

SECTION 5. PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGY

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5.1 Sexuality as a specific form of communication in the modern world

Introduction. Relationships between people are such a versatile phenomenon that it can be described not only from the social and psychological side, but also from the point of view of the people's sexual behaviour. In this perspective, sexuality is seen as a specific form of communication. Sexuality is extremely important for interpersonal relationships. Through the development of language (as the second signal system) and culture, the evolution of phylogenesis led to significant distinctions between human sexuality and sexuality of animals. However, they still retain common biological traits underlying two functions – reproductive and communicative. According to K. Levitt, sexuality can be seen as a specific, psychosomatic body language, a form of early non-verbal communication. In this sense, sexual intercourse from the psychosomatic point of view expresses the passion, commitment, trust, safety and satisfaction. Since commitment, close contact, trust and safety are universal human needs, their elements are sought for in all interpersonal relationships, including sexual.

Presenting main material. In the sexual contact, there is also a certain ambiguity of communication and components of ambivalence. In this sense, sexuality becomes not so much a source of “isolated” pleasure, but rather a means of expressing the essence of love relationships, on condition that the commitment, close contact and others, signalled and promised by the body language, are genuine and real. If so, then the sexual relationship may acquire a deeper meaning, not limited only by giving temporary pleasure. Cultivating communicative function of sexuality creates conditions for the development of interpersonal contacts and relationships for their greater humanization. Sexual ecstasy is a final expression of erotic communication between people. It is particularly characterised by the conscious existence “in a frenzy” and experiencing a sense of unity with the universe. Poetically it can be defined as a clash with eternity.

The overview of sexuality will be incomplete if we do not touch upon the

problems and variations in the expression of sexuality. Compared to other issues, sexuality is the most remote from the area of the natural behaviour and is distorted by the notions of evil, sin and perversion, connected with it. Instead of being one of the areas of everyday life, it is narrowed down due to being hidden and given special importance to at the same time.

In 1886 Krafft-Ebing published a book that became very famous, depicting sex as a disgusting perversion. Krafft-Ebing, forensic psychiatrist, described in detail sexual offenses and expanded the book, including the descriptions of such sexual variations as homosexuality, self-satisfaction and fetishism. Sex was seen as a dangerous and shameful phenomenon requiring sanctions of social control.

Since the Krafft-Ebing's times, sexuality has not been seen as a perversion to such an extent, but some forms of its expression are still generally considered as such. These acts of perversion are labelled perversions since they substitute the genital contact considered as a normal expression of sexual desire in the world culture.

There are different theories which explain these deviations. R. Stoller believes that the basis of all perversions is aggression. Psychoanalytic theory comes from the fact that the cause of perversions lies in the fixation on the early stages of psychosexual development or regression to them, as well as the fact that the central component here is the fear of castration.

Sexual acts that are considered deviant and hurtful towards partners are illegal and prosecuted under criminal law, although in recent years the legal consequences of this have been mitigated.

Sexual behaviour also changes radically, depending on its sense, on the needs it meets. "The same" intimacy can be:

1. The means of relaxation, discharge of sexual tension. This is an elementary form of sexual pleasure, when the focus is on the physiological needs of the subject while the partner's needs are almost unimportant.

2. The means of procreation, child making, when the process itself is not so much important as its outcome. In its pure form, this type of motivation acts in a dynastic marriage of a monarch in need of an heir, or in the behaviour of a single woman who

knowingly uses a man to have a child. Erotic considerations play a small role here, but social or natural qualities of the “producer” are crucial.

3. The means of recreation, carnal pleasure 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.

4. The means of getting knowledge and satisfaction of sexual curiosity. In a sense, sexual intimacy means continuous learning. No wonder that in the Bible and many other ancient texts the expression “to know the woman” means to have a sexual contact with her. However, this motive may be dominant by itself. It is especially distinctive for the beginners (e.g., boys’ sex live) who are fascinated by the question: “How does it even happen?” Adults put a more specific question – “What is this person like in sexual terms?” But in any case, the partner here acts primarily as an object of knowledge.

5. The means of communication when sexual intimacy acts as a moment of personal psychological intimacy, a way out of the loneliness, becoming one. This is the most difficult kind of relationship which includes the reasons mentioned above as its integral components. The communicative sexuality involves a high degree of individual selectivity. People usually mean exactly this when they talk about sexual love.

6. The 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, appealing, and sexually satisfying. This motive is extremely important for teenagers, and its hypertrophy among adults is usually connected with the sense of anxiety and insecurity.

7. The means of achieving some non-sexual goals, such as material benefits (marriage of convenience), or improving your social and psychological status and prestige in the eyes of others. Thus, intimacy with a beautiful woman increases the man’s prestige, and the presence of admirers increases the status of a woman. In any

case, the focus here is mostly on some impersonal social values and opinion of others.

8. The means of following a certain ritual or habit. For example, kisses of the married couples often have no erotic sense, but they emphasize the stability of the current relationship.

9. The means of compensation, substitution of some other forms of activity or means of emotional satisfaction. Self-satisfaction among adolescents or womanizing among adults is often a compensation of poor emotional life. A typical line of compensatory sexuality is its reluctant, compulsive nature and constant dissatisfaction of the subject with its results. Just as in the process of studying other forms of compensatory behaviour, the main thing is to understand what the person themselves seeks to make up for, consciously or unconsciously: to fill the lack of emotional warmth, suppress some aggressive impulses, and the like.

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 (as some sociologists did in the 1940s), 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, and 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 [230, c. 6].

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.

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.

Erotic imagination is a normal and necessary aspect of human sexuality, but its content is not ethically neutral. In the countries that are getting deeper into the quicksand of the “porn plague,” as it was called it the American magazine “The Time,” this issue is very serious. Let us consider it in depth. The supporters of the tolerant attitude to pornography, including many major scientists refer primarily to the ineffectiveness of prohibitions which only increase the attractiveness of erotic material and raise their market price. It is already difficult to define “pornography” and “obscenity.”

The issue of erotic art is very complex and “direct” techniques do not work. In art and literature, the level of eroticism may still be somehow defined by sight, judging by the content of the image, although it is quite conditional – art values not what is depicted, but how. How to determine eroticism in music? 7% of men and 23 to 29% of women from the “refined” sample by A. Kinsey admitted that music gives them sexual arousal; besides, the men with a higher cultural level (with a college degree) and women regardless of education are much more excited by classical music, while the less-educated men – by pop. At the same time, a large proportion of respondents (19% of women, 22.5% of men with a college degree, and 40% of men without a college

degree) said that they were not influenced by the content and type of music, but only by its rhythm. Thus, erotic perception of music depends on the aesthetic culture of the person, and other factors. Assessing the correlation between sexual arousal and music rhythm, we should remember that many men (48% in the “refined” sample by A. Kinsey) get excited by fast motion in itself, for instance, riding in the car or on horseback.

In addition, music does not directly affect sexuality, but rather excitable emotional state. This, perhaps, explains the fact that women with their more diffuse eroticism display a stronger reaction than men to music in general and classical music in particular. Emotionally reserved people with exaggerated self-control, afraid of their own sexuality, fear to surrender to the power of expressive music that awakens unusual and unacceptable feelings in their soul. They psychologically and morally accept only the music that immediately “discharges” in corresponding predetermined actions: march, drill songs, and religious music accompanying prayer. Even Mozart or Beethoven are considered dangerous, causing emotional excitement.

Interviewing a large group of subjects regarding the effects of pornography on the behaviour and mentality of people, sociologists then clarified whether those same people encountered similar cases. The gap between the biased attitude and direct experience turned out to be quite significant. For example, 47% of men and 51% of women believe that pornography encourages people to commit acts of violence; but from their own experience or experience of their friends, it could be confirmed by only 10% of men and 8% of women. 55% of men and 57% women believe that pornography undermines moral principles, but only 15% and 12% of respondents correspondingly have any specific facts of this kind. Thus, according to researchers, the imagination of the harmful effects of pornography are unsubstantiated [229, c.4].

Numerous experimental studies [231], in which subjects were shown various erotic materials and films, their physiological and emotional reactions being recorded, revealed that although pornography does cause sexual arousal and stimulates the imagination, only a few people want or make an attempt to recreate or try themselves what they saw, especially if the materials included sadomasochistic scenes. Besides,

the interest in pornography quickly burns out.

To the question “Have you ever had in your professional practice the cases where pornography was the cause of anti-social behaviour?” negative responses were given by 80% of psychiatrists and medical psychologists (among 3423 interviewed); 7% believe that they know such cases, and 9% of respondents expect such a connection. Hardly anyone dares to say that all these people were corrupted by the magnates of the “sex industry.” Nor do they look like irresponsible “ultra-left” boys who think by the principle “the farther from the traditional and stable, the better”.

However, these studies require critical attitude. The main conclusion of the socio-psychological experiments in the early 1970s was the fact that pornography makes a relatively weak and short-term impact on subsequent sexual behaviour of the subjects. This finding was a blow to the opponents of pornography and for the supporters of the “sexual liberation,” waiting for a steep break in the style of sexual behaviour; the former – for the worse, and the latter – for the better. But it could not have been any other way. [233] The person’s “sexual behaviour scenario” does not form immediately, it has in its development some probably unknown critical periods, after which external influences cannot dramatically change it. Otherwise we would have to admit that the human personality as a stable integrity does not exist or that sexuality is not connected with it.

The famous American psychologist Donn Byrne describes a three-stage model of such changes of psychosexual orientation and behaviour of the person under the influence of pornography:

- 1) first, through introduction and decrease in negative emotional sensitivity, the attitude becomes neutral or slightly positive;
- 2) then this course of action, unacceptable before, plays in your imagination;
- 3) the image turns into actions, first experimental and then the customary ones.

Certainly, such a development is not fatal – people themselves and their living conditions remain different. But can we take any risk when it comes to sadism, rape and such? In the atmosphere of the relative sexual moderation, people themselves control and suppress their moral or socially unacceptable impulses. If “everything is

permitted,” they will no longer do so. Most people will probably not change, but what about those who have such impulses? Even a 5% growth of sadism would be a disaster for society.

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.

One of the means of developing a healthy sexuality is psycho-preventive work of a psychologist. Trainings are especially effective. We are going to describe one of such trainings called “Visualization of the “Body Map” (sexuality training).”

This exercise can be performed during any training studying the relationship with your own body. The perception of the body affects health, self-esteem, and relationship with your partner. People very often go towards using their body, complaining about it, training it, forgetting that negative attitude and violence cause diseases and the situation when the body gets out of control. If a person comes to the gym, the coach will point to their shortcomings and make the person fix them. If a person comes to the psychological training, the most appropriate way to work with the body is acceptance and care.

The purpose of the training: learning the attitude to your own body, facilitating the acceptance of your physical characteristics, understanding and eliminating the causes of disease.

Setting: lying on mats. During the exercise, you should turn on calm, quiet music, and prepare everything necessary for drawing: paper and sets of crayons. You can prepare in advance silhouettes of human figures and draw on them. If the group is heterosexual, you should prepare silhouettes for men and women.

The duration of the exercise: 30-40 minutes.

1. Visualisation Test:

“Imagine your body as a huge continent. There are forests and rivers, deserts and glaciers on it. Some parts of it can be called fertile, others – well-looked after, while certain areas might be barren. You are going on a trip around the continent of your own body.

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The first place you get to is the area of clear blue lakes and amazing forests. Everything here is full of joy and peace. Find this land on your body – the land of love, acceptance, the things you like and bring up these feelings.

Then your way goes into an absolutely different place. It looks like a land of constant natural disasters. This is the territory of pain. Find this painful spot on your body and picture in your mind those images it brings. Perhaps this is a place of earthquakes or volcanic eruptions, droughts, floods or something else. How many of these parts are there on your body and how often do they remind you of their existence?

Now move to the land of the lush greenery and sunny, warm weather – the area of fun and joy. Imagine the parts of your body that gave you these experiences, where they are located, how many of them your continent has. They can be wide areas or small islands.

You continue your trip and get into the area of changes. These are the parts of your body that are prone to rapid change. They may occur randomly or under your control. What can you compare these changes with – swamp melioration, deforestation, fighting ravines, fertilizing soil or something else? What feelings do you have about these areas of changes? How often do they appear in the centre of your attention?

Now you go to the land of glaciers and snowy deserts, where the sky is always dark and icy winds howl in the silent space. This is the area of rejection and unacceptance. Find it on your body. What territory does it occupy? Has this area always been like this or has it changed over time? For what reasons has this part of your body become the area of rejection?

Does your body still have other areas which you rarely pay attention to? Find them and go there in your mind. This is the area of oblivion. Deserts or barren steppes, forgotten and abandoned. They exist by themselves, occasionally attracting your attention. What territory do they occupy on the continent of your body?

Now imagine your body as a map. In your mind, look around it with your inner eye, remember it and get ready to draw everything you have seen on a piece of paper.”

2. Drawing the “body map,” pair talk.

Questions to share:

- Which feelings towards your own body are the brightest?
- Which parts of body bring up these feelings?
- What conclusions, feelings, and resource conditions appeared after the exercise?

Conclusions. Let us draw some 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.