

Sexual Norms: Its Behaviour

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Introduction

IN ORDER TO understand the sexual standards of any society, one must have some knowledge of the ways in which our social existence shapes our sexual natures. One must know something about sexual similarities and differences existing between man and animals, within man and woman, and among various societies in the world today. The subject of normal sexuality is an extremely broad one and a very difficult one to define as it merges into the vague borderlands of sexual deviation.

Normality in sex implies an existence of a standard of normality within societies. However no absolute standards can be found, for what is considered to be sexually normal varies from country to country and from epoch to epoch. A sexual practice that is considered acceptable at one time or place may be an abhorred perversion at another. Even within the same culture, each individual may adhere to different sexual standards, depending upon the influences between his upbringing and the potency of his sexual needs. It is thus safe to assert that there are no sexual norms and practices which has not somewhere been condemned, and none which has not elsewhere been accepted (Storr, 1964). Every society must control potentially destructive sexual behaviour through some sanction of reward and punishment. But it is clear that effective control can only be achieved in many variegated ways (Gebhard, 1971).

Learned and Cultural Aspects of Sexuality

The learned aspect of sexual behaviour can be seen within society, e.g., people of higher education are more likely to engage in premarital petting

reaching orgasm, more likely to masturbate and engage in more oral-genital play (Reiss, 1960). The lower social classes are more likely to ejaculate faster, women having less orgasm, and women feeling that sexual relations is for the pleasure of men only and the duty of the wife (Masters and Johnson, 1970).

Since all cultures have a learned mode of sexual behaviour, no culture has the 'truly physiological' or 'natural' or 'normal' way of acting sexually. The present medical and psychological knowledge (Berg and Street, 1953; Ellis, 1954) defines all sexual behaviours which do not physically injure a person or reflect great internal conflict as normal. Even the injurious behaviours that are considered abnormal are often only the symptoms of some mental disorder. Thus oral-genital contact, masturbation and all positions in coitus are accepted as normal today.

Differing Sexual Responses of the Male and the Female

The female sex drive is not by nature significantly less than the male's (Kirchwey, 1924). The male is generally more easily aroused by physical excitement or by sexual phantasy, while the average female is aroused more frequently by motion pictures (not necessarily pornographic) or literary reading. While the male sexual arousal appears to be more genital in nature, the female arousal is more psychic and emotional. The male seeks recognition and demonstration of his masculine powers through sexual relationships; the female, on the other hand, finds that often sexuality is thrust upon her. The Kinsey (1953) report indicates that petting of a

fairly heavy nature was common among virgins. The female is probably an individual who has strong sexual desires but is striving to keep them under control.

While the male is anxious about his own sexuality, the female plays a relatively passive role (Storr, 1964) as she does not need to assert herself. Thus for the male, love is a thing apart but for a female it is her whole existence. These profound differences between the male's interest and goal in sexual relationship and that of the unmarried female produce highly complex misunderstandings. Because physical intimacy, particularly orgasm, is less central to the female's sexual development, the couple in the dating ritual can misunderstand each other (Hettlinger, 1967), as Greene (1964) stated 'she wants love, but he wants sex'. For the male petting or intercourse is likely to be desirable while his feelings for the female may not be deep at all.

If she finds him attractive and enjoys his company, she will accede to further intimacies, not because she craves for them but because she wishes to please him. She may assume, quite wrongly, that since (for her) passionate love-making could be an expression of a deep commitment. He, on his own part, may equally be wrong to assume that her readiness for petting reflects (as it would in him) an erotic passion, and may induce her to accept more pressure than she wishes to.

What seems to the male an obvious and extremely desirable incentive with all the possible risks (most to the girl) may be to her an entirely superfluous and even unattractive proceeding to which she only agrees because she loves him.

Calderone (1965) commented: "The female plays at sex when she is not ready because fundamentally what she wants is love; and the male plays at love, for which he is not ready because what he wants is sex". Because her total physical and psychic maturity is earlier than that of the male she is less interested in casual intimacies, is often more sophisticated in directing a relationship towards a more permanent fulfilment of marriage and child-bearing.

Infantile Sexuality

The first sexual experience of the male takes place early in childhood. His penis swells and grows stiff when his bladder is full. He will soon discover that it is accompanied by a pleasurable feeling not entirely within his control. These observations were made by Sigmund Freud (1924) in his essay on Infantile Sexuality which raised a furore among contemporary Viennese society.

The importance of infantile sexuality deals with Freud's discovery of the Oedipus complex from which the theories of psychosexual development, sexual behaviour and deviance originated and it played a major role in the modern understanding of sexual behaviour and pathology. The inability of the male to totally control his penile erection has been interpreted in early Christian times as the work of the devil. Thus the uncontrollable penis was proof of the original sin of Adam as recorded in the Scriptures.

Adolescent Sexuality

The sexual behaviour of young people is an important issue today, particularly in the controversial realm of sex education and contraception (Wagner, et al., 1969). As many taboos surrounding sex and sexuality disintegrate, a new openness in depth and range of discussion emerges.

Sexual behaviour has long been recognized as a major concern of adolescence and of others about adolescence.

The adolescent sexual dilemma occurs in the widely recognized fact (Kinsey, 1953) that man attain their greatest sexual capacity in the late teens. They grow up in a society which refuses to recognize and acknowledge their sexuality, but invariably blames the younger generation for non-conformity which is frequently exaggerated and misinterpreted. Nocturnal seminal emissions or 'wet dreams' appear to be the only means generally accepted in orthodox society by which young men can obtain sexual relief from the strain and pressure of their sexual excitements.

To understand the sexual behaviour of adolescents, one must be aware of the context within which a teenager struggles to find his identity and come to terms with his new physical maturity. There is continuing conflict between the traditional 'what ought to be' and 'what is'. This schism makes it more difficult for the teenager to find a consistent, unambiguous sexual standard. The marked ambiguity in attitudes and behaviour which characterizes traditional institutions merely intensifies his confusion. Specific factors causing a reduction in ambiguity over sexual matters are:

- (a) The apparent decline of parental control.
- (b) General decline in community's scrutiny of teenagers.
- (c) An apparent weakening of the churches' influence on sexual matters, and

- (d) Growing unwillingness of college authorities to act as parent-figures to their students.

Sex problems were said to range fourth in the list of what adolescents considered as major health problems, after drugs, smoking and drinking (Brunswick, 1971). The major anxieties were the fear of contacting venereal disease and the fear of pregnancy. Girls appeared to be more concerned about sexual matters than boys and among adolescent girls, sexual matters were an area of primary concern.

Schofield (1968), in a study of the sexual behaviour of young people, illustrated that less parental discipline caused more opportunities for sexual behaviour. Conformity with other teenagers was very important especially in the field of sexual behaviour. Many young males thought that their friends had more sexual experiences than themselves and there is an urgent desire to conform. It was also discovered that experienced girls were usually more independent than their male counterparts, rejecting family influences, thereby causing greater friction with their parents.

Some Statistics

Hall (1972) in a survey among males in Santiago, Chile, indicated that among males between 18 to 54 years of age, only two percent reported not having had any sexual experience. The median age for sexual relations was 15 years. Forty-six percent had their first experiences at 15 years and 67% before the age of 19 years. Ninety-four percent of unmarried males and 23% of unmarried women were sexually active. The use of contraceptives, whether married or single occurred in less than 50% of cases. Extra-marital intimacies were reported in 61% of married males and in the upper classes.

McCance and Hall (1971) in a study of unmarried college females at Aberdeen University noted that 44% had experienced sexual relations. Only fifty percent of the experienced girls and 28% of the inexperienced girls thought that contraceptive materials and advice were adequately available. Contraceptives devices were not used in 53% on the first occasion. However, the use of contraceptives increased with the frequency of sexual relations and the stability of the relationship.

Eysenck (1972) in a study of personality and sexual behaviour came to the conclusion that extroverts were more likely to have intercourse much earlier and more frequently, with more different persons per unit time, in more diverse positions, and would indulge in more varied sexual behaviour outside sexual relations than introverts.

Masturbation

The incidence of male masturbation is generally fixed at 95% of the total male population (McCary, 1967). Slightly less than two-thirds of males experienced their first ejaculation through masturbation, about three-quarters learnt about masturbation from verbal and literary sources. Surveys indicated that most adolescent boys masturbated two-and-a-half times a week and in about 17%, four to seven times a week. The incidence of masturbation in men progressively declined in the post-adolescent years and became sporadic throughout life.

Among the unmarried female's erotic activity, masturbation ranked only second to heterosexual petting. Thirty-seven to 85% of women masturbated depending on the sub-cultural groups. Among previously married women, masturbation accounted for 13-44% of the total sexual outlet. The frequency was higher for the higher educated in the upper social classes. In contrast to men, they showed a reduction in frequency after the teens.

It has only recently been realised by psychiatrists that the fear of masturbation and guilt it caused, appeared to have more dangerous consequences than the act itself. Many culture-bound psychiatric disorders related to the mythology and taboos of masturbation manifest the syndromes of Spermatorrhea (Carstairs, 1967), Masturbatory Insanity (Hare, 1962) and Koro (Rin, 1965; Yap, 1965 and Gwee, 1968).

The Double Standards of Sexuality — Male Dominance

The core of the double standards of sexuality in many cultures seemed to involve the notion of female inferiority. The standards gave males more rights than females and assumed such attitudes as proper. Thus the female role carried a lower status as compared to the male role (Reiss, 1960). Man's physical strength made him a much better hunter, while women were more incapacitated during child-bearing and rearing. Initially, economic reasons supplanted sexual motives and provided a more or less stable heterosexual relationship. Thus men's physical superiority conferred on him economic, political and military advantages thus making it possible for him to define women as inferior.

The double standards are an ancient sexual code in a modern society. It is evidently the feminist movement, with its platform of equality, that has greatly weakened the double standards. Furthermore contraception has removed the fear of pregnancy. The lower social classes conflict

more with the double standards while the upper social classes would be more likely to modify the double standards and accept transitional levels (Whyte, 1943).

The concept that the wife should submit to the husband's sexual approach and never make an approach herself is anomalous and is indicative of centuries of male dominance. It reduces the female into a mere instrument for man's pleasure and she becomes little more than a receptacle enabling him to discharge his own sexual desires.

Virginity and Frigidity

The tremendous over-valuation of virginity has a long history and its origins are far less creditable than are generally supposed. Intercourse before marriage was regarded as a grave sin, though more heinous for females than for males. Virginity was spiritually held at a higher status than marriage.

With the double standards, the male believed non-virginal women to be *bad* and therefore desire to marry virgins. At the same time, their sexual standards made them constantly strive to render as many women non-virginal as possible. This meant that they were lowering their own chances of marrying a virgin.

The *virginity paradox* could lead to conflict when a male discovered that his girl friend had indulged with someone else or when the husband discovered that his bride was not a virgin.

The double standards seemed to be shared by many individuals in a net of contradictory and unfulfilled desires, especially in an urban, industrial society. Many females utilised the double sex standards to attract males and then *castrated* their sexual potency. This situation led a female who, on the surface seems highly-sexed, but who is internally quite frigid – a sweet, sexy virgin whose dual nature may well cause her much internal conflict. Such a virgin was similar to *waxed fruit* – in both cases the appearance might be appetising but the object was incapable of fulfilling its promise. This situation led to a sensual type of sexuality which might constantly frustrate both persons in their attempt to maintain a stable relationship. In short, the sort of behaviour made people accept only the surface aspects of sexuality (Sharp, 1955).

Premarital Sexual Relations

Although the majority of pre-literate societies and cultures are opposed to most forms of extra-marital sex (adultery), the vast majority are in favour of premarital sexual intercourse. Murdock's (1949,

1954) and Service's (1957) examination of pre-literate societies revealed that 70% allowed premarital coitus for both males and females, but only about 20% allowed full extra-marital coitus. Furthermore, Gebhard (1971) found that in pre-literate societies roughly two-fifths to half were in favour of females indulging in premarital coitus.

The few cultures who fully restrict premarital coitus vary in nature with their restrictions. In many of them, the restrictions are of a double standard nature, i.e., the male is allowed to have sexual freedom while the female is severely condemned. Comparatively speaking, modern society is highly restrictive in terms of sexual behaviour but in practice, most people break the formal rules. Nevertheless, Kinsey (1948) found that the majority of men and women in his study engaged in premarital coitus.

The objections to premarital relations brought upon by parents are that it spoils a girl's matrimonial chances. She is solemnly warned by them that men were glad enough to take her virginity and would drop her as soon as they had what they wanted. Thereafter, she will be *damaged goods* and of little demand in the marriage market. The Chesser (1968) report found "those who had premarital sexual experience seemed to find greater pleasure in sexual relations at the beginning of their marriages than the virgins."

Various authors (Terman, 1938; Burgess & Paul, 1953; and Kinsey, 1948) indicated that 50% of women in California, Chicago and New York respectively entered marriage non-virginal. From half to two-thirds of his female subjects who engaged in premarital sex reported that they later married that man. Thus it seemed that the largest outlet for sexual intercourse among women was this 'affectionate-person-centred' type of coitus. The vast majority indulging in this type of coitus seemed to accept this behaviour as correct, i.e., they believed in a sexual standard which allowed indulgence when in love. Therefore, a major standard of premarital coitus is one which accepts intercourse as correct when strong affection, love or engagement is present.

This altered standard occurs for at least two groups:

- (a) those who accept sexual relations only when there is a stable relationship present.
- (b) those who accept sexual relations when there is physical attraction regardless of the degree of stability and affection present.

Illegitimate Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy is an end result of adolescent sexual behaviour and such behaviour is difficult to change but its outcome can be affected by contraception and abortion (Gabielsion, et al., 1971). It is important not to lose sight of the personal problems of these girls who court pregnancy as well as the social, educational, psychological and medical implications of teenage pregnancies. Teenage sexual activity is reflected in the increasing numbers of pregnancies in this age group and adolescents find it difficult to obtain contraceptives or may use them ineffectively. Girls favourably disposed to abortions tend to be older and of higher socio-economic status without current religious affiliations.

Demographers have noted that the younger the girl is when she starts having babies, the more babies she is likely to have (Campbell, 1968). The teenage population, the poor and the less educated are particularly adverse. Among women, there appeared to be an inverse relationship between education and both the number of children wanted, expected or intended (Ryder & Westoff, 1969).

Friedman (1972) indicated that dynamic conflicts of teenage illegitimate pregnancies were a flight from an intense involvement with a seductive father, identification with a pregnant mother, sister or friend, hostility towards a restrictive family, a wish for self-punishment or a depressive search for pleasure to avoid a depression or emptiness. In a study of 200 unwed mothers, she indicated that they were more sexually naive and had massive repression and denial of interest in the knowledge of sex. There was an avoidance of sexual knowledge matched by an emotional avoidance and a blunting of feelings which consistently reflected a deep-seated attitude towards sexual matters. Furthermore, evidence indicated that most of them did not discover their pregnancy till four to five months late and thus achieved a worry-free state of mind for a few months.

The unwed mother frequently entered into a sexual relationship with little conscious thought of what might happen to her. Her knowledge of the personality of her lover was poor and she usually focussed on the love he gave only. There was a defective ego function in these women who lacked an awareness of the consequences. The carrying of the pregnancy to term was not a rational decision concerning the baby, but rather, the natural consequence of not thinking of the pregnancy.

Many men who caused girls to become illegitimately pregnant were said to be irresponsible and used the double sex standard. It was interesting

that the contraceptive use of the condom was mainly to protect themselves from venereal disease, rather than to protect the girl from pregnancy. There was no concern for the female at all. It appeared that frequently the girl who became pregnant had casual relationships with a 'permissive-without-affection' double standard male and where there were shifting partners.

Marriage

To most young women, the wedding day is the most momentous event of their lives (James, 1969). The priest instructs her "it is ordained for the procreation of woman it is a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication, that such persons have not the gift of continence might marry and keep themselves undefiled."

The idea of marriage is like a medicine (cure) against fornication desires from St. Paul's notorious injunction "better to marry than burn". The implication is that sex is sinful both before and outside marriage and even within marriage it is tainted with guilt and suspicion. The couple creates unrealistic expectations of marriage and are so doomed to disappointment. The moral overtones turn sex into a problem with the inevitable emphasis of the age-old association of sex with sin.

The young bride cherishes three illusions and thus has false expectations.

(a) The Romantic Illusion

It is the most precious experience in life originating from romance and sexual desires and yet one of the most dangerous. It is not the sole foundation for a meaningful marriage. We are in a society where sexual relations are considered by the majority as sanctioned only within marriage. This gives rise to the myth that the first time one falls in love, one has to prove one's sincerity by being willing to marry. The wedding ring and the marriage vows are magical instruments that transform everything and 'they lived happily ever after'. The truth is that the kind of love that will endure gradually blossoms after marriage and has no relationship to a piece of paper which legalises it. Romance merely plants the seeds that may or may not grow to a deep relationship.

(b) The Feminine Mystique

The firm notion that women are pure, delicate and have to be protected from the outside world is an attitude that lurks in the male mind. He must fully support his wife, and feels he is entitled to a bigger salary. Women, he thinks, are not the same as men and that the natural place and identity of women are in the home.

(c) The Monogamous Fallacy

This is the belief that men are only capable of loving one person during the course of a life-time. Time alone can show whether the affection was essentially physical. Unfortunately there is also a risk that couples pursue a wild-goose chase for a perfection that is beyond their reach. Many wives torment themselves needlessly because they are told there is only one type of sexual experience and they have been unable to achieve it. If she accepts the romance to be permanent, she will fall victim to the same illusion.

The root of the problem is a belief that one must love only one. It is perfectly possible to love, in different ways, more than one person. What makes it difficult for one to recognize this fact is a sense of guilt that leads to such an exaggerated emphasis on sexual behaviour and is a great obstacle in realizing the full interpersonal potential. So far as one becomes more emotionally matured, one's enjoyment of sex will no longer be a problem. The gulf between the dream and the reality will close.

Marriage and Sexual Boredom

The boredom which settles down in so many marriages after a while is in a large number of cases traceable to sexual monotony which deadens the emotional life like a slow paralysis (Masters & Johnson, 1970). It is of gradual onset and so insidious and the victim seldom realises it is happening. The honeymoon is a flight from reality with a return ticket. Once married, guilt feelings are said to cease to exist when a pregnancy occurs, they are congratulated, not censured. The signing on the dotted line gives the magical approval for sleeping together. Sex should cease to be a problem but this is not so. Bedroom boredom is so insidious that one mistakes it for the inevitable consequences of marriage. The commonest cause is a lack of variety in sexual behaviour and after a time, sexual life becomes insipid. When marital relations become stale for a man, he reacts by seeking various vicarious satisfactions supplied by pornography, sex films and sexual fantasies.

Sexual Deviation

Although it may be impossible to define normality in sexual behaviour even within the confines of a single society, there do exist other standards in terms of which it is possible to make comparative appraisals. One such standard is that of emotional maturity, a concept which is found in the writings of every psychodynamic school. It is a standard to which no human being ever attains and is therefore

an ideal at which rather to aim at than to achieve. Maturity can be defined as the ability to form a stable relationship with the opposite sex which is both physically and emotionally satisfying, and where sexual intercourse forms the main, though not the only mode of expression of love. It is those whose emotional development is retarded and cannot reach maturity that deviation occurs.

It is assumed that for the mature person, the heterosexual intercourse is generally the most rewarding form of attaining sexual satisfaction, and that it will therefore be the chief sexual aim for most people – most of the time. In ideally mature form, it is a relationship between a man and a woman at which giving and taking is equal; and in which the relationship forms the most important channel through which love is expressed and received. This is one of the most natural, and certainly the most rewarding and the most life-enhancing of all human experiences. It is also the only one which both achieve complete satisfaction and yet can be endlessly repeated. But this wonderfully enriching experience is only possible when the two persons concerned with have achieved a relationship at which, at least in the actual process of love-making, each is able to confront the other exactly as they are, with no reservation and pretences. In this most intimate relationship, both are completely vulnerable to each other and reveal themselves for what they are. So if one had not been able to fully emerge from childhood, one's childishness would inevitably manifest itself in one's behaviour. Sexual deviation can generally be understood in terms of a persistence of a childish kind of relation to another person, or else as an attempt to overcome sexual relations and so reach a greater degree of adult freedom.

Sexual Guilt

A sense of guilt about sex which is often deeply embedded in a mind of a child, encourages an expression of deviant tendencies, or it acts as a dam which holds back the stream of normal development, forcing the sexual impulse into more tortuous channels. Since guilt is a crucial factor in the production of sexual deviation, it is important to discuss its origin. The attitude of society is a potent influence in causing guilt, and this is particularly true of our civilization, which is far less tolerant to sexuality than many cultures.

Sexual guilt is a burden from which few human beings can completely emancipate themselves in a society which is based upon supposedly moralistic values and over which hangs the shadow of hundreds of years of moral disapproval. Parents by their behaviour, often convey to children attitudes which

they themselves would repudiate, unaware they are passing on collective prejudices which have become deeply implanted thereby causing guilt. A parent, for instance, may freely be able to answer a child's question about sex in private, but not in the presence of strangers. Whilst many parents have learnt not to condemn the developing sexual interest of their children, they seldom actually praise sexuality or say anything good about it. The absence of positive approval for the sensitive child is enough to label the subject as *bad* and to create a sense of guilt about it. Finally the process of toilet training which gradually instills into the child's mind the notion that both the processes of excretion and its products are dirty, and create adverse attitudes to sex.

To some extent guilt about sex is inevitable, however liberal or understanding the parents, for sex cannot normally find its full expression in the family circle. The so called incest taboo precludes the satisfaction of even infantile sexuality and so sex for the child is bound to remain partially a secret and there are some things about which he feels some sense of guilt.

Sexual Inferiority

A sense of sexual inferiority is an impediment of equal importance to development. Sexual confidence is probably believed to depend upon physical attractiveness. A woman may be extremely beautiful and yet not believe that she is lovable. Beautiful women may be gratified by admiration and yet feel this is directed merely towards her physical presence and not towards her as a person. The distinction between love 'for oneself' and love because one is physically attractive is a very sophisticated concept, i.e., the personality is discrete from the body.

Confident that one is, or can be, lovable is more essential than the assurance in one's physical appeal. Although a high degree of physical attractiveness may lead to a succession of conquests, it does not enable a man or a woman to achieve a sustained relationship unless it is supported by an underlying conviction of being valuable as a person. Many sexually attractive people who have no such conviction terminate a sexual partnership almost as soon as they have achieved it for fear that, if the relationship were to continue, the partner would discover that they were fundamentally unlovable and abandon them on this account. Continuous promiscuity is often related to a failure to achieve a mature sexual relationship. On the other hand, those who lack beauty, but who feel confident of their acceptability as persons, are generally more able to make close and deep relationships in spite of doubts of their own physical attractions. A

generalized feeling of being unlovable may often be attributed to an earlier failure in the relationship between the child and her mother or a more specific inability to identify the current role assigned by society to male or female.

To be totally confident as a man or woman is a gift which is granted to so few that it seems doubtful that such a state of mind can be said to exist. The young men and women are never bony, muscle-bound, heroic figures in advertisements and films. The more intimately one becomes acquainted with even the most successful human beings, the more one realises that Don Juans are little boys, that the highly promiscuous are incapable of love, and that the most ravishing exterior may conceal the most profound uncertainty.

An extreme feeling of sexual inferiority means that the person concerned may turn away from any attempt to be sexually competitive or attractive resulting in attempts to seek self-esteem in other ways of being loved. Many sexually-deviant people are for this reason intensely ambitious, trying to compensate their inner sense of inferiority by achieving power and success that can compel respect and admiration even if they cannot command the affection from their fellows. The less a person can relate himself to real people in the external world, the greater will be the tendency for him to imagine erotic situations of a totally impossible kind, and their sexuality is entirely separated from the reality of life and in which the figures he conjures have no personal characteristics other than that of sexuality. The study of sexual deviation is very largely the study of sex divorced from love.

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