m a married woman who hasn’t visited the shores of singledom in over a dozen years – a prehistoric age before the instruments of modern seduction (texting, sexting, widespread online dating) – but my friends’ reflections on their sexual experiences in the #MeToo era were heartening. Romance isn’t ruined for them, even if its parameters are shifting. Sophie, a 29-year-old New York tech executive, told me that she’s shifted her attitude toward seduction quite a

bit in the past months. Though she used to wait for guys to come to her – worried that aggression would turn them off – she now wants to be an equal player in the choice to hook up, if not be the dominant one.

On a recent vacation to Berlin after a painful breakup, Sophie had a friend bail on a concert they were supposed to attend together. Free ticket in hand, she went on Tinder and swiped around. One of the guys who responded, Paul, a young German marketing guru, did not exhibit disarming charm at first: “So let’s jump to the important topics: what’s your favorite Jay-Z song?” She promptly ignored him, suddenly wary of engaging with new guys so soon after a breakup. But he tried again: “Are your glasses a homage to Harry Potter, or do you really need them?” She didn’t answer that question either, but on his third try, he broke down her defenses: “Harry Potter for sure. I know a fellow Ravenclaw when I see one.” She laughed at this, realizing he had sussed out her personality correctly, then invited him to the concert.

They met on a rooftop for drinks, and she liked Paul almost immediately, particularly when she found out that they had both kept journals since childhood. He put a blanket around her when she was chilly and complimented her boldness at inviting a stranger to a concert, which he found “so American”. Reflecting back on what happened next, Sophie thinks that Paul’s kindness is what led her to pull him close to her later that night. He genuinely seemed surprised that she was willing to come home with him instead of disappear down the subway to her hotel.

Sophie ended up spending the better part of a week in Paul’s apartment before she had to head back to New York for work. “It felt so natural, normal, easy and fun to be together,” she says now. “Paul gave me the gift of being with a man and not feeling anxiety. And feeling worthy of love. And feeling cared for. And feeling human connection. And that being normal – not having to be so special and so different and on the pedestal that my ex was putting me on, that nobody could ever hope to live up to. Just a regular person deserving of incredible love, which we were lucky enough to experience together for a week.”

Sophie is convinced that the revised power dynamic in this relationship – she was an equal player – is part of the reason why she felt empowered by Paul. And she may be right. Seduction is essentially about persuasion, whether we’re talking about Zeus coming off the mountaintop and transforming himself into a swan to bed an unwitting mortal, or someone simply pushing boundaries after hearing “no” in hopes of forcing a “yes”. Perhaps it is not, at this moment of heightened awareness about the amount of autonomy each partner has to have to create an atmosphere of true consent, still desirable.

But some of my other friends disagreed with this sentiment. Seduction not only titillates, but also satisfies the deep human urge to feel sexually and emotionally special – “You’re the only one for me, at least for tonight.” And getting what you want can be as satisfying as being

wanted. Eva, a 40-year-old friend from my college days and now a divorced mom-of-two, told me about a man who recently struck up a conversation with her at a remote spa retreat. They were sitting near each other in club chairs in the hotel’s den late at night – he was finishing the newspaper, she was immersed in a novel – when they began talking about politics. He started to complain about a pain that he had in his neck, and asked if she would give his neck a light massage. She was wary, but he was attractive, and she was excited he was giving her attention; she wasn’t entirely surprised when, after touching his neck, he moved in for a kiss five minutes later.

Did she think that this was the first time he had pulled this trick? No. Did it make her feel desirable in the moment, as if time had stopped and they were the only people on earth? Yes. And after he led her to his room, she tingled with anticipation. “He did things with me that I’d never done before, that I was initially pretty scared to try, such as being choked,” says Eva. “But once you’ve bulldozed over your own boundaries, it’s hard to maintain boundaries for someone else to respect.” This makes it sound like she was hurt by the experience: “It ended up being fine,” she says, adding, “I actually enjoyed it after a bit.” They hooked up one more time before going their separate ways.

What to do with this disrespect of boundaries, even if Eva ultimately enjoyed the experience? Some might say that’s simply a part of sex. Sometimes the unwanted can become wanted, and it takes experimenting with boundaries to know. But I think Eva’s experience is a good example of the curing power of “verbal consent”, by which I mean that partners would get a verbal “yes” from a partner before proceeding to an act such as choking. With the current standard, “no means no”, women bear the role of gatekeeper – unless they speak up, consent is implied. Silence means “yes”, even if the silence is due to fear or discomfort. This standard puts an incredible burden on women to stop something that’s already in motion, and it pressures them to keep the party going so they don’t ruin the moment or seem like prudes.

Hardline feminists who are trying to shift policy around sexual assault might argue that verbal consent should be received for every sexual act, from kissing to oral sex, and that it should happen each time, even with a long-term partner. This seems unrealistic to me, but insisting on it during random hookups makes sense. Nothing ruins a moment faster than the real or perceived notion of being unsafe.

There are other statistics, too, showing that women are increasingly interested in creative sex lives: they’re more likely to engage in polyamory, and more likely to have experiences with women and threesomes. Scientists are beginning to uncover that women are indeed

the more experimental species and men crave simplicity in their sexual experiences (even as they prefer an abundance of women). *Untrue*, a book by Wednesday Martin, author of *Primates of Park Avenue: A Memoir* (an anthropological study of upper-class women), chronicles this shift. Talking to scores of women with non-monogamous sex lives – women who “dare to do something they have been told is immoral, antisocial and a violation of the deepest notions of how women naturally are and ‘should be’” – she finds growing social acceptance for their lifestyles.

Part of the way we will be able to enjoy these evolving sex lives, but also stay safe, is through honest and open sexual communication – which I know can be hard, and even harder with strangers. But it’s the most surefire way to making sure not only a man’s desires but yours too are met. We’ve surrendered our sexual agency for far too long. We have to say what we want.

WOMEN DATING YOUNGER MEN: IS IT STILL AN ISSUE?

by Christa D’Souza

It is the celebrity demographic du jour. Brigitte Macron. Sam Taylor-Johnson. Kris Jenner. Kate Moss. These are just some of the women (with the exception of the latter, whose lover Nikolai Von Bismarck is a mere 14 years her junior) who are ensconced with men young enough to be their sons. Brigitte Macron, for example, is 25 years older than her husband Emmanuel. Kris Jenner is a quarter century older than her on/off partner Corey Gamble. Aaron Taylor-Johnson, or “Benjamin Button” as his friends call him, is 23 years younger than his wife Sam. Heidi Klum and whoever. The list goes on and on.

And good on them, too, right? For if there is one relationship equation society can’t quite get its head around, one vestigial taboo that still manages to upset the order of things, it is this one. Unfair, obviously, and most likely borne out of envy. After all, which woman *d’un certain age* hasn’t had fantasies about hooking up with someone two – hell, maybe even three – decades younger than herself? Who didn’t feel a little stab of something when Demi Moore started stepping out with Ashton Kutcher? Clearly, there is no better defense against aging than dating a much younger man. But it does beg the question: how long can it possibly last? And at which juncture does a MILF morph into an old woman? When are you too advanced in age to be a cougar?

(And while we’re on the subject, what is the etiquette on telling a girlfriend you have fallen in love with her son?) As I write this, I’m doing the math: if somehow, in my parallel universe, I managed to persuade Channing Tatum to leave his wife for me, when he hits a spring chicken-y 60, I’d be pushing 81. The point is – who cares?

We all need to get over it and watch as the goalposts change. If we can now delay having babies until we are in our mid-fifties (cf Brigitte Nielsen); if we can be as fit – if not fitter – than we were in our teens (look at Taylor Holland, the 75-year-old female partner of actress Sarah Paulson, 43); if, crucially, we can earn as much as our menfolk, (for the first time in US history the number of women in the labor force exceeds the number of men, and in roughly one fifth of American families, women are the main breadwinners) it stands to reason we can, as Susan Sarandon once tartly put it, “Partner up with someone because – radical thought – we like him.” (Sarandon recently broke up with a man 30 years younger).

In other words, if you are twenty-something and single, relax already. The love of your life may yet to be born. As the magnificently sanguine Joan Collins once said when asked about the 28-year difference between her and her 53-year-old husband Percy Gibson: “Well, if he dies, he dies.”

“Part of the way we’ll be able to *enjoy* these evolving sex lives, but also stay safe, is through *open* sexual communication”

Kate the great

Katy England, one of fashion's styling superstars, examines the enduring desirability of her close friend KATE MOSS

Kate and I first met in the early 1990s when I was working on the *Mail on Sunday's You Magazine*. One day, this girl came in for a casting. I remember thinking, "Wow, she's gorgeous, so youthful," but she was a little waif, which didn't quite fit in with the *You* consumer. It was only later when I had moved to *Dazed & Confused* and could work with my own aesthetic that she properly came into my life.

It would be easy to think that she's so beautiful, and that's it, or take her skills as a model for granted. But Kate's been honing her craft for more than 30 years. Watch her in front of a camera and she gives everything to that photographer. To see her on a set, the way she moves, how she brings life to the clothes – it's what has carried her through the industry. She'll say things like, "I need to shorten these trousers, put the collar up." She plays a big part in how an image looks. It's partly inside her, something innate, and partly a learnt thing. Sadly, models today don't get the chance to learn. The industry demands constant change – and yet Kate endures.

Of course, there's also her physical form: Kate's body has amazing proportions, and clothes fit her perfectly. What's less known – and extra special – about her is that she is always present, in the moment of whatever she's doing. She's really committed, not looking at a phone, not wondering what's she's doing next. She's real with designers – she's charming, engaging, intelligent. They have a great time with her. She clicked with Lee [Alexander McQueen] on a personal level; they had their background in common – the East End boy and the Croydon girl. She ticked so many boxes for him. Yet she was always a little nervous about doing his shows, worried about looking slightly ridiculous. That's another thing about Kate – she's clear about her boundaries. She will only go as far as she wants to, and if something detracts from the overall portrait of beauty, she will be the first to say. She has such a strong sense of it – she's not willing to let it go.

I think what's particularly alluring about her is that she has always been an enigma – she doesn't court the press, doesn't play that game, and that has helped feed the intrigue. She also has the x-factor, *that thing*. We have always been obsessed with her because she is

real; we sometimes see her a little worse for wear, her make-up not quite right, her eyes puffy. We want the life we know she leads – which has been played out in public – the gigs she goes to, the parties. She really is friends with the fucking Rolling Stones! She has that appealing, care-free attitude that is so attractive. I remember when she left the Met Ball with her dress a little ripped – isn't that so much sexier to a man than the beautiful girl who is so perfectly polished? She brings her bad-girl attitude to anything she does – and brands want that cool.

I think about how young she was when she lived with Johnny Depp. He was a proper movie star at the height of his career, and she was only 20 when they were dating. They went to Cannes [Film Festival] and to all these incredible places. He must have shown her an awful lot, plus her career took her all over the world at such a young age. These experiences have made her worldly and heightened her sense of occasion, which she brings to all that she does.

She wants to create memories, precious moments in time and for everything to be special – if we meet for a cup of tea in her garden, there will always be beautiful china, the right tablecloth and flowers. The whole portrait is perfect. She's

always thinking, "How can I turn this into the best moment?" It's the same when she gets dressed for an evening out: "Where am I going, what's it going to be like once I'm there, what type of dress will suit the location?" She makes it her own and she'll say to us, "Right, we're going here. It's a smart restaurant so we should make an effort. Let's all wear a dress." And there we all are in our dresses. But first and foremost, she's a girls' girl. She looks out for us, her girlfriends, and she's very clever with her advice; it's worldly. She'll tell you spot-on what you should do, and she encourages everyone to do well.

I think this moment sums Kate up – it was a summer's night and we were a happy group of grown-ups and children. A big, bright moon was shining down on us and Kate immediately insisted that all the children climb up onto the roof of her house to get as close to it as possible, to absorb its energy. I remember her saying, "It's a special moon." She was so excited. The children were running to the roof, scrambling up it, and I have this mental image of us all lying down, bathing in the light of the moon, staring up at the stars, listening to Kate. We were all drawn to her and what she was saying, charmed and excited.

What we sometimes forget is that she's navigating her position as a supermodel who is ageing in the public eye, and yet our desire for her sustains. Has she changed from that waif I met so many years ago? Haven't we all?

KATE MOSS TALKS DESIRE

How did you feel when Mario's images were taken? I was excited every day.

It was an adventure...

Did you feel desirable then? I was just beginning to understand what the word meant... Now I understand, and the power that can come with it.

Who do you think is the most desirable woman in the world? Patti Smith is desirable to me, she's the poet laureate of punk rock.

MARIO SORRENTI KATE MOSS

Who was Kate when these images were taken? Kate was an amazing, vibrant young girl, full of character and confidence. Everyone who came across her fell in love with her instantly.

Did you know then how desirable she would become? No, neither of us had any idea what was in store for her. She was more interested in pursuing life with passion, rather than having material success. I think that she has managed to have both.

What does desirable mean to you today? The same as it did 25 years ago: honesty, passion, integrity, inner-beauty, intelligence, confidence, sensitivity, adventurousness and kindness.

A new book showcases intimate, never-before published portraits of a young Kate Moss just before her rise to fame in the 1990s, taken by legendary photographer and then boyfriend Mario Sorrenti

Kate by Mario Sorrenti is out September 5. Phaidon, \$100

Photographs Mario Sorrenti, taken from 'Kate', published by Phaidon