INTRODUCTION

The task of understanding sexual deviance, and those of its forms commonly referred to as perversion is twofold. First, we must attempt to understand why and under what conditions certain behaviors are proscribed. Second, there must be an understanding of the motivations that encourage individuals to engage in or identify with such behaviors. These two levels of concern are related, but rarely in ways that are either simple or direct.

Attempts at answering these two questions are often the meeting point of naive functionalisms, psychobiologisms, or mechanistic behaviorisms. Functionalist and psychobiological perspectives tend to assume that the reproductive consequences of heterosexual intercourse are the manifestation of evolved drives associated with species survival (Symons, 1979). When confronted with the reality of sexual practices that have little or no direct relation to reproduction, such essentialistic approaches attempt to locate the specific experiences of individuals that alter or divert this phylogenetic predisposition. This is consistent with the 19th-century conceptualization of perversion as a pathology of sexual appetites that alter nature’s initial intent (Stoller, 1975; Kaplan, 1990).

My own view, in contrast, rests comfortably within social constructionist perspectives which consider sexual behaviors in much the same way as most other behaviors, i.e., to be viewed in terms of their origins within the sociohistorical process and their necessary derivation of legitimacy from the cultural practices of their time and place. This constructionist perspective views the emergence of definitions of sexual conformity and deviance within the context of the evolving discursive practices of social life. Correspondingly, constructionists view individual motivation not as the adaptations of unchanging human organisms to changing sociocultural circumstances, but as also occasioning fundamental changes in the capacity of individuals to experience and act upon sexual desires (Foucault, 1978; Simon and Gagnon, 1986, Irvine, 1990).

The fact of sexual deviance presents problems for social constructionists who, like adherents to all other social learning approaches, are often embarrassed by the appearance of sexual behaviors that persistently violate social expectations. However, the embarrassments of effective resistance to powerfully held social norms need not only be explained by archaeological approaches that locate the origins of deviance or perversion in hormonal variations or the direct consequences of infant/child experiences that are remote to societal influence. Rather, it is possible to view such outcomes as derivative of numerous developmental contingencies that, at many points of development, could have produced markedly different outcomes. While sensitive to the factors that might differentiate the deviant from the non-deviant, this constructionist approach requires that individual differences be understood in the context of a greater abundance of shared experiences. We must also acknowledge the possibility that relatively small differences might account for the display of both conforming and deviant sexual behavior.¹

The Self in Alternative Realities

It may be something of an irony that the realm of human sexuality, which has frequently been viewed as constant across the human record, may actually be an ever-changing, dependent upon the time and place. Modern sociobiology has explicitly pointed out the changing patterns of desire and cultural expressions of the same (Gagnon, 1986).

Elias (1978) notes that preindustrial societies possessed concepts of private repulsion, unselfishness and the possibility of personal motives that were separated from the dominant public ethic. The elevation of this individuality in social learning may allow them to learn to bargain and trade in exchange for what they desire to consummate. In the contexts, becomes possible, a dialogue as private behaviors as public, with implications (Simon, 1984; 1991; 1954; Thompson, 1992; Plummer, 1979).

Sexual Desires

Among the many who have commented on Freud’s reconstruction of infantile development was one that Freud himself elaborated. This was his account of how the male infant object of the sexual drive, and his subjection to the preordained mode of the infant’s own mutant, “solo” because of his focusing our attention on the question of how and why sexualized, Freud’s model describes the sexual object as a metaphor for shared but as the representation the sexual task, conceptualizes sexuality but as metaphorical.

This formulation has largely unexplored, there is no conceptual space for the expression of individuality or the internalization of symbolic power, which are not intrinsic attributes of symbolic power, that to sexual motives is not only meaningful but that


²A revised version of papers presented at the 1988 meetings of the American Sociological Association and the 1992 Conference of Theory, Culture & Society. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Robert J. Stoller who taught us to approach sexuality with a proper disrespect.
actually be among the forms of behavior most
dependent upon contextualizing contingencies.
Modern societies may represent an unprece-
dented point in social evolution where sexual de-
sire and cultural expectations increasingly cease
to closely mirror one another (Simon and
Gagnon, 1986).
Elias (1978) and Foucault (1978) suggest that
concepts of privacy, the modern self, and the
flourishing of the erotic as a widely distributed,
personal motive all tended to coincide as a dis-
tinctive aspect of the modern western experience.
The elevation of the sexual becomes a probabil-
ity in social contexts where individuals must
learn to bargain not only with the world for what
they desire to be but also with themselves for
what they desire to be. The sexual, in such con-
texts, becomes an occasion for enlarging internal
dialogues as private thoughts must mesh with
private behaviors that have profound social im-
plications (Simon and Gagnon, 1987; Freud,
1915/1954; Trilling, 1972; Goffman, 1959;
Plummer, 1975; Wernberg, 1983).

Sexual Desire and Its Representation
Among the most revolutionary aspects of
Freud’s reconceptualization of sexual develop-
ment was one that he himself did not fully appreci-
ate nor work into his theoretical constructions.
This was his almost casual observation that the
object of the sexual drives was not an extension
of those drives, as it were, not their natural or
preordained mode of expression, but that the ob-
ject was “soldered” onto the drives. More than
focusing our attention upon the often neglected
question of how object and aim become eroti-
cized, Freud’s formulation encourages us to treat
the sexual object not as the expression of desire,
but as the representation of desire; a view that
conceptualizes the sexual not as an ultimate real-
ity but as metaphoric text (Davidson, 1987).
This formulation occasions the familiar but
largely unemployed idea that sexual behavior is
the expression of a wide variety of desires that
are not intrinsically sexual and, by the same
token, that to speak of “hidden” or “latent” sex-
ual motives is not to speak of desire’s ultimate
meaning but to refer to a complex history of
meanings (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Individuals
acting in virtually identical ways may be doing
so as a result of different configurations of desire
and they may find themselves experiencing the
act in different ways. Similarly, individuals expe-
riencing what are virtually identical configura-
tions of sexual desire, given the specific contin-
gencies of their lives, may find themselves
engaging in vastly different activities. To the
continuing frustration of conventional behavior-
ists, individual behavior increasingly must be
viewed not as the text of a fact but the fact of a
text, a complex outcome for which no one defin-
ing label can have universal meaning. Conse-
quently, the appearance of uniformities in sexual
practice may speak to a dependency upon shared
sexual scripts more than to biological constants;
there clearly are more reasons for being sexual
than ways of being sexual.
Contrary to the legacy of Freud, for the very
reason that there may be no desire that cannot be
sexualized, there may be no desire that is intrinsi-
cally sexual. The possibility of hidden agendas
becomes the commonplace of human encounters
in modern and postmodern worlds; agendas hid-
den from others, and often simultaneously hidden
from the self. As never before, more than finding
the origins of the sexuality of individuals in the
history of their culture, we must find these ori-
gins in the varied histories of individuals within
their cultures.

The Eroticized Self
The transparency of the self in traditional so-
cieties, where individuals are assumed to be what
they appear to be, gives way in modern settings
to the emergence of the more opaque strategies
of the narrating subject. Objects of sexual desire,
being representations of what is experienced as
coming from within the self, as well as a state-
ment to the external world, are the projections of
an enlarged and empowered complex intrapsy-
chic reality. While thumb-sucking ultimately
gives way to its inability to provide nourishment,
the same cannot be said of the numerous objects
and experiences that nourish the psyche, which
has a more enduring ability to feed upon its own
creations. It is in this empowerment of the in-
traps psychic that the modern world’s capacity to democratize eroticism rests, as well as its diminishing capacity to transform sexual desire into specific types of persons.

Defining Deviance and Perversion

It is not paradoxical to say that the abnormal, while logically second, is existentially first.
—George Canguilhem (1989)

That which constitutes sexual deviance and that which constitutes sexual perversion by definition relate to larger categories of social practice than those that are specifically sexual. This leads us to a useful distinction between sexual deviance and sexual perversion. Sexual deviance might be defined as the inappropriate or flawed performance of a conventionally understood sexual practice. For example, rape is an act of sexual deviance that is rarely defined as an act of perversion. Rape becomes perverse only when performed on an individual whose inclusion in a sexual act goes beyond the limits of generally conceivably sexual practice or is performed in ways that go beyond the limits of generally conceivable sexual practice. Though we may deplore the behavior, it is possible to comprehend, and even empathically reconstruct, the experience of the rapist or his victim. In the language of the pathologists, such behaviors can be termed a "disease of control."

As the character of sexual practice changes over time so do the boundaries of the definitions of deviance. An excellent case in point is the increasing incorporation of oral sex in the scripting of conventional sexual scenarios. Although the behavior as a matter of organs and orifices remains unaltered, its collective meanings and uses for specific individuals demonstrably have been undergoing profound change (Gagnon and Simon, 1987; Simon et al., 1991).

Perversions in contrast tend to be forms of desire too mysterious and sometimes too threatening to the most elementary definitions of desire and satisfaction to be tolerated. Perversion, then, can be thought of as a disease of sexual desire not only in the sense that it appears to violate the sexual practices of a time and place, but also because it constitutes a violation of common understandings that render current sexual practice plausible. The "pervert" is disturbing because, at the level of folk psychology, we have difficulty understanding why someone "might want to do something like that." Consistent with this approach, Davidson (1987) cited Krafft-Ebing's use of the term "perversion" in the following way:

In Krafft-Ebing's Text-book of Insanity there is a discussion of anomalies of appetite such as hyperorexia (increases), anorexia (lessening) or perversions such as "a true impulse to eat spiders, toads, worms, human blood, etc." (p. 259)

Perversions of appetite, thus, involve not only the desire to eat the unthinkable but also the desire to eat for unthinkable reasons. The same might be said of perversions of the sexual. Moreover, as with deviance, what is considered a perversion is also subject to revisions as what constitutes the thinkable changes.

The logic that links motive and behavior is the complex, almost magical logic of representation, a logic of metaphor and metonymy that meshes personal with social history. Concerns for the role of the symbolic in the interaction of individuals often obscures the importance of the interaction between, and even within, symbols. A homogeneity of sexual preferences inevitably masks a heterogeneity of desired emotional productions, and this perhaps is the level at which, to some extent, we may all be perverts, as even the most conventional may find their sources of sexual excitement fueled by the slightest "whiff" of the unthinkable (Stoller, 1979, 1985).

SEXUAL DESIRE AND ITS "DISEASES"

Sexual "deviates" are . . . an enigma, and it is the future of culture that they are challenging us to decipher through their obsessions.
—Sylvère Lotringer (1988)

Masturbation: From Perversion to Normality

Within the Western tradition, masturbation was the first "disease" of sexual desire to become a matter of continuing major public preoccupation. From the 18th century forward, though known to be a common temptation, masturbation was conceived of as a disease with only versions. The specific masturbatory practice to endure for its continuing expression of guilt and longings of guilt initially served only partially those experiences that are horrific concepts.

The Foucaultian notion that perversion is widely broadcast and introduced in the century to advertise and reenact the language of the sex is testimony to the idea that perversion is only partially changing patterns from the mid-18th to the mid-19th century, that the actual understanding of masturbation and its psychic content between.

Masturbation is therefore not an isolated phenomenon totally separate from general sexual practices as Kant and others believed. It was about the fear of sexuality. The response to their fears required an answer that could possibly be answered by the symbolic." Thus within the reality of "the properly described desire," both sexual practice (Pontalis, 1974) and the content of fantasy and the reality vary between different cultures and at different times. As a result, masturbation is a constant throughout the history of the human species.

The experience of the individual is that reference to the external world, to the subject to the external world, to the other, is a mixed blessing. The individual experience of the external world have been a constant throughout the experience that is the human capacity of the will.

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was conceived as a major source of sexual perversions. The speed and intensity with which the masturbatory prohibition was adopted, its capacity to endure for almost two centuries, as well as its continuing capacity to generate powerful feelings of guilt and anxiety, cannot be explained simply by the ideological functions it might have initially served. What remains unclear is the experiences that might have lent credibility to such horrific conceptions (Simon, 1989).

The Foucaultian hypothesis (1978) that the widely broadcast masturbatory prohibitions introduced in the mid-18th century actually served to advertise and dramatically valorize the significance of the sexual and make the body itself give testimony to the deployment of power may be only partially valid. It is possible that in the changing patterns of individual development from the mid-17th century on, there were conditions that were already in the process of increasing the actual number of individuals engaged in masturbation and, at the same time, altering the psychic content of the masturbatory experience.

Masturbation, we can be sure, was not an experience totally alien to the architects of the masturbatory prohibition, which includes such figures as Kant and Freud. Thus we might ask what it was about their experience that gave substance to their fears regarding that experience. A plausible answer is that it was the anxieties generated within the reality of the psyche. Fantasy has been properly described as “the mise-en-scene of desire,” both sexual and nonsexual (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974). Neither the capacity for nor content of fantasy are constants; they necessarily vary between cultural settings and individual histories. As a result, it would be a mistake to chart the history of sexual behavior without a corresponding history of the self.

The experience of internally generated desires that reference the external world, without being subject to the immediate surveillance of the external world, has always been something of a mixed blessing. As dramatization of the fullest experience of desire, masturbation might well have been a critical, enhancing developmental experience that is most essential to the Freudian model of the human: the divided self, the primacy of the wish, and the centrality of symbolic processes (Weeks, 1985; Gagnon and Simon, 1973; Hillman, 1975, 1979). It must be understood that masturbation could have such character-altering consequences only because of the kind of personalities that were evolving in the changing circumstances of emerging modern Western social life.

Homosexuality: From Perversion to the Suburbs of Normality

The invention of the concept of the homosexual, the major focus of concerns for perversion in the late 19th century, made the sexual significant by making it a signifying aspect of character. While homosexuality took center stage in a heightened scrutiny of the sexual as emblematic of basic character types, it was also an admission of the problematic nature of sexuality in all guises. As a result of this enhanced role of sexuality, modern homosexuals may be as different from previous generations engaging in same gender sexual behavior as contemporary homosexuals are different from previous generations of individuals engaging in heterosexual acts (Halperin, 1990; Katz, 1990).

Homosexuality and heterosexuality necessarily share an ability to allow the issue of gender to dominate all competing explanations of sexual desire. This, in turn, gives rise to two powerfully signifying, if deceptive, homogeneities. Sexual behavior can be viewed as an ultimate signified at the end of a signifying chain; desire would be seen as a desire for a kind of sex (homosexual or heterosexual) and there need be no, or very little, concern for else what that “kind” of sex might additionally represent. The “fact” of homosexuality created the conditions for the recognition of heterosexuality as a distinct type, the ideologizing of homosexuality also ideologized heterosexuality. Specific sexual desires could compromise, often happily, with the desire to be part of a version of a larger normality. The pleasures experienced by the validation of gender competence that accompanies evidence of heterosexual competence provided “obligatory heterosexuality” with its carrots, while institutionalized homophobia provided the sticks. Both homosexuality and heterosexuality serve to enhance the primacy of
concepts of gender and the patchwork quilt of discursive practices that, in part, rests upon them (Simon, 1989).

By the middle of the present century, homos-exuality had effectively lost its status as a perversion, especially in the sense we have used it, and in recent years, curiously encouraged by the information and imagery attending the current HIV epidemic, it can be said to have lost its status as significant deviance. And there is little reason to anticipate a change in the direction of this trend. This is not to say that homophobia and its attendant irrationalities will not continue to occasion cruelties and pain, but that manifestations of homophobia must increasingly be seen as just that. The widened perception of homophobic practices as cruel, unjust, and irrational occurs because those practices must increasingly contradict and, at times, disrupt current conventional practices in areas of social life both immediately and remotely connected to the sexual.

SEXUAL DEVIANCE TODAY

Sex is dirty to the extent that erotic reality threatens to undermine the cosmic categories that organize the rest of social life. This is the source of the fears that surround sex, but also the source of its fascination. If sex did not disintegrate the cosmos to some extent, human beings would want to copulate only so much as the animals, which are less preoccupied with sex. Those who desire to wash the dirt from sex...are polishing away the very impurities that make it worth doing, that allows sex to rise above mere biological process into an existential act (pp. 245-246).

—Murray Davis (1983)

The confusions and uncertainties that attend massive social change, particularly those that are massive without being immediately catastrophic, change that almost imperceptibly invades and alters our social worlds, are reflected in concerns focusing upon both the sexually deviant and the sexually conforming. The changes manifested in each of these domains not only contextualize the other but both must bear the effects of changes in related and often broader social practices in the realms of work, family life, and community. Much of what has shaped current sexual patterns is still very much in place, even if undergoing continuing revision. These forces involve virtually every aspect of social life, from the technologies influencing the worlds of work to those which have transformed our most intimate living spaces. What only a few decades ago represented hard-won understandings of the intermeshing of biological time and social time in comprehensive models of the life cycle (Erikson, 1963) appear to be less universal in their application and less usable as a basis for creating guides to personal and social well-being.

Much of current commentary on contemporary sexual patterns speaks of excessive change (the sexual revolution) and of returns to normality or, at the very least, of a backing off from current patterns with a renewal of older standards and constraints (the sexual counterrevolution). Many secular observers viewed the appearance of several kinds of sexually transmitted diseases as manifestations of some natural sanction against "excessive" sexual behavior. Similarly, the swiftness of the construction of a new psychiatric disorder, "sexual addiction," gives further evidence of what is commonly described as "a retreat from permissiveness" (Levine and Troiden, 1988).

The historic relationship between behavior and desire has been dominated by an anticipation of the need to establish firm limits on the expression or confession of desires. The postmodern experience may begin to reverse this as the claims of many desires can be heard more emphatically. The hyperreality, the attempt to create in nature what was not there in the first place, that Baudrillard (1983) finds intrinsic to postmodern culture may find its analog in the hyperreality already to be found in modern versions of sexual desire. In this case, hyperreality represents the ascendancy of the "simulacra" or "dream of desire" over the enactment of desire, which sustains the repetitions that are fueled by the quest for what does not and, by its very nature, cannot exist. (This would also be consistent with the Lacanian notion of the circularity of desire, where desire presses upon behavior not seeking satisfaction, but seeking confirmation of itself.) Sexual hyperrealities press even more strongly upon the conventional, allowing the narrating self to reach toward the experience of the self in ways that compensate for a legacy of compromise with pleasure and the contingencies and indecisions and end (Stoller, 1977).

We might also note that sexual in recent years has become increasingly detached from any kind of institution, which we used to address. This perhaps reflects the near monopolization of sex by the market not of sex in the market, but also the changes of the field. In the revolutions of this society, where desire present an and pleasure also are numerous.

Many of the desires, particularly the demand for wealth and status, be the result of an investment in to occult or to the potential of change, changes that might be called "sociolistic gratification" (Stoller, 1977).

Given the above layered history, there are different enactment of the social, on the level of the body and the individual, to the interpersonal, and to the social and political, which might be productive of semiotic excess and multiple meanings and effects. Thus, the sexual desire is company feeling itself as the myth of love or the myth of aggression. The parodic dimension of the the intrapsychic and intersubjective, sexual desire possible, the personal script is object acceptable (Simmel), where the difference represents an in which an enhancement of the experiences of current social and sexual excitement is no longer linked to sexual excess, and is still of the self (Stoller, 1979).
pleasure and transcend the prevailing inconsistencies and indifference of the world (Lichtenstein, 1977).

We might also speak of the decentering of the sexual in recent years in recognition of its increasing detachment from the family as an institution, which was once its nearly exclusive social address. This partial abandonment of the familial near monopoly on legitimate sexual expression involved not only changes in sexual practices but also the changing practices describing other aspects of the family (Stone, 1989). The implications of this sociocultural shift from the immediate present and future of the sexual in our lives are numerous.²

Many of the changes in relationships, particularly the dissolving of marriages, tend either to be the result of an intensification of sexual interest or to occasion such interests. This environment of change also finds expression in what might be called the individual’s repertoire of gratification (Simon and Gagnon, 1976).

Given the ability of the sexual to represent a layered history of desires and associations, different enactments of sexual desire can be staged on the level of the intrapsychic than are being performed, often simultaneously, at the level of the interpersonal. The sexual has the capacity to be productive of the confusions associated with “semiotic excess,” to become the bearer of multiple meanings and associations (Barthes, 1968).

Thus, the sexual scripting of tenderness can accompany feelings of disdain and retelling of a myth of love can be accompanied by displays of aggression. The distinction between the intrapsychic dimensions and the interpersonal dimensions of the sexual become critical: The logic of the intrapsychic script is organized to make desire possible, whereas the logic of the interpersonal script is organized to make behavior acceptable (Simon and Gagnon, 1987). This difference requires a charting of the ways in which an enhanced marketplace for sexual desire encourages shopping among the emotional products of current experience for their direct links to sexual excitement, as well as their indirect links to sexual excitement, as well as their indirect links to still older sources of sexual excitement (Stoller, 1979). Developments that encourage a self more mutable in the scripting of its social commitments and one for whom the satisfactions derived from the inevitable insincerities of our own performance encourage the appropriation of the questionable sincerity of our sexual partners.

For a mutable self may be subjected to “identity exchange,” the reciprocal cognitive transfer of some of each partner’s defining characteristics to the other during sexual intercourse. Identity exchange is central to both erotic experience and smut structure, providing the link between the sexy and the dirty. It is the “double helix” of sexuality, involved in both sexual attraction and repulsion. Sex partners are attracted to each other because identity exchange allows for each to reproduce himself in the other and the other in himself. (Davis, 1983, p. 239)

THE MEANING OF PERVERSION

It is possible that at any one moment a society may contain a wide variety of forms of sexual perversion. Many such perversions are so obscure that they remain unknown and unknowable. Still others occur with sufficient regularity that they become part of a society’s canon of perversions. Of these, a small number become a special focus of attention and these frequently provoke an intensity of response; their appearances are not merely sanctioned severely but their dangers advertised, and their actual, potential, and suspected practitioners are aggressively pursued.

The perversions that command the greatest attention and/or intensity of response are those whose incomprehensibility is lessened by a diminishing of the differences that certify their very status as perversion. In other words, attention is paid to those perversions that begin to appear on the shadowy borders of plausibility and, as a result, where the increased scrutiny for signs of such taint in others occasions a similar scrutiny of the self. Such scrutiny is associated with a sense of impending epidemic as it brings to perception an enlarged number of decipherable signifiers.

THE FUTURE OF PERVERSION

Masturbation and homosexuality over the past century have been repositioned with specific images that range from normality to tolerable de-
viance. The continued oppressions associated with masturbation are largely confined to those that individuals are encouraged to impose upon themselves. Exceptions are those manifestations that are viewed not as particularly dangerous but that constitute a public nuisance. Currently, masturbation is accepted in current schema of individual development. Even for the psychoanalysts it becomes a stage-appropriate behavior, though not without its inherent dangers (Laufer and Laufer, 1989). Some consideration of the positive and enabling role it plays in psychosexual development have appeared (Freud, 1914; Hillman, 1975; Gagnon and Simon, 1973). Outside of a concern for adolescence, however, it remains largely unexamined despite the research of Kinsey (1948, 1953) which pointed to its persistent appearance in the lives of significant numbers over the longer span of the life-cycle and as part of the sexual repertoire of many who are sexually active in other ways.

Most of the dominant institutions of society continue to define homosexuality as undesirable, if not aberrant, but they do so, in recent years, with a dramatic erosion of credibility and confidence. For many at all levels of social life lesbians and gay men no longer appear mysteriously hypersexual, but disenchantedly pedestrian as figures of everyday reality. Except for the most homophobic, the fear of homosexuality rests not upon its own claims, but upon what else must be reconsidered when homosexuality is reconsidered.

Practices regarding gender, age, and hierarchy are the current dominant focal points of sexual perversion. All three, to varying degrees, are currently problematic in terms of their nonsexual manifestations and this may heighten the ability of such practices to generate sexual excitement. Gender, age, and hierarchy are powerful signifiers of complex signifieds, each with a capacity to link erotic significance to more general and, in some cases, older desires.

The dominant claimants to the center stage of current perversions are pedophilia, the violation of norms of age, and sadomasochism, the elaboration of the often hidden or denied norms of hierarchy, the language of power. These seem to provoke the qualities of widely publicized indignation that indicates their presence may be known in the sexual imageries of large numbers of persons.

**Pedophilia**

Pedophilia is generally seen as sexual desire for the prepubescent; sexual desire for those who, aside from being seen as unable to give meaningful consent or to be fully sexually responsive, are seen as objects who lack many of the qualities of the semiotic of the body that suggest erotic significance. This lack, or deficiency, appears to challenge our capacity empathically to comprehend this desire. However the idea of children as sexual objects is not so remote that it cannot be viewed as potentially attracting a growing number of devotees. Although the incidence of this kind of behavior is almost impossible to establish with any accuracy, it is becoming a more visible part of current social discourse than in any other period of history. Concerns for potential "victims" and commitments to various forms of prevention, such as anti-kiddy porn legislation and enforcement, suggest a widespread and growing problem. This issues of child sexual abuse, both within and outside the family setting, has become one of the dominant themes in current public sexual talk. Independent of the actual frequency of such events, the sheer amount of such talk brings the behavior closer to the horizon of plausibility. The appearance of histories of victimization (recall), which now occurs with considerable frequency and a greater sense of legitimacy by the widespread endorsement of parts of the psychotherapeutic community, gives substance to the image of the dysfunctional family as normal. Pedophiles are no longer exclusively an obscure type emerging out of unusual circumstances, known only in terms of their hypersexuality; in many instances, they are our parents.

These developments suggest that the plausibility of the behavior has markedly increased in recent years. However, increased plausibility, by itself, need not imply an increasing incidence of pedophilic behavior or that such behavior would be increasingly seen as acceptable. As with all forms of behavior whose very implausibility becomes suddenly more plausible, it is necessary to scrutinize those aspects of the characteristic behavior that support the protective status of the adult and to expose the adult sexual activity that was previously present to observe or which we have to worry about. The critical distance of social inquiry.

The civilization of the Western world required that we view the child, as well as the adult, has significant deficiency. Much of the effort to be directed was clearly deleterious and the initial hostility to this approach evaporated. All of this, the Western milieu is such that could be both the child and perhaps of lust and psychopathology. Western family life has become a more constant, and the expectation of the adult may be.

Child development and memory are generally an act of human emotion, as well as the act of the child, could be symptomatic or expressive of love or the parent or love of the parent. It is evident in the family is to protect the child from unacceptable appearances. The denial of within familial contexts the property may have been situations where the child had emotional attachments.

It is likely that this significant aspect of the child character as a social and immediate function...
scrutinize those behaviors not only for changes in
the characteristics and motives of its participants
but for insights into the practices, sexual and
nonsexual, such behavior appears to ignore, if
not violate. Elias (1978) provided a potent insight
when commenting on the emergence of a special,
protected status for children when they were first
protected from exposure to the appearances of
adult sexual activity. He noted that previously
there was little concern for what children were
present to observe because the adults did not
have to worry about maintaining psychological
distance from their children as there was a suffi-
ciency of social distance already in place.

The civilizing (modernizing) process, which
required that we learn to see the adult in the
child, as well as the legacies of childhood in the
adult, has significantly eroded that social
distance. Much of the indignant astonishment that
accompanied the introduction of Freud’s image of
the psychosexual life of the infant and child
was clearly defensive. Yet, more surprising than
the initial hostility was how quickly much of it
evaporated. All things considered, how quickly
the Western mind accepted the idea that the child
could be both the object and subject of love—and
perhaps of lust as well. In the increasingly psy-
chologically dense environment of the modern
Western family, children were treated with an
almost constant, but rarely fully conscious, anticipa-
tion of the adult person they were expected to
be. The child could be seen in both experience
and memory as accessing almost the entire range
of human emotions. Erotic interest by the child,
as well as the projection of erotic interest from
the child, could be as ordinary as fear, anger, re-
sentment, or envy, as well as loyalty, dedication,
or love of the purest kind. This anticipation was
evident in the frequently articulated desire to pro-
tect the child from the sexual in virtually all its
appearances. The potential for pedophilic incest
within familial settings that viewed children as
property may have been far less than in those set-
tings where the bonds of the family rest upon
emotional attachment.

It is likely that pedophilia will remain a signif-
ificant aspect of sexual deviance, maintaining its
character as a major form of perversion for the
immediate future. However, its plausibility is
strengthened by the plausibility of other evolving
practices. Three interrelated aspects might be
mentioned:

1. Just as the seeming universalism of gender (with its
ability to naturalize a wide range of social practices
and yet encompass and bracket great social differ-
ences) has been subjected to radical deconstruc-
tions, age appears vulnerable to similar deconstruc-
tive criticisms. The resulting uncertainty is
reflected in the increasing ambiguity surrounding
what is considered age-appropriate costuming, pos-
tures, and behaviors.

2. As age loses a substantial portion of its seeming
objectivity, its ability to independently organize the
narrative of the self is correspondingly diminished.
The uses of childhood in the narration of the self
are exemplified in the ability of the psychoanalytic
tradition to conceptualize most human experience
as being framed by the repetitions of the experi-
ences and meanings of childhood. As the tradi-
tional “family romance” turns into the horror story
of the dysfunctional family, the sexual potential of
childhood present and childhood past becomes
something of an atmospheric presence.

3. Of great general significance, the enlarged and em-
powered domain of psychic reality makes behavior
the servant of sexuality, as it makes sexuality the
servant of the narrative of the self. The narration of
the self becomes less a continuous chronicle than a
series of vivid episodes, episodes that often occur
within settings that are rarely predictable. Cinema,
more than the novel, becomes the dominant genre
of sexual autobiography. Moreover, the experience
of sexuality in service to self-solidarity increas-
ingly rivals the experience of sexuality in the ser-
vice of social solidarity. Thus the acting subject can
become the object of its own desires by appropriat-
ing the experience of the other. For some, being in
a parental role is the only acceptable route to the re-
construction of the fantasized desires of the child.

This last point describes a very general
process which organizes the sexual in many more
ways than merely that which facilitates the route
to the varied forms of pedophilia. However, to
the degree that pedophilic imageries begin to
describe the construction of the sexual for signifi-
cant numbers of persons, it does suggest why pe-
dophilia becomes potentially less implausible
and why the current intensity of responses to the
issue of pedophilia is required as much as an act

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of self-protection as it is required by a desire to protect the child.

**Sadomasochism**

Sadomasochism touches directly and sometimes embarrassingly illuminates the degree to which hierarchy, with the immediate implication of power and control, permeates virtually all aspects of social life (Burke, 1966). Aspects of social life that claim for themselves an agatilist character tend to do so with a self-consciousness that calls attention to their self-conscious avoidance of hierarchy. It is love, for example, that has the powers to "level" all. It should not be surprising, then, that past and current experiences with hierarchy should provide both motives and metaphors critical to the self-recognitions of the individual. The permutation of the sexual by such motives and metaphors should be as inevitable as it is disturbing. To the degree to which gender costumes power, the manifest significance of gender signs in the construction of sexual scripts speaks to the most general capacity of themes of hierarchy to elicit or give permission for sexual excitement as a general phenomenon (MacKinnon, 1987).

The term "sadomasochism," as discussed below, does not refer to specific individuals, such as sadists and masochists, but to those who participate in the enactment of consensual sadomasochistic episodes in which at least one participant explicitly experiences sexual excitement as a result of overt sadomasochistic gestures. Great emphasis must be placed upon "explicit" because suggestions of the sadomasochistic, if only in obscure nuances, may play a role in sexual experiences for many, just as comedy often disguises the very hostility upon which it depends. Because the exclusion of the principle of hierarchy from most current cultural scenarios describing the erotic, playing off the themes of hierarchy is often hidden from the other, as well as from the self. Perhaps for that very reason, hierarchical themes tend to play a pivotal role in the processing of those gestures that inspire and reinforce sexual excitement (Stoller, 1977, 1985).

Among the most compelling and earliest of the experiences of hierarchy are those that involve critical dependencies of infancy and childhood. Emotionally infused issues of hierarchy also reemerge with the ambiguities of adolescence, ambiguities that tend to be accompanied by an enlarged attention to the sexual. These ambiguous themes of hierarchy and power figure preeminently, but by no means exclusively, among the experiences that provide both an imagery of occasions and the raw materials of feeling states from which sadomasochism in both its sexual and nonsexual guises subsequently arises (Adorno et al., 1950).

The sexual experiences, particularly those that must be established by interpersonal negotiation rather than those maintained by long-standing ritual or convention, require a high degree of sensitivity to the dialogical. The experience of the sexual, like many kinds of experience, often occurs with its participants viewing the activity as if from the outside. The conditions of postmodernity mandate great intensities of self-reflexivity; to one degree or another, we are all voyeurs of ourselves.

There are very few forms of behavior more commonly dialogical than the modern experience of the sexual. It is dialogical in the sense that participation often requires an attribution, accurate or inaccurate, of the emotional responses of their sexual partners, as well as a chorus of others who are not present but whose sense of judgment is invoked (Simon and Gagnon, 1987; Bakhtin, 1981). When uncertainty and dialogical requirements meet, actors are situated as an audience to the unfolding interaction, and, as such, they are split not only between activity and reflexivity but also between identification with self and other. As we read or order ourselves to meet our own socioemotional requirements, so do we of necessity read the other. It may be that the lighting within the sexual chamber is dimmed, as often occurs, not to obscure what can be seen but to see what is not present but must be seen.

The sadomasochistic script plays upon the potential absolutism of hierarchy, not merely to experience hierarchy with the relief accompanying the elimination of its ambiguities but to experience the dangerous emotions that invariably accompany acknowledgment of its exercise, the rage and fear of rage in both the other and our-
selves. This includes the rage that follows from our inability to be a perfect (guiltless) god or a perfect (guiltless) servant of god, or the rage that follows from the frustrations that attend mutual dependencies, with their inevitable disappointments and coercions. A risk that becomes more common with a decline in culturally prescribed specifics of sexual interaction, a situation where each participant has the capacity to betray or embarrass the performance of the other.

The social segregation of the sexual ensures its limited claims upon larger identities; for example, it allows those who are professional aggressors in public contexts to become submissive children within the sexual script as it allows the timid public subordinates to become the most demanding rulers. In a sense, then, sadomasochism can represent an escape from both the practice and legacies of hierarchy by playing past its realistic imperatives. The sexual, often too real to be taken too seriously, can become an occasion for a visceral confirmation of a version of self that is not obtainable in other configurations of the self (Lichtenstein, 1977). Consensual sexual sadomasochism emerges as an exercise in hierarchy that occasions authenticity precisely because of the illegitimacy of the behavior to which it is applied; its eroticism and attending sexual excitement create a comforting sense of reality to what otherwise often appears as a childish performance.

Though much of the sexual, and sadomasochism in particular, has been viewed as a desire to dissolve interpersonal boundaries, sadomasochism can actually serve to orchestrate a heightened sense of difference between self and other by affirming a felt absolute symbiosis of self and other in a parable of social order. It does so by playing upon divisions within the self, creating an objectified space within the rules of the intrapsychic dominate, where authority uncovers all secrets, allowing truth, justice, and desire to coincide—albeit momentarily. Sadomasochistic sexual desires, as discussed here, can only be conceived of by segments of humanity capable of contemplating a fragmentation of self as well as loss of social order.

To the degree that sadomasochism can be seen as "tainting" the sexual practices of many individuals, it may not qualify as an issue of perversion as we have used the word thus far. That is, the degree of images, gestures, or—to use Stoller's (1979) useful descriptive term—"microdots" implicating sadomasochistic themes are generally prevalent in both the intrapsychic and interpersonal scripts of individuals should narrow the space between the thinkable and the unthinkable. For some time, film and art critics have instructed us in just how much the erotic is a game of power played within (or at) the rules of power. This is typified in discussion of the predominant representation of women as passive recipients of the male gaze, as the object of desire and only rarely the subject of desire (Berger, 1972; Mulvey, 1975). An enlarged capacity to empathically comprehend its attractions may account for the nervousness with which the popularization of its clearly related symbols (leather, chains, studs) has been greeted.

It is also important to understand that, as with most forms of sexual behavior, the attributes that appear to encourage a commitment to the specific enactment of erotic desires may be distinct from, rather than essential to, those attributes which give rise to the desire in the first place. While there are critical differences between those who only fantasize and those who risk performing a version of the fantasy, such differences may be independent of the shared capacity to dream in certain similar modes.

Sadomasochism looms large on the horizons of the current sexual landscape in ways that require that it be approached as a "disease of desire." One source of this marginalization is the dominant cultural scenarios that predominantly insist upon nonhierarchic motives, scenarios that are allowed to serve lust only in the guise of love, that place all emphasis upon other motives that might occasion sexual excitement (Benjamin, 1988; Simon, 1973; Stoller, 1979, 1985). It is possible that the experiences of recent years have created new pressures to modify this position. This has been particularly true for many among recent cohorts who cannot, like Freud, welcome the decline of Eros' imperatives, but who experience its possible loss as a crisis of identity, as a crisis of competence. Typical of this shift is the current abandonment of Freud's idea of genital

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maturity as occasioning an easy and gentle confluence of the sentimental and the erotic.

There is a growing awareness of the importance of these polymorphous perversions [e.g., exhibitionistic, voyeuristic, sadistic, and masochistic sexual games] as part of normal love relations, in contrast to their subordination to genital intercourse. I have proposed that normal polymorphous perversity is an essential component that maintains the intensity of a passionate love relation, and recruits—in its function as the receptacle of unconscious fantasy—the conflictual relations and meanings that evolve in a couple's relationship throughout time. (Kernberg, 1988, p. 65. My emphasis, W.S.)

It is worth noting that even this concession to the possible acceptance of perversities, such as sadomasochism, is admitted only on the condition that they serve to enhance a domesticated relationship. The origins of the lusts that somewhat belatedly are allowed to serve love are viewed as limited to the universal residues of inarticulate infancy and early childhood. There is no concern for the recent history or current condition of individual existence; “the conflictual relations and meanings” that occur within extramarital roles, as well as from other regions of the self.

CONCLUSION

At the moment, the inherited legacy of the sexual—its current moral, social, and psychological significances—continues to color our actual experience of the sexual. Few reared in the Western tradition can be indifferent to the significance of the sexual or be unaware of the ambivalences it generates, though the degree to which individuals are affected differ widely within and between cohorts. Indeed, the great significance accorded the sexual has tended to privilege it in the sense that its mere presence has often either created a near blinding glare or provoked such nervousness that made a detailed examination of what in fact was going nearly impossible (Simon, 1989).

In Foucault’s (1978) view, the growth of an erotic consciousness in the modern west was occasioned by the oppressive presence of efforts to banish it from visibility. This situation, in recent years, has changed profoundly. Erotic images, direct and indirect, conventional and unconventional, are abundantly visible. Patterns of behavior have changed in numerous ways, and the erotic status of individuals has become a more overt aspect of the reciprocal surveillance that accompanies many aspects of social life. At the risk of dissolving parts of what little we think we may know about sexual behavior, we must begin to address the questions of the changing nature of sexual desire, the changing nature of their uses; very much in the spirit of Foucault, we must begin to see it as an evolving phenomenon whose meanings and truths are part of the continuing production of social reality, of the continuing production of our current versions of the human.

NOTES

1. A source of misapprehension is the tendency to seek a singular origin or cause for seemingly uniform outcomes. Another equally influential source of misapprehension is the questionable assumption that we are viewed as dramatic effects must require equally dramatic causes.

2. Changes in the family and other changes in social life are often reflected in what might be termed the changing ecology of the self. This, in turn, poses the possibility of a disordering or altering of prior commitments to expressions of the sexual. Commitments that, at each earlier stage of personal history, reflected accommodations to a specific and now different ecology of the self. Even when a disordering of the ecology of the self culminates with a reconsolidation of the previously existing ecology, the sexual often becomes an initial focus of change as previous commitments and renunciations must be reprocessed (Kohut, 1978).

REFERENCES


Drawing upon the writings of Michel Foucault, Charles Taylor, and others, Charles Taylor's discussions as a survivor of Nazi-occupied Belgium, Heilprin's essay, and a participant observer study, we can examine how prisoners come to accept and cohere mean as to negotiate between a normative and a deviant world of a new structure. As a result of the research regarding institutions and total institutions.

In an excerpt from his book, "Incarceration and Control," Wayne Wood and his colleagues present a method of viewing overcrowded prisons as 'total institutions,' and societies that order against governments. A significant example should be noted to keep the "prevailing" order of the system swift, and several control mechanisms need to be implemented when punishment system. Given the conditions for the horrid jail and the consequences, the legitimacy of the punishment system is debilitated.