

CHAPTER 34

Paraphilias

Paraphilias, also known as perversions or sexual deviations, are sexual behaviours that are outside what is considered the normal range of human behaviour. They are comparatively rare, affecting less than one percent of the population. Some are more or less harmless, while others can bring great harm either to the person with the paraphilia or to others (or both). Except for masochism (where men still outnumber women by about twenty to one), they are almost exclusively male behaviours. The key thing about a paraphilia is that it must be there in order for a person to become sexually aroused.

We really do not know for certain what causes paraphilias but it is known that about 75 percent of those treated for paraphilias have suffered child sex abuse. If you include an overzealous repression of natural curiosity about sex, for religious or other reasons, as sexual abuse, nearly all cases can be considered to have this root cause.

Exhibitionism and voyeurism account for the majority of sexual offences handled by the police. Exhibitionism involves exposing one's genitals to unwilling strangers. The shock, dismay and panic caused is the real turn-on. Voyeurism is watching people in the act of undressing or having sex, usually when they don't know they are being observed. The natural reaction of becoming aroused by a member of the opposite sex undressing for one's pleasure is not voyeurism.

Frotteurism is rubbing against or fondling a nonconsenting person - often practised in crowded public transport.

Paedophilia is the seeking of physical, and often sexual, contact with prepubescent children unrelated to the adult (overwhelmingly male) perpetrator. Studies by Stephen Tucker have shown that about forty percent of paedophiles are affected in the right-hand side of the brain.

Sexual sadism and masochism is the exchange of pain for sexual pleasure, with the sadist inflicting the pain (and/or humiliation) and the masochist receiving it (a sadist is someone who is kind to a masochist). Unusually with paraphiliacs, some of both are women. Although many people switch roles, masochists outnumber sadists. Why? There may well be incidents in the person's psychosexual history that can provide an explanation but it is also true that pain can produce an endorphin high and concentrated bursts of anxiety excite sexual desire. On the other hand, studies by Ron Langevin in Toronto suggest that more than forty percent of sadistic sexual offenders have anomalies in the left-hand side of the brain.

Telephone scatologia is the making of obscene phone calls to consenting adults.

Transvestism or cross-dressing is the dressing in women's clothes by men (predominately heterosexual) who are thereby sexually aroused.

Transsexualism is the belief that one's physical sex does not match one's true sex. There is usually no biological basis for this belief and, biologically, the vast majority of those who undergo sex change surgery and hormone treatment to change to their desired sex remain mutilated examples of their original sex.

Fetishism is the dependence on a body part or inanimate object for sexual arousal and ejaculation.

Incest is sexual relations between close relatives for whom marriage is forbidden by law.

Bestiality or zoophilia is sex with animals - found by Kinsey to occur in about eight percent of men (though usually only once or twice in a lifetime).

Compulsive sexual behaviour is the joyless repetition of particular erotic acts, which may be endlessly phoning sex lines, having one-night stands, masturbating several times a day, and many others. Women (nymphomaniacs) engage in frequent dangerous sexual encounters. Men tend to exhibit uncontrollable promiscuity (satyriasis, Don Juanism), autoeroticism and exhibitionism and to engage in rape, molestation and incest. Most perpetrators of rape and incest

exhibit features of compulsion. The key feature is that the behaviour is out of the person's control. Danger signals are: feelings of shame, despair and emptiness after sex; a felt need to keep sexual behaviour a secret; engaging in abusive or exploitative sexual practices; empty relationships; and engaging in sexual behaviour that consistently violates one's ethical values.

Is compulsive sexual behaviour an addiction? Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous defines three levels of progressively more serious sexual addiction: promiscuity, pornography and so on; exhibitionism and voyeurism; rape, incest and child molestation. They assert that loneliness, low self-esteem and anxiety cause individuals to lose control over their sexual behaviour and that sex gives these individuals a temporary psychic relief - a 'fix'. However, the sex engaged in causes guilt, leading to increased anxiety, thus creating a vicious cycle. Critics, though, give good reasons why compulsive sexual behaviour cannot be considered an addiction: sex is an experience, not a substance; there is no physiological state of dependence and no withdrawal symptoms.

Very sexually active people may simply be at the extreme end of the biological bell-shaped curve. On the other hand, it is possible that a neurochemical failure causes people to fall headedly in love, often with inappropriate partners. Jerome Goodman of Columbia University found that hypersexuality in women is correlated with small breasts, a low voice, acne and hirsutism - all markers of hormone balance different from those in normal women. Hypersexuality is also associated with schizophrenia, mania, epilepsy, frontal lobe injury, and limbic and subcortical dysfunction.

The boundaries between 'kinky sex' and paraphilias can also be sometimes hard to define. After all, yesterday's paraphilia may be today's kinky sex and tomorrow's normal behaviour - as with oral sex and masturbation. Heterosexual anal sex could, perhaps, also come into this category. Mild forms of bondage, spanking and other light sadomasochistic practices, exhibitionism and voyeurism, when indulged in by less inhibited couples as a means of spicing up their sex lives, are probably best viewed as 'kinky sex' rather than real or incipient paraphilias - as long as sex does not become impossible without these props.

However, it is worth noting that over half of those with paraphilias report being brought up in households where any talk about sex was savagely forbidden. On the other hand, Fred Berlin, at the National Institute for Sexual Trauma in Baltimore, has found that paraphiliacs possess a vastly disproportionate number of various unusual physical conditions, from chromosomal disorders through hormonal imbalances to brain anomalies of many different kinds.