

KAPITEL 12 / CHAPTER 12<sup>12</sup>

## FEATURES OF THE MOTIVATION OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

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**Introduction.**

So far we have spoken about social norms and standards of sexual behaviour. However, how these standards are reflected in our minds, and what lies in the basis of the sexual motivation of the individual remain open questions.

Criticism of the instinctivist model of libido does not mean denying the biological determinants of sexuality. In the mid-1960s, R. Whalen proposed to replace the abstract concept of “power of desire” with a more specific concept of sexual excitability, i.e., readiness to respond to a sexual situation sexually and erotically. Sexual excitability has great individual variations determined by the physiological state of the body (hormonal balance and such) as well as the life (sexual, emotional, and communicative) experience of the subject and their non-sexual motives. According to R. Whalen, sexual arousal, i.e., current, temporary psychophysiological state, is a function of stable excitability of the subject, and particular given external and internal situation. Modern psychological literature describes sexual motivation in terms of the theory of needs, the theory of emotion, and cognitive psychology alike. However, the most productive theory in terms of opportunities for integrating psychological and sociological data is the theory of “sexual script” suggested by William E. Simon and John Gagnon.

**Presenting main material.**

As the special studies show, erotic dreams, night dreams, and fantasies are an essential aspect of our sexuality. They do not only substitute actual sex life or fill in its deficit, as S. Freud believed, but also constantly accompany it. More sexually active people also have more intense erotic imagination that supports, encourages and diversifies their real experience. For those brought up in Victorian spirit, the words “erotic” and “eroticism” sound as offensive phrases denoting something “animal” and low. In fact, animals do not know what eroticism is. The ability to not only respond to erotic signs and images, but also create them implementing your imagination is an exclusively human property, inherent to us, as the history of art says, from ancient times.

Erotic images perform four main functions. First, they are all tools of cognition, displaying and capturing sexually significant properties and experiences. Second, they serve as a kind of psychological stimulants of sexual arousal. Third, they expand the

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scope and possibilities of sexual satisfaction, enriching the repertoire of sexual behaviour and complementing it with new details. Fourth, erotic imagination allows the individual to overcome the limits of reality, which are sometimes very strict, and experience the feelings physically unavailable to them.

Erotic imagination of the individual almost never completely coincides with their real sexual behaviour, it always has the elements that the person cannot or does not try to implement for various reasons. As a rule, it is more contradictory and ambivalent than behaviour. When it comes to deviant behaviour, such inconsistency is usually seen as a sign of latent anomaly. However, this is absolutely not necessarily so. Very often erotic preferences of the individual are not condemned by the culture, and seem strange only because of their atypical nature (for example, the need for an unusual erotic stimulation). [1]

In terms of general psychology, the difference between erotic fantasies and behaviour means just a single case of inconsistency of attitude and action, observed in all spheres of life and not always bearing negative consequences. Whether there are some elements of sexual pathology, we can find out only on the basis of the content of erotic fantasies, studying their source, impact, and many other specific conditions. The traditional “individualistic” psychology usually derives the content of erotic images and objectifies behaviour from inherent and internal, ultimately physiological needs of the individual. There is a grain of truth in it. For example, hormonal changes during puberty may stimulate the erotic imagination of teenagers, no matter how they are being raised. However, due to the fact that people’s sexual behaviour is socially significant, the very distinction of “erotic” and “non-erotic” stimuli is legitimate only within a particular sign system and a certain situation.

A lot of things seem to an adult person simple and obvious; they do not rack their brains regarding which touch or look has an erotic meaning, and which one does not. But this is the result of experience and learning, during which the individual adopts physiological sexual code common for all people, for example, location and ways of stimulation of erogenous zones, erotic code specific to their culture (sign language, courtship ritual, etc.), developing on this basis their own erotic language of communication (words, looks, gestures, touches, etc.), taking into account their own individual characteristics and their partner’s ones. Every couple and every individual have something unique in this respect. Nevertheless, there are general laws of social psychology, based on which, though without knowing them, people learn, form opinions about each other, get closer, adapt to each other or, conversely, separate.

It is essential for psychology of sexuality that science has broken the barriers between emotional and cognitive processes.



According to the theory of American psychologist Stanley Schachter, any emotional experience suggests:

- a) unusual internal condition, physiological excitement;
- b) some explanation, attribution of this condition.

This means that the difference between erotic and non-erotic experiences also depends on the context in which they are perceived. In the experiment conducted by S. Wellins the men being studied looked at the pictures of naked women, during which they were experiencing increased by devices heartbeat, presented as their own. The photos that, when shown, made the false pulse significantly change, increase or decrease, were more attractive to the subjects, while the control group assessed their attractiveness at about the same level as the others'. Just like in the experiments carried out by S. Schachter, the subjects tried to explain to themselves the changes in their physiological condition and, as the only possible reason for the change of pulse seemed to be the given picture, they had to believe that that picture excited them, and, therefore, that female image was more appealing than others. Naturally, cognitive attribution, i.e., explanation of emotional states, does not fully determine their content.

The theory of differential emotions (Silvan Tomkins, Carroll Izard et al.) emphasizes that the primary basic emotions, like desires, have a certain psychophysiological autonomy from the cognitive processes through which they are realised; so it is not surprising that they can be manipulated with the help of hormonal medicine. The fact that the person explains their emotional states in rational terms does not mean that these states are always controlled and determined by mind. Emotional preference do not need logical background, and affective judgment may precede cognitive, being often more important than them.

These clarifications are aimed against too mental human model, quite significant for psychology of sexuality. Similarly to cognitivism that in its time helped to understand the error of the instinctivist interpretation of libido as a self-sufficient beginning of existence, today's criticism of the attribution theory of emotions is in a certain sense restoring the rights of its spontaneity and autonomy from other motives. Polyfunctionality of sexual automatisms does not rule out their physiological reproductive specifics. Could it be any different at level of motivation? It is not about how to rehabilitate the blind and omnipotent Freudian "Id." Although an affect or drive taken separately is not always clear to your mind, it operates in a particular system. [2]

In the words of S. Tomkins, in some relations affect resembles a letter of the alphabet in a language: it is autonomous and yet may change its meaning depending on how it is combined with other letters, forming new words and phrases. However, the system as a whole does not have one but several "outlets." Emotions are manifested



not only in the external “behaviour” observed in motor acts, but also in the internal reactions, “feelings.”

In the area of sexuality, we deal not only with the behaviour, but also with feelings, and they do not always coincide. It is necessary to study not individual acts of behaviour and motivational symptoms themselves, but the living world of the individual as a whole, and not only in its permanence and stability, but also in connection with particular life situations which the person is in and which affect the content and meaning of their activity at the moment.

Every human action has not only an important objective meaning, but also a subjective personal sense, i.e., the connection of the motive of the action and its goal. Reading a book as a formal exam preparation or out of the desire to learn its content, or for pleasure from the process of reading are absolutely different things psychologically.

Sexual behaviour also changes radically, depending on its content and the needs it satisfies. The “same” intimacy can be similar to what is mentioned above:

- a means of relaxation, discharge of sexual tension;
- a means of procreation, childbirth;
- a means of recreation, sensual pleasure, which acts as an end in itself.

Recreational motivation emphasizes the playful aspects of sex; the biggest importance goes to the novelty and diversity of erotic techniques. Psychological intimacy is not required, sexual pleasure of the partner is included into the “rules of the game” only as a means to increase your own satisfaction.

- a means of getting knowledge and satisfaction of sexual curiosity;
- a means of communication, when sexual intimacy acts as a moment of personal psychological intimacy, a way out of the loneliness, becoming one;
- a means of sexual self-affirmation, when the main role is given to the person’s need to check or prove to themselves and others that they can be attractive and sexually satisfying;

- a means of achieving some non-sexual goals, such as material benefits or improving your social and psychological status and prestige in the eyes of others;

- a means of following a certain ritual or habit;
- a means of compensation, substitution of some other forms of activity or means of emotional satisfaction. [3] As we can see, the multiplicity of motivation schemes of sexual behaviour emphasizes its complexity. To understand the personal meaning of any action only on the basis of behavioural indicators, for instance, to assess family well-being by the number of kisses between the spouses, is impossible. Each of these motivational syndromes is relatively autonomous, depending on it, even



the sequence of psychosexual reactions may change. For example, relaxation model suggests that physiological arousal precedes the erotic image, while the recreational one supposes the reverse sequence, but in fact, different motives mostly interconnect, making it difficult to determine the dominant one. Besides, in the course of the development of psychosexual contact (and especially a longer interpersonal relationship), one motive may grow into another, thereby changing the nature of the relationship as a whole (e.g., flirtation develops into a serious passion). Finally, these motives are often not realized, and never fully realised at all. No wonder the psychology of sexuality especially widely uses the S. Freud's theory of defence mechanisms and its various current modifications.

The connection between individual "sexual script" and the values in the culture and its attitude to sexuality appears most clearly in such mechanisms of moral control as the feelings of shame and guilt. Although psychological and cultural sense of these concepts and their correlation are quite difficult, they are always present in the sexual sphere. Shame restricts external manifestations of sexuality that can be judged by others, guilt extends also to the intimate internal feelings. The development of sexual shame and guilt mostly depends on the nature of culture: the more cautious its attitude to sexuality is, the stronger feelings inhibiting its manifestations the members of society will experience.

However, there are considerable individual variations. As the special studies reveal, a developed sense of "sexual guilt" complicates verbalization of erotic feelings, sometimes reduces sexual arousal, strongly influences the perception of erotic material. There are no statistical norms or standards, but an excessive amount of "sexual guilt," which usually correlates with a common emotional constraint, affect sexuality negatively and can completely paralyse it in the end.

Conversely, the absence of such a control mechanism often leads to promiscuity and de-personification of sexual relationship, so here, just as everywhere else, the balance is required.

The most productive theory in terms of opportunities for integrating psychological and sociological data is the theory of "sexual script" suggested by William E. Simon and J. Gagnon. The notion of "script," close to the concepts of "plan," "scheme" or "behavioural programme," means quite an extensive cognitive structure that connects diverse symbolic and nonverbal elements into an organised and chronologically consistent behavioural chain, on the basis of which people can both foresee their behaviour and evaluate it at the same time.

However, this does not exclude large individual differences and variations of the quantitative and qualitative manner. Like any complex disposition system attracting a





person to a certain kind of conduct, sexual script includes cognitive components of different levels – ideas, concepts, evaluating thoughts, etc. The person usually has not one but several scripts.

The wrongfulness of global considerations of the relationship between “sexual” and “non-sexual” moments of life was clearly illustrated by such an ideologically acute problem as sex and aggression. At the level of psychophysiology, the connection between these phenomena has been known for a long time. S. Freud pointed out that most men’s sexuality contains elements of aggression, the desire to conquer, so sadism is just a separation and hypertrophy of the aggressive component inherent to the normal sexuality. Although in his later works S. Freud draws a clear line between libido and aggression, they both belong to the “It” system and are unconscious. Later, the connection between sex and aggression was confirmed experimentally. Endocrinologists stated that the aggressive behaviour of males and their sexual activity are determined by the influence of the same androgens, and psychologists – that the evident elements of aggression are present in erotic fantasies and partly in the sexual behaviour of men. How should culture react to such things? If sex and aggression are different instinctual drives (Eros and Thanatos, according to S. Freud), the suppression of libido must cause frustration and, as a means of releasing it, increased aggressive impulses.

By this logic, pornography (however licentious it is) that “releases” this tension not only contributes to increase in violence in society, but it is practically a therapeutic tool. Conversely, if sexuality itself contains aggression, then any liberalisation of sexual morality will cause an increase in violence in society. From this point of view, pornography is the main reason for the growth of crime, violence, and such in the West. As it usually happens in global theories, the same facts have been used to confirm both points of view.

In fact, the very way the question is put is wrong, since neither sex nor aggression is a complete and unambiguous term. The notion of “aggression” makes sense only in the context of a specific interaction, aggression is always directed against someone and characterises not so much the personality, but the interpersonal relationship.

The so-called aggressive behaviour includes two completely different classes of actions: relational, instrumental, assertive aggression, for example, in the boys’ fuss, and hostile aggression aimed at destroying or hurting the enemy. Relational aggression and sexual arousal probably interact in people like in some animals, in synergy, mutually reinforcing, and sometimes even turning into each other, while hostile aggression and sexual arousal are mostly antagonistic, hence one impulse causes inhibition of another.



This pattern also exists in people's perception of erotica. Scenes of sexual violence cause excitement in most people, and men are more identified with rapists and women with victims; gender sexual role is stronger than awareness of moral principles. However, this normally supposes that violence is only a means of sexual contact, as a result of which the victim eventually feels pleasure, meaning that violence looks nominal and the rapist looks like a "seducer." If the material is presented so that the victim feels only suffering, then the viewers tend to eventually experience negative emotions.

Regarding the impact of erotica on aggression (in the experiment, people were shown erotic materials of different intensity and content, after which the subjects had to give someone an electric shock), it proved ambiguous, depending both on the content of the stimulus, and the characteristics of the subjects. [4]

The question of the correlation between sexuality and aggression leads us to a much more general issue – the meaning of the so-called cognitive emotional components. Both sexual arousal and blind rage that drives to murder seem completely impulsive, unconscious. However, the emotional response appears to a certain stimulus, and decoding the latter is a cognitive process, even though the person may not be aware of it. Even such a seemingly purely physiological process as sexual arousal includes a series of cognitive operations: the perception of some internal and external stimuli associated with excitement; viewing them as erotic; identifying the source of excitement; the direction of your erotic responses according to their intensity, and assessment of the situation; evaluation of your capabilities; this or that reaction to the expectations of others, etc.

Adolescents can experience evident erections, but they bear no erotic meaning for them until anyone explains them or they learn themselves, observing others, and knowledge is a prerequisite of the conscious control and self-control. A lot of things seem to an adult person simple and obvious; they do not rack their brains regarding which touch or look has an erotic meaning, and which one does not. But this is the result of experience and learning, during which the individual adopts physiological sexual code common for all people, for example, location and ways of stimulation of erogenous zones, erotic code specific to their culture (sign language, courtship ritual, etc.), developing on this basis their own erotic language of communication (words, looks, gestures, touches, etc.), taking into account their own individual characteristics and their partner's ones. Every couple and every individual have something unique in this respect. [5]

The research findings are quite indicative. Recent studies show that this is true. A group of American students classified in advance by their attitude to sexual violence



listened to a description of various sex scenes, including rape. Sexual responses of the subjects were recorded, and then they had to put down their own erotic fantasies. It was found that the level of sexual arousal of the subjects (quite high, by the way) was supposed to depend on their erotic preferences and content of the given stimulus. However, the erotic fantasies of those subjects to whom the rape scene was read contained significantly more “violent” motives than of those who were shown the act by mutual consent. An especially strong aggressive reaction was displayed by those individuals who already had a positive attitude to this type of sexuality before.

Thus, such materials can promote the growth of anti-social attitudes and behaviour, so that even laboratory experiments of this kind are hardly acceptable, and social prohibitions on pornography are as legitimate as the prohibition of war propaganda or racial hatred.

In all socialist countries the distribution of pornography is illegal and sex education, undoubtedly necessary, is based on the general principles of ethics as an aspect of preparing young people for family life.

## **Conclusions.**

The main methodological flaw in psychological studies of sexuality is that they are cut off from the general psychological theories. Sexual behaviour is a complex entity, which cannot be reduced either to physiological needs or emotional reactions, or to situational actions. “Sexual script” should be seen not only in the unity of its own components, but in the system of common regulatory mechanisms of the person.

Thus, erotic imagination is a normal and necessary aspect of human sexuality, but its content is not ethically neutral.