

## THE INSTITUTION\* OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

our "society," . . . if it's not deflected from its present course and if the Bomb doesn't drop on it, will hump itself to death.

--Valerie Solanas

The debate on vaginal orgasm is not central to feminism as a whole. The theory of vaginal orgasm was created quite recently to shore up that part of the foundation of a social institution that was being threatened by the increasing demand by women for freedom for women. The political institution I am referring to is the institution of sexual intercourse. The purpose, i.e., the social function, of the institution is to maintain the human species.

It used to be that the construct of marriage guaranteed the institution of sexual intercourse. It is still true that, when and where that construct in any of its original variants is properly entered into and protected, the activities sufficient to the definition of this construct and, thus, the purposes of the institution of sexual intercourse, are protected. The substitute theoretical construct of vaginal orgasm is necessary only when marriage is threatened.

The theory of vaginal orgasm was the concoction of a man, Freud, whose theories generally place women in an inhumane and exploited role. His theory of vaginal orgasm reaches the apex of these. The theory was inspired by his confrontations with women who were sick to death of the female role, and it adjusted women back into this female role by convincing them that it was in a woman's interest, by her very nature (i.e., it is in the interest of her vagina), to be dehumanized and exploited. While Freud's theory is inconsistent with female anatomy, it is excellent evidence in support of the theory that the concept of sexual intercourse is a political construct, reified into an institution.

The construct of vaginal orgasm is most in vogue whenever and wherever the institution of sexual intercourse is threatened. As women become freer, more independent, more self-sufficient, their interest (i.e., their need) in men decreases, and their desire for the construct of marriage which properly entails children (i.e., a family) decreases proportionate to the increase in their self-sufficiency. It is for this reason that the construct of vaginal orgasm is coming under attack among women radicals in the feminist movement (as opposed to radical feminists) while at the same time the construct of marriage is coming under attack among women in the feminist movement who are either politically conservative, or liberal-to-the-right (e.g., a McCarthyite), or, as is the case with most women, apolitical in the main. The latter group is both presently and potentially far larger than the former, which is the only

whole, whereas its more recent substitute, vaginal orgasm, is not.

Vaginal orgasm is, then, a substitute construct for marriage. Unfortunately for those women who are accepting the substitute, vaginal orgasm as a political construct is less in their interests than marriage. It takes time for women, simply because they are so much weaker politically, to build in compensations for themselves in any political construct in which they are a necessary member.

It is interesting to compare the correlative structures of these two political constructs. (I will not consider those protections built in at a later date into marriage so that the two constructs can be compared in their original and definitive forms.) The salient feature of both is that both constructs are in the interests of the male and against the interests of the female, and both constructs were, not surprisingly, conceived of by men. Both constructs limit a woman's human possibilities (the double standard is built into any double-role theory). Both constructs incorporate attempted justifications (excuses?) for the role assigned to women in sexual intercourse, which however in no way mitigates the initial exploitation.

1. Both constructs contain conveniently supportive theretofore unknown or unrecognized biological theories:
  - a. In marriage, the supportive biological theory is the theory of maternal instinct. The biological argument for the maternal instinct goes something like this: women need to have children, it's part of their nature. Can't you see that that's what their bodies were built for? And if women didn't like to have children, they wouldn't; this proves women choose to have

\*The definition of "institution" used in this article - (John Rawls' df. of "practice" - any form of activity specified by a system of rules which defines offices, roles, moves, penalties, defenses, and so on, and which gives the activity its structure) - (Webster's df. of "institutional" - organized so as to function in social, charitable, and educational activities).

\*\*This article is not on the interdependence of the two political constructs of marriage and the family, but the comments on the biological theory contained in the construct of marriage assumes this interdependence. The goal of the institution of sexual intercourse, i.e., child-bearing by women, is the bridge between the two constructs of marriage and family. If this article were not concentrating on political constructs by definition limited to two persons and as pertains to the institution of sexual intercourse, it might be more accurate to refer to the marriage-family construct. At the present time and in the foreseeable future, without the construct of the family, the marriage construct would serve no political purpose, i.e., there would be nothing to protect, and it would evolve out.

children. And since they choose to have children in such large numbers, having children must come naturally to women. It's an instinct, the maternal instinct.

1. There's a confusion of priorities here: a capacity for some activity is not the same as a need for that activity, so that even if women's bodies were suitably formed for the activity of child-bearing, this in no way necessarily entails that they want to bear children, much less need to. Unfortunately for women, child-bearing wreaks havoc on their bodies and can hardly be defended as healthy. (a) Pregnancy and birth distend and tear women's bodies out of their natural forms as women (as opposed to mothers), so that it hardly can be held that women's bodies are constructed appropriately for the activity of child-bearing. (b) Reliable estimates indicate that in the U.S., the maternal death rate was 29.1 out of every 1,000; the female death rate in 1966 was 8.1 out of every thousand. [U.S. Vital Statistics]. Maternity triples the risk of death for the average woman in the years of her pregnancy. The maternal death rate for the entire world in 1966 was at least twice that of the U.S., so that the average woman, appropriately enough, sextupled her chance of death by becoming pregnant. [U.N. figures]. There is no other activity in the world, short of war, with that high a mortality rate that would be legalized. (It's interesting, albeit chilling, that the maternal death rate is almost never publicized, whereas the infant mortality rate is often seen; this is another indication of the low value placed on women.)
2. At this point, it might be countered that while it might not make sense to engage in such an activity as pregnancy, that this is proof that maternity is indeed an instinct: it is an activity engaged in in spite of its being contrary to the interest of the agent.

[It is easy to see how nicely this argument feeds the theory of innate masochism into female psychology. The institutional strangleholds that coerce women into child-bearing are always overlooked here, but it is in fact these institutions that transform the alleged maternal instinct from what would appear to be a kind of death wish into an instinct for her own political survival.]

It is claimed then that women enjoy having or, at least, wish to have children. The evidence is against this, too. (a) Does anyone wish to try to hold that the blood-curdling screams that can be heard from delivery rooms are really cries of joy? (b) How are you going to account for the fact that as much as 2/3 of the women bearing children suffer post-partum blues, and that these depressions are expressed in large numbers by these women killing their infants, or deserting them, or internalizing their hostility to such an extent that the women must be confined in mental hospitals for "severe depression" (often a euphemism for attempted murder). Either it's necessary to fall back on some physiological explanation which will irrevocably damage

the claim that child-bearing is good for a woman's health, or it's necessary to admit that an overwhelming number of women do not like to bear children regardless of whether or not there is some theory that it is a woman's natural function to bear children. (c) As for women wishing to possess children, it will be necessary to account for the fact that parents [and we all know who that is] are the second highest cause of children's deaths ("accidents" rank first). If the theory is still maintained that women by their nature like to have, or take care of, children, and that this constitutes at least a necessary part of what is called "maternal instinct," it would seem that it is the duty of men, i.e., society, to protect children from women's care just because of this instinct.

3. It seems clear that there is far too large a body of counter evidence to try to maintain any biological theory of maternal instinct.
- b. In vaginal orgasm, the supportive biological theory is that the institution of sexual intercourse is in the interests of woman's sexual instinct. The argument goes something like this: man has a sexual instinct, and we know this because men like to have sexual intercourse so much. Since his desire for sexual intercourse is not determined by the recipient, it must be the activity itself which is desired. The activity is defined essentially as the penetration by the penis into the vagina. But the man may have an intense experience, called "orgasm," caused by some activity of his own within the particular environment of the vagina. The completion of his experience, or orgasm is indicated by certain signs, e.g., ejaculation. This experience has been judged by society to be pleasureable. The environment of the vagina is necessary for sexual intercourse. Either a woman must be forced to provide this environment or it must be in her interests to do so. It's illegal to force her; that's called rape. Therefore, it must be in her interest to provide this environment. Therefore, it must be that she experiences the same experience that the man does because of the same activity. This will be called vaginal orgasm to distinguish it from the original sense of "orgasm," i.e., male orgasm. And it is pleasureable for the woman. If it is the same experience as the male orgasm there should be no discrepancy between either the amount or conditions of the experience. Therefore, women also have a sexual instinct.
1. The maternal instinct is obviously too indirect an interest to justify sexual intercourse to a free woman. There has to be some direct connection between the act and the woman's interests. As exterior coercion lessens, it must be projected inside the victim.
  2. The construct of vaginal orgasm as even a second order biological need for women has been absurd from the beginning. First of all, animals don't have this need, that is, they don't have vaginal orgasm. The whole point of vaginal orgasm is that it supports the view that vaginal penetration is a good in and for itself. It

justifies vaginal penetration i.e., a necessary condition of the institution of sexual intercourse, as in the direct interests of women. Since a necessary condition for a biological need is that it cover the genus of living beings, the fact that animals do not experience vaginal orgasm is an extremely strong argument against its biological nature. Secondly, women don't possess the receptors in the vagina for any sensations that could cause anything like a male orgasm, that is, what has been proposed as vaginal orgasm

2. Both the construct of marriage and the construct of vaginal orgasm contain conveniently supportive psychological theories to justify the institution of sexual intercourse to the female. These psychological theories are dependent on their respective psychological theories; without the biological basis, the psychological theory, instead of justifying, exposes the exploitative nature of the institution of sexual intercourse.

a. In marriage, the psychological theory is an analysis of the psychological characteristics inherent in the alleged maternal instinct. This varies somewhat from time to time depending on what sacrifices society deems necessary from the parent to keep the child in line, and how the political system needs, or regards as a liability, women in the outside world. The main constants are that a woman, i.e., a mother, whether actual or potential, is adaptable and giving. It is the woman's role in marriage to meet the needs of others, and her joy to do so. But in the circular argument of the marriage construct, the woman's role is called her will and from there is transformed into her essential nature.

b. In vaginal orgasm, the psychological theory is based on the assumption of the physiological fact of vaginal orgasm, and the further assumption that that orgasm is caused not psychologically but physiologically by the penetration of the penis into the vagina. There is an equivocation at this point in the argument for the theory that even further assumes that what was defined by a male as vaginal orgasm is analogous to the orgasm the male experiences by penetration. It is only by claiming some such responsive equivalence that the institution of sexual intercourse can be justified between free parties.

II

So far here, sexual intercourse has been referred to as an institution. Since our society has never known a time when sex in all its aspects was not exploitative and relations based on sex, e.g., the male-female relationship, were not extremely hostile, it is difficult to understand how sexual intercourse can even be salvaged as a practice, that is, assuming that our society would desire positive relationships between individuals.

The first step that would have to be taken before we could see exactly what the status of sexual intercourse is as a practice is surely to remove all its

institutional aspects: we would have to eliminate the functional aspect. Sexual intercourse would have to cease to be society's means to population renewal. This change is beginning to be within our grasp with the work now being done on extra-uterine conception and incubation. But the possibilities of this research for the woman's movement have been barely suggested and there would have to be very concentrated research to perfect as quickly as possible this extra-uterine method of pre-natal development so that this could be a truly optional method, at the very least.

This step alone would reduce sexual intercourse, in terms of its political status, to a practice. But the biological theories as well as the psychological ones would fall with the institutional purposes: sexual "drives" and "needs" would disappear with their functions. But since a practice must have some sort of structure, and without a social function sexual relations would be individually determined and socially unpatterned, sexual intercourse could not be a practice either.

It is necessary to at least speculate on just what the status or place of sexual relations would be once the institutional aspects disappeared. If for no other reason, it is necessary to figure out some sort of projection because an idea like this frightens people so badly. Because of the implications of such a change, people must have some idea of a possible future. It should still be understood, however, that such projections must be very tentative guesswork because so many possible variables could appear later that can't be foreseen now.

Having lost their political function, one possibility is that perhaps we could discover what the nature of the human sensual characteristics are from the point of view of the good of each individual instead of what we have now, which is a sort of psychological draft system of our sexualities. Perhaps the human sensual characteristics would have the status of a sense organ; they might even properly be called a sort of "sixth sense." This sense organ, like the other five, would receive stimuli via the brain and the more direct contact appropriate to that sense. In the case of the sexual organs (although they would probably not be called that anymore since the term "sexual organs" assumes two sexes: the purpose of transforming that distinction into a definitive property has been the procreative function of the sexual organs) the direct stimuli would be tactile and the indirect stimuli would be the thought of someone or something that you would like to touch or be touched by.

Now since, for the sake of the argument, we will assume that the direct stimulus is a living being, even a human being and that this human being is other than the human being stimulated, and that the procreative function of the activity is absent even in the concept of the activity (that is, it is not regarded as a practice since it is not a structured activity) why should there be this tactile contact with another person? We assume at this point that sexual contact is not a biological need and was formerly only the means to satisfy the social need of survival of the species.

It will be argued no doubt that this tactile contact is pleasureable. But what exactly is meant by this? Why is it more pleasureable than auto-contact? In whose interest is this physical contact between two persons, and what are the grounds of this interest? If masturbation has such strong arguments in its favor (assuming the sexual organs are a kind of sense organ) such as technical proficiency, convenience, egocentricity, on what grounds is an outside party involved? On what grounds is this party a positive addition to the experience?

Must this alleged pleasure be mutual? and if so, why? What motivates the desire to touch other people, and without the procreative function of sex, what would distinguish (for the average person) touching a child and touching an adult in whom one had an alleged "sexual" interest. Would you want to make an important distinction between an erotic and a sexual contact? Isn't it crucial to the argument for tactile contact as innately pleasureable whether or not you can hold the claim that touching the other person is directly pleasureable to the toucher, not only indirectly pleasureable to the toucher by witnessing the pleasure of the touched? How could it be claimed that the finger tips are as sensitive as the alleged erogenous areas of the body? Or would you have to establish some separate but equal, synchronized system of mutual indirect/direct stimuli? But wouldn't that force you back into a practice, and under what justification? Wouldn't you be institutionalizing sex again? Given the nature of sex, once you deinstitutionalize it and it has no social function, and there is no longer any need for a cooperative effort, and when the physical possibilities of this sense can be fully realized alone, on what possible grounds could you have anything remotely like what we know today as sexual relations?

### III

If the sense of touch alone were under discussion, it would be surely less complicated simply because there would be only one, in any way relevant to our discussion, fluctuating (i.e., changeable) party. And even more important to any ethical consideration, it wouldn't matter whether the touched wished to be touched. (The constructs of marriage and of vaginal orgasm as supportive practices to the institution of sexual intercourse are both based on the assumption that "it wouldn't matter whether or not the touched wished to be touched." The construct of vaginal orgasm differs from marriage only in that the coercive aspect is internalized in the female.)

The important distinction between "the sense of touch" and what is being called the "sixth sense," the "sense of being touched," or the "sense of feeling" is the addition of a strong passive element. Since what is being received cannot be a technical or physical improvement on that same auto-experience, any positive external component must be a psychological component. It must be some attitude or judgment held by the person doing the touching, or the agent, about the person being touched that is satisfactory to the person being touched most of the time and at other times is supportive to the person being touched. In short, the agent is trusted to either add to or to reinforce and diffuse the pleasure of the sensual experience. The contribution of the agent is firstly

to extend the area of the sensual experience in the quite literal way of touching the recipient's body and being touched by it; this reinforces the auto-erotic senses by extending the feelings of pleasure and of well being. The second, more important, contribution is that the recipient must make a psychological extension from the agent touching and giving pleasure and the attitude of good will the recipient deduces from that action to the outside world and its attitude towards the recipient. The extension of the recipient's intention for its own pleasure to the world's intentions towards the recipient must be at least one good motive for the socialization of the sensual experience.

#### IV

The most difficult component to define in this projected, seemingly gratuitous cooperative act is the psychological attitude of the participants each to the other. What is it about this psychological attitude, the two attitudes together transmitted through various physical contact being the relationship, that could render the two-party experience (1) relevant to what is essentially an independent experience, and (2) an improvement upon such an independent experience.

The first step might be to determine what the components of such a cooperative experience would be: two individuals and their respective erotic sensibilities. Since either individual can add to the physical experience of the other, it must be that the contribution is a mental one, that it consists of the agent forming certain concepts and expressing these concepts in statements to the recipient. These statements or thoughts are not translated into a verbal medium but into a medium of gestures (or physical actions). These gestures are most fully understood when they are received directly, that is in physical contact, by the person to whom they are addressed. This is because of the nature of the language, that it is not primarily heard but felt through being touched.

The most plausible explanation for a theory of cooperative sensual experience is probably some theory of psychic language, that is, a mime expressive of the agent's attitude towards the recipient and transcribed into gestures appropriate to a particular experience. (It must be remembered that this is the roughest sketch of some alternatives to institutionalized sex.) Some account must be given of this language which would be common to many different cultural languages, such as that it is emotive, that it is expressed by touch; some account must be given of its structure, whether some attitudes are required or some emotions must be expressed before someone could claim the use of the language; some account must be given of how the concept of style is relevant to the language, at what point do you have a dialect? What would count as a metaphor.

The agent is present to convey certain feelings. Assuming a healthy relationship, it's probably safe to say that these feelings would be positive towards the recipient. But what would "positive" mean? It would have to satisfy the

recipient, since the gesture would be received by that person and simultaneously interpreted. But why would such feelings have to be expressed by touching instead of verbally? What is significant about the connection between certain emotions and the sense of touch? But most important, what is the significance of this combination to the recipient?

How is the expression of approval related to the sensual experience? It must mean something that it is a joining of extreme examples of the public (approval being a conventional judgment) and of the private (the auto-erotic). It must be that this mime has a symbolic aspect, and that in this essentially private act the outside participant expresses by its presence an identification with the recipient's feelings for itself. This could serve as a reinforcement to the ego and to a generalization from the attitude of the agent towards the recipient to the attitude of the public as a whole towards the recipient.

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These are only a few suggestions. Our understanding of the sense of feeling, or intuition, is almost non-existent, and few people probably even realize that there is such a sense. It is as if our understanding of the sense of sight were modelled on the experience of being punched in the eye instead of on experiences such as seeing a Tunisian watercolor from Paul Klee. One might infer the possibility of assault from the act but not the possibility of art from the assault. We are unfortunately in the latter position, and there's not much hope of inferring an understanding of the sense of feeling from the institution of sexual intercourse. It has to be approached from some other direction. I have tried to suggest a possibility.

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Ti-Grace Atkinson