



SEXUALITIES

IDENTITIES, BEHAVIORS, AND SOCIETY

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1.6 THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

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THE SEXUAL TRADITION

The most important set of images for sex or eroticism in the modern West, either for scientists or in conventional educated speech, derives from the language of psychoanalysis. It would be difficult to overstate the coercive power of Freud's innovative verbal reformulations of a whole range of early conceptualizations about the role of sexuality in its biological, personal, and societal contexts. In an important sense Freud remains the superego of nearly all researchers into the sexual, since we must in some measure either conform to or rebel against his body of ideas. As with most great innovators, Freud began with the available set of contemporary ideas that were part of the heritage of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is difficult for those in the 1970s, for whom Freud is received wisdom and whose conservative postures are now most evident and emphasized, to recognize his role as a radical theorist of sexuality as well as representing a force for sociopolitical liberalism. The emphasis on the instinctual basis for the experience of the sexual and the universality of man's sexual experience, though possibly wrong in fact and theory, served to introduce a great change in sexual values at the turn of the century. Perhaps more important, by asserting the universality of the human experience, Freud significantly helped erode the dubious anthropology that imperial Europe used to describe its colonial subjects. The Freudian codification provided for modern, educated, Western man a set of verbal categories through which he might describe his internal states, explain the origins of his sexual proclivities, describe his own and others' motives, and ultimately reanalyze literature, histories, and societies as well as individual lives. The cultural assimilation of much of psychoanalytic theory, especially on a popular level, resides in its essential continuity with popular wisdom about the

instinctive nature of sexuality. This version of sexuality as an innate and dangerous instinct is shared not only by the man in the street, but also by psychological theorists deeply opposed to Freudian thought, as well as by sociologists whose rejection of analytic theory is nearly total. Hence the language of Kingsley Davis:

The development and maintenance of a stable competitive order with respect to sex is extremely difficult because sexual desire itself is inherently unstable and anarchic. Erotic relations are subject to constant danger—a change of whim, a loss of interest, a third party, a misunderstanding. Competition for the same sexual object inflames passions, and stirs conflicts; failure injures one's self-esteem. The intertwining of sex and society is a fertile ground for paranoia, for homicide and suicide.¹

The seventeenth-century political image of the individual against the state is translated by the Romantic tradition into a contest between the individual and his culture. The Hobbesian contest between natural instinct and imposed constraint was moved by Freud (as well as many other post-Romantic innovators) from the arena of the state, power conflicts, and the social contract to the arena of the mind, sexuality, and the parent-child contract. The sexual instinct presses against cultural controls, pleasure contests with reality, as the sociocultural forces in the form of parents (*Leviathan writ small*) block, shape, and organize the sexual drive and convert it from lust to love, from societal destruction to social service.

This tradition is surely present in Freud with his emphasis on a drive model of development, a libidinal thrust that sequentially organizes intra- and extra-psychic life as well as the very meaning of the parts of the body. This direct relation between the external signs of physiological events and necessary motiva-

tional and cognitive states is a given for nearly all students of sexual behavior, whose frequent error is to confuse the outcomes of sexual learning with their apparent origins.

The Freudian or Kinseyian traditions share the prevailing image of the sexual drive as a basic biological mandate that presses against and must be controlled by the cultural and social matrix. This drive reduction model of sexual behavior as mediated by cultural and social controls is preeminent in "sexological" literature. Explanations of sexual behavior that flow from this model are relatively simple. The sex drive is thought to exist at some constant level in any cohort of the population, with rising and falling levels in the individual's life cycle. It presses for expression, and in the absence of controls, which exist either in laws and mores or in appropriate internalized repressions learned in early socialization, there will be outbreaks of "abnormal sexual activity." In the more primitive versions of this drive theory, there is a remarkable congruence between the potentiating mechanisms for specifically sexual and generally sinful behavior. The organism is inherently sexual (sinful) and its behavior is controlled by the presence of inhibitory training and channeling, internalized injunctions, and the absence of temptation. If these mechanisms fail, there will certainly be sexual misconduct (sin). More sophisticated models can be found in functional theories in sociology or in revisionist psychoanalytic models, but fundamental to each is a drive reduction notion that sees sex as having necessary collective and individual consequences because of its biological origins.

What is truly innovative about Freud's thought is not his utilization of prior constructs about sexuality and the nature of man, but his placement of these ideas about sexuality at the center of human concerns, beginning in infancy, an essential to normal human development. As Erik Erikson has observed, prior to Freud, "sexology" tended to see sexuality as suddenly appearing with the onset of adolescence.² From Erikson's point of view, Freud's discovery of infantile and childhood expressions of sexuality was a crucial part of his contribution. Libido—the generation of psychosexual energies—was viewed after Freud as a fundamental element of the human experience from its

very inception, beginning at the latest with birth and possibly prior to birth. Libido was conceived as something essential to the organism, representing a kind of constitutional factor with which forms of social life at all levels of sociocultural organization and development, as well as personality structure at each point in the individual life cycle, had to cope.

In Freud's view the human infant and child behaved in ways that were intrinsically sexual and these early behaviors remained in effective and influential continuity with later forms of psychosexual development.³ Implicit in this view was the assumption that the relations between available sexual energies and emergent motives and attachments would be complex but direct. In some aspects of psychoanalytic thinking, both adolescent and adult sexuality were viewed as being in some measure a reenactment of sexual commitments developed, learned, or acquired during infancy and childhood.⁴

From the vantage point of the late twentieth century, it is apparent that this point of view presents both an epistemological and a sociolinguistic problem. Freud's descriptive language for sexuality was the language of adults describing their current and childhood "sexual" experience (as transmuted through psychoanalytic interviews), which was then imposed upon the "apparent" behavior and "assumed" responses, feelings, and cognitions of infants and children. Acts and feelings are described as sexual, not because of the child's sense of the experience, but because of the meanings attached to those acts by adult observers or interpreters whose only available language is that of adult sexual experience.

It is important to note here the extraordinary difficulties of all developmental research in getting accurate data and also that research on infancy and childhood through adulthood faces a problem which most of the psychoanalytic literature obscures. Part of the problem is faulty recall, some of which is locatable in the problem of inaccurate memories, but another source of error is located in the existentialist insight that instead of the past determining the character of the present, the present significantly reshapes the past as we reconstruct our biographies in an effort to bring them into greater congruence with our current identities, roles, situations, and available vocabular-

ies. Indeed, the role of the analyst in providing an alternative self-conception for patients by creating a new vocabulary of motives is central to the therapeutic impulse and opposed to the gathering of accurate information about the past.

The other major problem of data quality control results from attempting to gather data either from children who are, because of their stage of development, ill-equipped to report on their internal states or from adults who were asked to report about periods in their life when complex vocabularies for internal states did not exist for them.⁵ How can the researcher determine what is being felt or thought when the researcher is confronted with organisms whose restricted language skills may preclude certain feelings and thoughts? The child in this situation possesses internal states that in a verbal sense are meaningless and that will begin to be named and organized only during later development. The adult loses access to that inchoate period of his own experience by learning new ways of attributing meaning to experiences. The organism cannot hold onto both sets of experiences at once. Indeed, this may be the central meaning of development, that the acquisition of new categories for experience erase the past. Opie and Opie report that adolescents quickly forget childhood games. How much more quickly do we forget earlier and more diffuse experiences?⁶

The assumption of an identity between perception based upon a adult terminology for the description of a child's behavior and the meaning of that behavior for the child must be treated with extreme caution. The dilemma is in distinguishing between the sources of specific actions, gestures, and bodily movements and the ways in which they are labeled as sexual at various stages of development. For the infant touching his penis, the activity cannot be sexual in the same sense as adult masturbation but is merely a diffusely pleasurable activity, like many other activities. Only through maturing and learning these adult labels for his experience and activity can the child come to masturbate in the adult sense of that word. The complexity of adult masturbation as an act is enormous, requiring the close coordination of physical, psychological, and social resources, all of which change dynamically after puberty. It is through the developmental process of converting external labels into internal capacities

for naming that activities become more precisely defined and linked to a structure of sociocultural expectations and needs that define what is sexual. The naive external observer of this behavior often imputes to the child the complex set of motivational states that are generally associated (often wrongly) with physically homologous adult activities.

In the Freudian schema, this gap between observer and observed, between the language of adult experience and the lived experience of the child is bridged by locating an instinctual sexual energy source within the infant. The child is seen as possessed of certain emergent sexual characteristics that express themselves regardless of parental action systems. These actions of the child are viewed as being rooted in the constitutional nature of the organism. Consequent upon this primitive Freudian position is an overgeneralized presumption that all contacts with or stimulation of the end organs of the infant have a protosexual or completely sexual meaning.

To suggest that infant or childhood experience, even that which is identified as genital, is prototypical of or determines adult patterns is to credit the biological organism with more wisdom than we normally do in other areas where the biological and sociocultural intersect. Undeniably, what we conventionally describe as sexual behavior is rooted in biological capacities and processes, but no more than other forms of behavior. Admitting the existence of a biological substrate for sex in no way allows a greater degree of biological determinism than is true of other areas of corresponding intersection. Indeed, the reverse is more likely to be true: the sexual area may be precisely that realm wherein the superordinate position of the sociocultural over the biological level is most complete.⁷

The unproven assumption in psychoanalytic theory (and much conventional wisdom) of the "power" of the psychosexual drive as a fixed biological attribute may prove to be the major obstacle to the understanding of psychosexual development. In its more specific psychoanalytic formulation, we find little evidence to suggest that such a "drive" need find expression in specific sexual acts or categories of sexual acts.⁸ Similarly, we must call into question the even more dubious assumption that there are innate sexual

capacities or specific experiences that tend to translate immediately into a kind of universal wisdom, that sexuality possesses a magical ability allowing biological drives to seek direct expression in psychosocial and social ways that we do not expect in other biologically rooted behaviors. This assumption can be seen in the psychoanalytic literature, for example, in which the child who views the "primal scene" is seen on some primitive level as intuiting its sexual character. Also, the term *latency*, in its usage by psychoanalytic theorists, suggests a period of integration by the child of prior intrinsically sexual experiences and reactions; on this level, adolescence is reduced to little more than the management or organization on a manifest level of the commitments and styles already prefigured, if not preformed, in infancy and childhood experience.

In contradistinction to this tradition, we have adopted the view that the point at which the individual begins to respond in intrinsically sexual ways, particularly in terms of socially available or defined outlets and objects, reflects a discontinuity with previous "sexual experience" (however that might be defined). Further, at this point in the developmental process, both seemingly sexual and seemingly nonsexual elements "contend" for influence in complex ways that in no respect assure priority for experiences that are apparently sexual in character and occur earlier in the life cycle.

Essential to our perspective is the assumption that with the beginnings of adolescence—and with the increasing acknowledgement by the surrounding social world of an individual's sexual capacity—many novel factors come into play, and an overemphasis upon a search for continuity with infant and childhood experiences may be dangerously misleading. In particular, it may be a costly mistake to be overimpressed with preadolescent behaviors that appear to be manifestly sexual. In general, it is possible that much of the power of sexuality may be a function of the fact that it has been defined as powerful or dangerous. But this overenriched conception of sexual behavior (to the degree that it is possessed by any individual) must largely follow upon considerable training in an adult language that includes an overdetermined conception of sexuality. Thus it does not necessarily follow that the untrained infant or child

will respond as powerfully or as complexly to his own seemingly sexual behaviors as an adult observer.

We must also question the prevailing image of the sexual component in human experience as that of an intense drive stemming from the biological substratum that constrains the individual to seek sexual gratification either directly or indirectly. This is clearly present in the Freudian tradition. A similar position is observable in more sociological writings. This is apparent, for example, in the thinking of sociologists for whom sex is also a high intensity, societal constant that must be properly channeled lest it find expression in behaviors which threaten the maintenance of collective life.⁹

Our sense of the available data suggests a somewhat different picture of human sexuality, one of generally lower levels of intensity or, at least, greater variability in intensity. There are numerous social situations in which the reduction and even elimination of sexual activity is managed by greatly disparate populations of biologically normal males and females with little evidence of corollary or compensatory intensification in other spheres of life.¹⁰ It is possible that, given the historical nature of human societies, we are victim to the needs of earlier social orders. For earlier societies it may not have been a need to constrain severely the powerful sexual impulse in order to maintain social stability or limit inherently antisocial force, but rather a matter of having to invent an importance for sexuality. This would not only assure a high level of reproductive activity but also provide socially available rewards unlimited by natural resources, rewards that promote conforming behavior in sectors of social life far more important than the sexual. Part of the legacy of Freud is that we have all become adept at seeking out the sexual ingredient in many forms of nonsexual behavior and symbolism. We are suggesting what is in essence the insight of Kenneth Burke: it is just as plausible to examine sexual behavior for its capacity to express and serve nonsexual motives as the reverse.¹¹

A major flaw in the psychoanalytic tradition is that psychosexual development, while a universal component in the human experience, certainly does not occur with universal modalities. Even ignoring the striking forms of cross-cultural variability, we can observe

striking differences within our own population, differences that appear to require not a unitary description of psychosexual development but descriptions of different developmental processes characterizing different segments of the population.¹² The most evident of these are the large number of important differences between observable male and female patterns of sexual behavior.¹³ This particular difference may in some respects be partly attributable to the role played by the biological substratum. We have to account not only for the gross physiological differences and the different roles in the reproductive process that follow from these physiological differences, but must also consider differences in hormone functions at particular ages.¹⁴ However, while our knowledge of many of the salient physiological and physiochemical processes involved is far from complete, there is still little immediate justification for asserting a direct casual link between these processes and specific differential patterns of sexual development observed in our society. The work of Masters and Johnson, for example, clearly points to far greater orgasmic capacities on the part of females than males; however, their concept of orgasm as a physiological process would hardly be a basis for accurately predicting rates of sexual behavior.¹⁵ Similarly, within each sex, important distinctions must be made for various socioeconomic status groups whose patterns of sexual development will vary considerably, more impressively for males than for females.¹⁶ And with reference to socioeconomic status differences, the link to the biological level appears even more tenuous, unless one is willing to invoke the relatively unfashionable conceptual equipment of Social Darwinism. These differences, then, not only suggest the importance of sociocultural elements and social structure, but also stand as a warning against too uncritical an acceptance of unqualified generalizations about psychosexual development.

SCRIPTS AND THE ATTRIBUTION OF MEANING

The term *script* might properly be invoked to describe virtually all human behavior in the sense that there is very little that can in a full measure be called spontaneous. Ironically, the current vogue of using

"encounter groups" to facilitate "spontaneous" behavior can be defined as learning the appropriate script for spontaneous behavior. Indeed, the sense of the *internal rehearsal* consistent with both psychoanalytic and symbolic interactionist theory suggests just such scripting of all but the most routinized behavior.

It is the result of our collective blindness to or ineptitude in locating and defining these scripts that has allowed the prepotence of a biological mandate in the explanation of sexual behavior. (This possibly occurs precisely because the notion of such a biological mandate is a common element within the sexual scripts of Western societies.) Without the proper elements of a script that defines the situation, names the actors, and plots the behavior, nothing sexual is likely to happen. One can easily conceive of numerous social situations in which all or almost all of the ingredients of a sexual event are present but that remain nonsexual in that not even sexual arousal occurs. Thus, combining such elements as desire, privacy, and a physically attractive person of the appropriate sex, the probability of something sexual happening will, under normal circumstances, remain exceedingly small until either one or both actors organize these behaviors into an appropriate script.

Elements of such scripting occur across many aspects of the sexual situation. Scripts are involved in learning the meaning of internal states, organizing the sequences of specifically sexual acts, decoding novel situations, setting the limits on sexual responses, and linking meanings from nonsexual aspects of life to specifically sexual experience. These would at first seem only to be versions of the old sociological saw that nothing occurs internally that does not occur in the external social world. But it is more than this in two ways. Using this model the process of sexual learning can be specified without depending on non-behavioral elements, and doing this reorders the sources of meaning for phenomena and the ways in which we think about the sexual experience.

This can be exemplified even more dramatically. Take an ordinary middle-class male, detach him from his regular social location, and place him for some business or professional reason in a large, relatively anonymous hotel. One might even endow him with an interest in sexual adventure. Upon returning to the

hotel at night, he opens his hotel door and there in the shaft of light from the hall-way, he observes a nearly nude, extremely attractive female. One may assume that his initial reaction will *not* be one of sexual arousal. A few men—the slightly more paranoid—might begin to cast about for signs of their wife's lawyer or a private detective. Most, however, would simply beat a hasty and profoundly embarrassed retreat. Even back in the hall and with a moment's reflection to establish the correctness of the room number, the next impulse would still *not* be one of sexual arousal or activity but most probably a trip to the lobby to seek clarification—via the affectively neutral telephone. What is lacking in this situation is an effective sexual script that would allow him to define the female as a potentially erotic actor (the mere fact of her being attractive or nearly nude is not sufficient) and the situation as potentially sexual. If these two definitional elements did exist, much of what might follow can be predicted with fair accuracy. But without such a script, little by way of sexual activity or even sexual arousal will transpire.

Our use of the term *script* with reference to the sexual has two major dimensions. One deals with the external, the interpersonal—the script as the organization of mutually shared conventions that allows two or more actors to participate in a complex act involving mutual dependence. The second deals with the internal, the intrapsychic, the motivational elements that produce arousal or at least a commitment to the activity.

At the level of convention is that large class of gestures, both verbal and nonverbal, that are mutually accessible. Routinized language, the sequence of petting behaviors among adolescents and adults, the conventional styles establishing sexual willingness are all parts of culturally shared, external routines. These are the strategies involved in the “doing” of sex, concrete and continuous elements of what a culture agrees is sexual. They are assembled, learned over time, reflecting—as will be clear in subsequent chapters—general patterns of stages of development. This relatively stylized behavior, however, tells us little of the meaning it has for its participants. The same sequence of acts may have different meanings for both different pairs of actors or the participants in the same act. This is the

world where sexual activity can be expressive of love or rage, the will to power or the will to self-degradation, where the behavioral is experienced through the symbolic.

On the level of internal experience, it is apparent from the work of Schachter and others that the meaning attributed to many states of physiological arousal depends upon the situation in which they are experienced.¹⁷ In this way, meaning is attributed to the interior of the body by many of the same rules as it is to an exterior experience, depending on a vocabulary of motives that makes the biological into a meaningful psychological experience. This phenomena is well understood in research in drug effects, with the meaning of the drug experience being dependent on mood, situation of use, prior history of the user, and the like, rather than what is spuriously referred to as the drug effect. This is apparent in the effects of all of the so-called mind-altering drugs including marijuana. The differing reports on the internal effects of LSD-25 lysergic acid (good trips, psychomimetic experiences, paranoid trips, art nouveau hallucinations, meetings with God) seem more attributable to the person-situation effect than to the drug. This is observable in young adolescents when they are required to learn what the feelings they have with reference to early post-pubertal sexual arousal “mean.” Events variously categorized as anxiety, nausea, fear are reported which are later finally categorized as (or dismissed, even though they still occur) sexual excitement. A vast number of physiological events get reported to the central nervous system, but of this number only a small proportion are attended to in any single moment. (How many persons, for instance, experience their toes curl or the anal sphincter twitch at the moment of orgasm?) It is this small proportion that is recognized as the internal correlates or internal “meanings” of the experience. In this case, the meaning is a consensual experience with various elements brought together to be the appropriate behaviors that will elicit the internal correlates or consequences of the external behaviors.

Scripting also occurs not only in the making of meaningful interior states, but in providing the ordering of bodily activities that will release these internal biological states. Here scripts are the mechanisms

through which biological events can be potentiated. An example from the adult world is most apt in revealing this process. If one examines the assembly of events that are the physical elements of the current script in the United States for adolescent or adult heterosexual behavior that leads to coitus, it is clear that there is a progression from hugging and kissing, to petting above the waist, to hand-genital contacts (sometimes mouth-genital contacts) and finally to coitus. There is some variation about these acts in timing (both in order and duration), but roughly this is—at the physical level—what normal heterosexual activity is. Prior to or in the course of this sequence of physical acts, sexual arousal occurs, and in some cases orgasm results for one or both of the two persons involved. What is misleading in this physical description is that it sounds as if one were rubbing two sticks together to produce fire; that is, if only enough body heat is generated, orgasm occurs. However, orgasm is not only a physical event, but also the outcome of a combination of both biological and, more importantly, social psychological factors. Unless the two people involved recognize that the physical events outlined are sexual and are embedded in a sexual situation, there will not be the potentiation of the physiological concomitants that Masters and Johnson have demonstrated as necessary in the production of sexual excitement and the orgasmic cycle.¹⁸ The social meaning given to the physical acts releases biological events. Most of the physical acts described in the foregoing sexual sequence occur in many other situations—the palpation of the breast for cancer, the gynecological examination, the insertion of tampons, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation—all involve homologous physical events. But the social situation and the actors are not defined as sexual or potentially sexual, and the introduction of a sexual element is seen as a violation of the expected social arrangements. The social-psychological meaning of sexual events must be learned because they supply the channels through which biology is expressed. In some cases, the system of naming must exist for the event to occur; in others, portions of the event that are biologically necessary are never observed in the psychological field of the participating persons.

The term *script* (or *scripted behavior*) immediately suggests the dramatic, which is appropriate; but it also

suggests the conventional dramatic narrative form, which more often than not is inappropriate. The latter tendency is reinforced by our most general conception of the sex act itself, which is seen as a dramatic event with continuous cumulative action. This is suggested, for example, by the language of Masters and Johnson—"arousal, plateau, climax, and resolution"—a conception resembling somewhat an Aristotelian notion of the dramatic or the design for a nineteenth-century symphony. However, the sources of arousal, passion or excitement (the recognition of a sexual possibility), as well as the way the event is experienced (if, indeed, an event follows), derive from a complicated set of layered symbolic meanings that are not only difficult to comprehend from the observed behavior, but also may not be shared by the participants. Even where there is minimal sharing of elements of a script by persons acting toward each other (which, while not necessary, clearly facilitates execution of the acts with mutual satisfaction), they may be organized in different ways and invoked at different times.

The same overt gesture may have both a different meaning and/or play a different role in organizing the sexual "performance." The identical gesture undertaken during sexual activity may be read by one participant with a content that might resemble that of Sade or Sacher-Masoch, while the other participant reads content from *Love Story*.

Elements entering into the performance may be both relatively remote to the erotic (or what is conventionally defined as remote to the erotic), as well as the immediately and intrinsically erotic. Moreover, the logic of organization may more closely follow the nonnarrative qualities of modern poetry, the surrealist tradition, or the theater of the absurd than conventional narrative modes. The sexual provides us with a situation where the mere invocation of some powerfully organizing metaphor links behavior to whole universes of meaning; a situation where the power of a metaphorically enriched gesture, act, characteristic, object, or posture cannot be determined by the relative frequency with which it occurs; such organizing metaphors need only be suggested for their effects to be realized.

An example of this may be seen in Jerzy N. Kosinski's novel *Steps*,¹⁹ where our nameless hero finds

himself looking down upon a fellow office worker (female) whom he has long desired sexually and who is in a posture of unrestrained sexual accessibility. Though it is a moment he has long desired, he finds himself unable to become aroused. He then recalls the moment of his initial sexual interest; a moment in which, while watching her in the act of filing papers with uplifted arms, he catches a fleeing glimpse of her bra. This trivial image, originally arousing, remains arousing and our hero goes on to complete the act. It is that image (and what it links to) that both names her as an erotic object in terms of his sense of the erotic and names also what he is about to do to her. Though the image need only be briefly suggested (both in its origins and subsequent utilization), and though it may remain unknown to the behaviorist observer, it becomes critical to the performance. Its meanings could be multiple. For example, that the sexual becomes erotically enriched when it is hidden, latent, denied, or when it is essentially violative (deriving from unintended exposure). It also legitimates the appropriate name for the behavior. Consider the possible "labels" our hero could have invoked that could have been applied to the behavior, each with its own powerful and powerfully distinct associations—making love, making out, fucking, screwing, humping, doing, raping.

The erotic component we can assume is minimally necessary if sexual activity is to occur; that is its very importance. (A dramatic exception, of course, are many women whose participation in sexual activity has often—historically, possibly more often than not—had little to do with their own sense of the erotic.) On the other hand, a preoccupation with the erotic may reach obsessive proportions without overt sexual behavior necessarily following. Thus, like the biological component, it can be described as simultaneously being of critical importance and also insufficient by itself to be either fully descriptive or predictive of actual sexual careers.

While the importance of the erotic can be asserted, it may be the most difficult to elaborate, as a concern for the erotic—the acquisition of sexual culture—is possibly the least well understood or attended aspect of sexual behavior. We know very little about how it

is acquired or, for that matter, the ways in which it influences both our sexual and nonsexual lives. Persistence of concepts such as libido or the sex drive obviate need for this knowledge. For those who hold these or comparable positions, the body is frequently seen as being both wise and articulate; recognizing and speaking a compelling language. Still others have assumed, in too unexamined a way, a direct link between collective sexual cultures and private sexual cultures, despite the fact that for many what is collectively defined as erotic may not be associated with sexual response or that much that the collectivity defines as non- or even anti-erotic may become part of the private sexual culture of a given individual; for example, various kinds of full and partial fetishisms. As a result, much of the research on responses to erotic materials often begins with the dubious assumption that experimental stimuli are recognizable in terms of a conventional social definition.²⁰

One thing that is clear is that for contemporary society erotic imagery or metaphors are for the most part discontinuously or only latently a part of the images or metaphors of nonsexual identity or social life. (The exceptions are those social roles that are specifically assumed to have a "known" erotic aspect, such as the prostitute, the homosexual, the stewardess, or the divorcee, all of whom we tend to see as either fully erotic or unusually erotic to the point where we have difficulty seeing them in anything but erotic terms.) Thus, for conventional actors in relatively conventional settings, the invocation of the erotic, necessary for sexual arousal, frequently requires a series of rituals of transformation before the participants or the setting license (as it were) the sexual moment. For example, much of pre-coital petting or foreplay may serve less as facilitators of a physiological process, than as elements in a ritual drama that allow one or both actors to rename themselves, their partners, as well as various parts of the body in terms of the "special" purpose. The intrusion of nonerotic, manifest meanings to images—that is, parts of the body or other role commitments of one or another of the actors is experienced as disruptive of sexual interest or capacity, if only because such commitments are rarely predictive of sexual role needs. For most, as a

consequence, the sexual flourishes best in a sheltered and, in some sense, isolated universe, a landscape denuded of all but the most relevant aspects of identity.

At the same time, the larger part of identity and sense of the rest of social life frequently intrude in an indirect way. The elaboration of the erotic or its direct expression is often constrained by an anticipation of an anticipated return to that larger social role, that more continuous sense of self. For some this may involve merely the insulation of silence; for others, symbolic reinterpretation and condensation—for example, an intensity of pressure that allows the actor to represent by that gesture either passion (or the message that uncharacteristic behavior is thereby explained), or love and affection (that the actor is the same as he or she is in their more conventional mode of relating), or sadistic aggression (illuminating a complicated fantasy rehearsed and experienced sufficiently that the gesture successfully evokes most of the emotional density generated by a long and frequently complicated scenario).

Beyond the very general level, however, little can be said. Important questions dealing not only with origins but careers have yet to be even examined provisionally. Where do such images come from? In terms of what sexual and nonsexual experiences do their meanings change? Is there need for elaboration? These, and many more, are the questions that we may have to examine before sexual activity, which all too often can be described as a "dumb-show" for its participants, becomes something other than a dumb-show for behavioral science.

NOTES

1. Kingsley Davis, "Sexual Behavior," in *Contemporary Social Problems* eds. R. K. Merton and R. Nisbet (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 317.
2. E. H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1963).
3. Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on Sexuality," *Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 7 (London: Hogarth, 1953), pp. 135-245. Also, E. Jones, "Freud's Conception of Libido," in *Human Sexual Behavior: A Book of Readings*, ed. Bernhardt Lieberman (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1971), pp.

42-60; P. Chodoff, "Critique of Freud's Theory of Infantile Sexuality," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 123 (1966): 507-18.

4. Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (New York: Liveright, 1935), pp. 283-84.

5. E. Schachtel, *Metamorphosis* (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

6. There is a body of evidence that among young children there is a large amount of game and folklore material that is rapidly forgotten after puberty. A certain amount of this material is sexual, but the folklorists who work with children usually fail to keep records of this, or if they do so, do not publish it. An interesting aspect of this material is its eternal character—that is, it is passed on from generation to generation. For example, children in England are currently singing a recognizable variant of a song about Bonaparte popular in the early nineteenth century. See Iona Opie and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of School Children* (London: Oxford Press, 1959), pp. 98-99.

7. Even on the level of organismic needs and gratification, the linking of these to the sexual or protosexual may be too limited, too simple. Robert White has argued cogently that during infancy and early childhood an emergent commitment to "competence" may rival sensual expressions of the pleasure principle in organizing the young organism's activities, as the child "sacrifices" immediate sensual gratification in order to develop and experience his or her own competence. See "Psychosexual Development and Competence," *The Nebraska Symposium on Motivation* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1960).

8. Frank A. Beach, "Characteristics of Masculine 'Sex Drive,'" *The Nebraska Symposium on Motivation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1956).

9. E. Durkheim, *Suicide* (Glencoe, Ill. The Free Press, 1951).

10. J. H. Gagnon and W. Simon, "The Social Meaning of Prison Homosexuality," *Federal Probation*, 1968.

11. K. Burke, *Permanence and Change* (New York: New Republic, Inc., 1935).

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