

Sexual Scripts: Permanence and Change

William Simon¹ and John H. Gagnon²

A general introduction to scripting theory is offered, attempting to provide links between macrolevel considerations of sociocultural development and general theories of individual development. The scripting of behavior is examined on three distinct levels: cultural scenarios (instruction in collective meanings), interpersonal scripts (the application of specific cultural scenarios by a specific individual in a specific social context), and intrapsychic scripts (the management of desires as experienced by the individual). These concepts of the scripting of behavior are then applied to sexual behavior. Interpersonal scripts are seen as the ordering of representations of self and other that facilitate the occurrence of a sexual act; intrapsychic scripts represent the ordering of images and desires that elicit and sustain sexual arousal. Issues of stability and change in sexual scripts are then examined in terms of the changing circumstances and requirements associated with movement through the life cycle.

KEY WORDS: scripts; learning theory; psychosexual development; erotic; sex and the life cycle; culture and personality.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the profoundly enlarged attention paid to the issues of human sexuality since World War II, the discussions attending these issues remain almost as theoretically barren as before. One says "almost" because some progress can be noted. Among Freudian revisionists, most notably the work of Kohut (1977) on the general theoretical level and, focusing more specifically

A revised version of a paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association, 1983.

¹Department of Sociology, University of Houston, Houston, Texas 77098.

²Department of Sociology, State University of New York, Stony Brook, New York 11794.

on the sexual, the path-breaking work of Stoller (1979) has moved us beyond the rigidities of traditional libido theory. These developments, however, have remained largely indifferent to the dramatic changes in the pattern and structures of everyday social life over the past half century and the impact these must inevitably have upon the developmental process.

At the same time, recent work in social history and psychohistory has made it less easy to treat the sexual as an unchanging constant, providing the illusion of an unifying thread in the human record. For the most part, however, work in this tradition has persisted in traditional metapsychological conservatism; formalist perspectives largely attempting to sustain a static model of the human within a landscape of changing ecologies and cultures. The history of the psyche remains the unfinished business of psychohistory.

The present essay is an attempt to move this discussion further by proposing a theoretical approach and conceptual apparatus that allows us to consider human sexuality in ways that are responsive to both the contextual requirements of the sociohistorical process and the necessary metapsychological understanding that preserve a sense of individually experienced lives.

SCRIPTING THEORY

Scripts are essentially a metaphor for conceptualizing the production of behavior within social life. Most of social life most of the time operates under the guidance of an operating syntax, much as language becomes a precondition for speech (Lacan, 1977). For behavior to occur something resembling scripting must occur on three distinct levels: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts.

Cultural scenarios are the instructional guides that exist at the level of collective life. Thus all institutions and institutionalized arrangements can be read as semiotic systems through which the requirements and the practice of specific roles are given. Cultural scenarios essentially instruct in the narrative requirements of specific roles; they provide for the understandings that make role entry, performance, and/or exit plausible for both self and others: providing the who and what of both past and future without which the present remains uncertain and fragile. The enactment of virtually all roles then, must reflect either directly or indirectly the contents of appropriate cultural scenarios.

However, as Bourdieu (1977) properly observes, even in the seemingly most traditional social settings, cultural scenarios are rarely entirely predictive of actual behavior. Cultural scenarios, in order to serve their very function, must be too abstractly generic to be consistently applicable in all

circumstances. Improvisation or tinkering to some degree conditions almost all social interaction. Even in the most tradition-bound of collectives, not all requirements of a role can be applied uniformly. Distinctions, for example, must often be made between the sick and the well, the powerful and the powerless, the closely related and the stranger, and age peers and non-age peers. The very possibility of a failure of a congruence between the abstract scenario and the concrete interactional situation must be solved at the level of interpersonal scripting.

The very possibility or, in some cases, the necessity for creating *interpersonal scripts* transforms the social actor from being exclusively an actor trained in his or her role(s) and adds to his/her burdens the task of being a partial scriptwriter or adaptor as he/she becomes involved in shaping the materials of relevant cultural scenarios into scripts for context-specific behavior. Patterned improvisation may be seen as little more than institutionalized variations of existing scenarios. Ad hoc improvisation often represents efforts at creating a consensus, be it ever so temporary or uncertain of acceptance. If what one is attempting to be recognized as being determines what can be expected from others, interpersonal scripts represents the mechanism through which appropriate identities are made congruent with desired expectations.

Where complexities, conflicts, and/or ambiguities become endemic at the level of cultural scenarios, much greater demands are placed on the actor than can be met by the adaptive possibilities of interpersonal scripts alone. The need to script one's behavior, as well as the implicit assumption of the scripted nature of the behavior of others, is what engenders a meaningful "internal rehearsal in the first place," an internal rehearsal that can become significantly only where alternative outcomes are available. *Intrapsychic scripting*, in other words, becomes a significant part of the self process in proportion to the extensivity and intensity of the internal dialogue.³ It is this that creates fantasy in a very rich sense of that word: The symbolic reorganization of reality in ways that make it complicit in realizing more fully the actor's many-layered and sometimes multivoiced wishes.

In social settings where most find it difficult to conceive of themselves as being anything but what they are (a triumph of the traditional model of socialization), the content and significance of the intrapsychic is limited, at best accounting for minor variations in performance. However, as the human

³There is an obvious similarity between our conception of interpersonal scripting and intrapsychic scripting and the much earlier formulation of Mikhail Bakhtin. "In the Bakhtinian model, every individual engages in two perpendicular activities. He forms lateral ('horizontal') relationships with other individuals in specific speech acts, and he simultaneously forms internal ('vertical') relationships between the outer world and his own psyche. These double activities are constant, and their interactions in fact *constitute* the psyche. The psyche is thus not an internal but a boundary phenomena" (Emerson, 1983, p. 249).

societies come to experience higher levels of differentiation, a distinct version of the self is created in the practice of asking: Which of these outcomes do I want? An experience that transforms the surrounding social world from the source of desire into the object of desire. Moreover, still another and equally important modification in the self occurs when, as must occur increasingly, that form of the question is applied to the "I" itself: What kind of I am I? What kind of I do I want to be? Questions that create the illusion of a self distinct from the roles it may be required to play; the illusion of a self autonomous in its interests and, of greater importance, autonomous in its desires⁴ (Simon, 1972).

Intrapsychic scripting thus becomes an historical necessity as a private world of wishes and desires that are experienced as originating in the deepest recesses of the self must be bound to social life: the linking of individual desires to social meanings. Desire, in a critical sense, is not really desire for something or somebody, though it is often experienced that way, but rather what we expect to experience from something or somebody. Desire is not reducible to an appetite, a drive, an instinct: It does not create the self, rather it is part of the process of the creation of the self. "Desire has its origin and

⁴What is being touched upon at this point comes very close to the conditions of increased uncertainty that for Trilling (1972) virtually occasioned "a mutation in human nature." The historic development he points to is that where significant numbers of individuals began to cope with what is among the most commonplace experiences for the contemporary world, i.e., significant interaction with others who are for all practical purposes strangers to us, the uncertainty that necessitates questioning the sincerity of others ultimately becomes the condition for the questioning of the self by the self. The subsequent emergence of what was experienced as the imperative claims of an "authentic self," i.e., a self that might be represented in any one of its several roles but that need not be fully represented in any, might well be taken as a comparable "mutation" occasioned by the emergence of a "post-modern era." This is an experience described most clearly by Merleau-Ponty (1970) when he observes, "It is incomprehensible that I, who am irreducibly alien to all my roles, feel myself moved by my appearance in the gaze of others and that I in turn reflect an image of them that can affect them, so that there is woven between us an "exchange" . . . in which there are never quite two of us and yet one is never alone" (p. 14). For Trilling, as for others, the conflict between the claims of sincerity and the claims of authenticity are seen as part of the traditional dialectic of the requirements of civilization juxtaposed against the urgencies of nature. What is currently perceived as the further and in some ways unanticipated enlargement of the claims or powers of the authentic self is commonly explained by reference to the weakening of agencies of socialization. In other words, a weakening of the forces of social control that allow the previously subdued residua of biological evolution ("the beastly drives") to be heard with a heightened clarity. Implicitly in this view is the argument that civilization may have drifted too far, may have turned against itself by unleashing the very dangerous propensities within the individual that the commitment to sincerity emerged to protect against. However unattractive many of the postures and behaviors associated with the claims of authenticity may be, it may be a mistake to view this as an historic turn that brings us ever closer to our phylogenetic roots. An alternative perspective might view these same developments as part of the continuing mutations that brought into being so much of the appearance of the human that Trilling found to be both attractive and critical to the Western tradition: the significance of the individual. This is continuing evolution that in Lacan's terms does not necessarily assert the greater claims of the imaginary over the symbolic but that places more of the resources of the symbolic in the hands of the imaginary, while making more of the materials of the imaginary available to the symbolic.

prototype in the *experience of satisfaction* (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974) [Emphasis in the original]. And the experience of satisfaction, past the earliest moments of life, comes to us corrupt with symbolic meaning and it achieves its uncertain legacy for just that reason.

In Freudian conceptual language superego-like functions are conceived as emerging to help bring an innately incoherent organism into comfortable accommodation with an essentially coherent social order. For most of human history the accommodation of the individual to the expectations of the collective rarely appeared problematic; it was rarely the voice of collective life that required focusing and amplification. It was the emergence of modern Western societies that required for burgeoning numbers the focusing and amplification of a self; a self often experiencing a complex, sometimes contradictory, and almost always changing collective life (Trilling, 1972). In other words, as a significant determinant of consciousness and behavior, id-like functions may well have followed the appearance of superego-like functions in the evolution of human societies, which tended to transform the very architecture of human personality as they themselves were transformed.⁵

⁵Some notes on the id: By the end of the 19th century, the idea of a “true self”—a self that existed somewhere behind the penumbra of roles that persons performed in their changing daily lives, roles that existed somewhere between the self and the demands and/or confusions of social life—was in the preliminary stages of intellectual articulation and existential diffusion. The presenting symptom of this profound shift was the growing number of individuals experiencing desires seemingly distinct from the materials of existing cultural scenarios or conventional interpersonal scripts. What was largely missing was the elaboration and conventionalizing of a justificatory apparatus for these desires either at the level of culture or interaction. The first level of articulation represented by Freud was essentially reformist in that it did not challenge existing cultural scenarios but merely called for a broadened basis or interpretation. In significant measure, Freud was responding to individuals who were experiencing this new quality of desire with profound uneasiness, embarrassment, anxiety, and—in many instances—pain. What intensified this response was the frightening notion that they were exceptional in not being at one with the world; what they could not anticipate was that they were merely the vanguard of entire classes or social groups for whom not being at one with the world would be the normal condition. That much of this distress should be either experienced as (or interpreted as) being part of the domain of the sexual among nascent middle-class groups should not be surprising. The movement to alienate the sexual in almost all its forms, from the most direct to the most allusive, from everyday life, was well advanced in that class by the latter part of that century. An alienation of the sexual that rested upon and continuously fed an image of it as the beast within, suggesting the appropriateness of the language of “drive” and “lust,” which, in turn, served to provide a moral symmetry to the cultural ideals of “self-control” and “purity.” The pivotal misconstruction in Freud’s model of the intrapsychic is in his conceptualization of the id as the embodiment (perhaps one might better use the term *embodiment*) of the sexual and, consequently, as the expression of nature. The confusion of the sexual with the natural can be understood easily as being typical of the historical context. The more instructive error, however, is the problem of misunderstanding of the problem of desire and locating this at the boundaries between id (natural forces), the ego (self-control), and the superego (the internalized version of cultural scenarios). From our perspective, the problem of desire is not that of a conflict between nature and civilization, rather, it is a problem of the emergence of the intrapsychic as an autonomous domain following the experience of living in modern civilizations. The id, then, is the product of the “civilizing” process and the most modern, not the most archaic, of psychic functions.

In Meadian terms, the “impulsive I” may become a meaningful possibility only when confronted by alternative and potentially manipulatory versions of the “reflexive me.” Moreover, the “generalized other” shifts from being an agency of judgment to being one of rationalization where the individual must create and sustain a quality of consistency that is often not reflected in social life as experienced. The absence of overriding community consensus finds its reflections at the most primary levels, including the family. It is this increasing lack of consensus of the social order, as experienced by the individual, that requires the transcendent qualities of the intrapsychic; transcendent in the sense that by representing experience at its most concrete it becomes experience at its most abstract, and as a consequence takes on the appearance of being ageless.⁶

The relevance of the three levels of scripting—cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts—is far from identical in all social settings and for all individuals in any given setting. In traditional settings, cultural scenarios and a limited repertoire of what appear to be ritualized improvisations may be all that is required for understanding by either participants or observers. Such societies might be termed *paradigmatic* societies; paradigmatic in a double sense; in the sense of a very high degree of shared meanings and in the sense of specific or concrete meanings perceived as consistently derived from a small number of highly integrated “master” meanings. Thus specific shared meanings are experienced as being consistent both within and across distinct spheres of life.

Postparadigmatic societies, conversely, are those where there is substantially less by way of shared meanings and, possibly of greater significance, where there are potentially profound disjunctures of meaning between distinct spheres of life. And, as a result, the enactment of the same role within different spheres of life or different roles within the same spheres routinely require different appearances, if not different organizations, of the self.

⁶One implication of this argument touches upon the issue of the relative centrality or significance of the infant-child experience (nature accommodating to the family—the requirements of the microuniverse) versus that of the adolescent experience (the self accommodating to the social order as something more than the disguised voice of inarticulately heard parents—the requirements of the macrouniverse). The disorders of social life do not remove the barriers containing the chaos of the inner self but rather the disordering of social life creates the chaos of inner life. From this perspective, a singularly strong case can be made for the critical nature of the adolescence experience; i.e., seeing it not only as a vital link between childhood (desire seeking meaning) and adulthood (meaning confirming desire) but for many as a qualitative leap into both the experience and the language of the larger social world. This is a world whose objectivity broadens on indifference and where the historic fear of being deserted by one’s family is at least partially replaced with a fear of being deserted by the world. This is a fear that occasions for many their first fantasies of being the one to desert the family with its constraints and embarrassments. This is a crisis that intensifies as there appear substantial differences and potential conflicts between family scripts and those of the surrounding social world.

Postparadigmatic societies or settings, then, are those where the instructive implications of the cultural scenarios specific to given institutional spheres have little by way of continuities of content or continuities of style⁷ (Simon, 1982).

The cultural scenario that loses its coercive powers also loses its predictability and frequently becomes merely a legitimating reference or explanation begging employment. Indeed, the failure of the coercive powers of cultural scenarios occasions not a voiding of the social contract, which in turn unleashes presocial drives, but anomie in its classic form. Clearly, much of the passionate intensity associated with anomic behavior might better be interpreted not as the instinctive drives freed from the constraints of social life but rather restorative efforts, often desperate efforts at effecting a restoration of a more cohesive self, one reinforced by effective social ties. In other words, anomie feeds not on some permanent conflict between the organism and social life but on the ultimate dependence upon collective life that describes all human experience. The alternatives to anomie, as envisioned by Durkheim, were collective and individual disaster, the reestablishment of viable scenarios, and/or an evolutionary transformation of the individual. The latter, which Durkheim saw as a likely outcome, involved a greater growth of "psychic functions such that individuals prove capable of providing many of the narrative continuities that previously were the direct product of collective life⁸ (Durkheim, 1964). As this occurs, the integration of

⁷Thus, for example, the patriarchal style culturally idealized throughout the 19th century easily accommodated the roles of father, employer, political leader, teacher, or minister. Currently, one can detect a warring pluralism of styles idealized for the enactment of each of these roles, as well as a shifting complex of linkages by which a self might share these.

⁸In most discussions of anomie it is the image of Durkheim, the positivist, that tends to dominate the discussion. However, the equal significance and possibly of greater significance is the image of Durkheim, the evolutionary theorist; an image that is rarely invoked if only because of the embarrassment this image creates for contemporary structuralists both in this country and Durkheim's homeland. However, consistent with this evolutionary perspective, Durkheim (1964) applied the evolutionary principle to the major product of sociocultural evolution: the human. "In so far as societies do not reach certain dimensions nor a certain degree of concentration, the only psychic life which may be truly developed is that which is common to all the members of the group, which is found identical in each. But, as societies become more vast and, particularly, more condensed, a psychic life of a new sort appears. Individual diversities, at first lost and confused amidst the mass of social likenesses, become disengaged, become conspicuous and multiply. A multitude of things which used to remain outside consciences because they did not affect the collective being become objects of representation. Whereas individuals used to act only by involving one another, except in cases where their conduct was determined by physical needs, each of them becomes a source of spontaneous activity. Particular personalities become constituted and take conscience of themselves. Moreover, this growth of psychic life in the individual does not obliterate the psychic life of society, but only transforms it. It becomes freer, more extensive, and as it has, after all, no other bases than individual consciences, these extend, become more complex, and thus more flexible. Hence, the cause which calls forth the differences separating man from animals is also that which has forced him to elevate himself above himself. The ever growing distance between the savage and the civilized man has no other source" (p. 347-348).

personal metaphors and social meanings that make social conduct possible are constrained to enter negotiations of unprecedented complexity. Scripting becomes a useful metaphor for understanding this process.

By the way of summarizing this introduction to what we call scripting theory,⁹ it is difficult to conceive of any behavior, except that which is in fact biologically programmed, that is not scripted. And if nothing else has been established, it should be clear that the term *scripted* is not merely a synonym or code word for "learned." All behavior, or perhaps one should say all conduct or all action, involves all three levels of scripting, though not all three are of equivalent relevance in all situations or at all levels of concern. Moreover, in social contexts where identical acts may be expressive of a multiplicity of motives and identical motives may find expression in a number of different acts, it becomes impossible to meaningfully account for behavior without also accounting for consciousness.

SEXUAL SCRIPTS

The very concept of the scripting of sexual behavior implies a rejection of the idea that the sexual represents a very special, if not unique, quality of motivation. From a "scripting perspective" (Gagnon & Simon, 1973), the sexual is not viewed as an intrinsically significant aspect of human behavior; rather, it views the sexual as becoming significant either when it is defined as significant by collective life (sociogenic significance) or when individual experiences or development assign it a special significance (ontogenic significance). The significance of some aspect of behavior, it should be noted, does not determine the frequency with which that behavior occurs but only the amount and intensity of individual and collective attention paid to it (Foucault, 1978).

⁹Scripting theory as it is used in the present essay may be said to derive from three major intellectual traditions, though varied influences and parallel constructions can be found in numerous other sources. Of the three that must be explicitly acknowledged at this point are: (1) the symbolic interactionist perspective associated with James, Cooley, Dewey, Mead, Blumer, and in more recent years by Strauss, Stryker, Denzin, Victor, and Plummer; this is a perspective that examines social life primarily as a communicative process; (2) the theoretical contribution of Kenneth Burke who adds to the symbolic interactionist tradition's concern with communicative interaction a critical emphasis upon the reciprocal efforts of social hierarchy (social structure) on symbol systems (the socioanagogic principle) and, of equal importance, an analytic approach to the effects of the interactions of symbols; (3) the monumental works and tradition created by Freud. Here we find parallels with Burke, as Freud offers an approach to the interaction of symbolic material on the intrapsychic level, reminding us that the study of human behavior is a study of transformations as well as repetitions. More specifically, we would add to such influences that work of such neo-Feudians as Kohut, Lichtenstein, and Stoller. The most obvious example of parallel views is in the somewhat ambiguously bounded tradition labeled *semiotics*.

Sociogenic and ontogenic factors are undoubtedly closely interrelated. Societal settings where the sexual takes on a strong meaning, where successful performance or the avoidance of what is defined as sexual plays a major role in the evaluation of individual competence and worth, should also be settings where sexual meanings play a correspondingly significant role in the intrapsychic lives of individuals. However, even in settings with a high density of external sexual cues, not all individuals need experience an equivalent density of internal cues. Similarly, it is possible for some individuals in settings marked by relatively little concern for the sexual create a set of sexual meanings and referents far more intense than that describing that particular setting.

The motivation to perceive and respond in sexual terms, then, need to be determined exclusively by what is essential to a given setting. As both history and contemporary life reveal in abundance, individuals may attach sexual meaning and motivation to aspects of the external environment that are not conventionally defined as having a sexual content. For the most part, however, ontogenically rooted deviations from prevailing cultural scenarios tend to be limited to a universe largely created by such cultural scenarios, i.e., the application of conventional sexual meanings to unconventional sexual objects or the expression of unconventional motives through conventional sexual activities.¹⁰

The most basic sources of sociogenic influence are the cultural scenarios that deal explicitly with the sexual or those that can implicitly be put to sexual uses. Such cultural scenarios not only specify appropriate objects, aims, and desirable qualities of self–other relations but also instruct in times, places, sequences of gesture and utterance and, among the most important, what the actor and his or her coparticipants (real or imagined) are assumed to be feeling; qualities of instruction that make most of us far more committed and rehearsed at the time of our initial sexual encounters than most of us realize.

Where there is a fundamental congruence between the sexual as it is defined by prevailing cultural scenarios and experienced intrapsychically, con-

¹⁰Most forms of sexual deviance in their initial crystalizations, like most human adaptations, parsimoniously alter the smallest amounts of relevant attending conventional structure; the capacity to add substantially to social reality is generally limited to the extraordinary or the accidental. Thus, to follow Davis's (1983) argument the "gnostic" ideologizing of the sexual clearly follows the contours of the prevailing [Judeo-Christian] conceptualization; we can conceive of sex as salvation only after it has been conceived as being sin. Moreover, what is frequently the highly stereotypical outcome of what is experienced as an act of isolated self-invention, or more accurately, self-modification, speaks rather dramatically to the power of the symbolic. The absorption of social symbols by psychic reality, while rendering such social symbols subject to a larger number of grammars, does not make them totally plastic. It makes them available to the imaginary but often in terms set by the symbolic. Identical discoveries of the uses of the symbolic tend to produce approximately identical individual employment of such uses.

sequent behavior is essentially *symbolic*, being entirely dependent upon the shared significant meanings of collective life. In such contexts, the sexual takes a natural air that obscures the fact that virtually all the cues that initiate sexual behavior are embedded in the external environment. It may have been this reliance upon external cues that made what later eras define as "sexual deprivation," i.e., long periods during which sexual activities are not accessible, more easily managed in most historical settings than contemporary observers might anticipate.

However, a lack of congruence between levels of scripting, following either the variables of individual autobiography or as a response to an absence of coherence of sociocultural expectations, transforms the sexual into more obscurely *metaphoric* behavior, as it possibly becomes a vehicle for meaning above and beyond the conventionally shared meanings: private sexual cultures grow within the very heart of public sexual cultures. It may well have been the growing number of individuals in Western societies experiencing just such a lack of congruence that made prevailing 18th and 19th century discourses on the nature of the sexual, that Foucault (1978) describes, so highly effective in gaining widespread adherence to modern Western sexual values and idealized patterns of behavior.

Interpersonal scripting, representing the actor's response to the external world, draws heavily upon cultural scenarios, involving symbolic elements expressive of such scenarios. Among other functions, interpersonal scripting serves to lower uncertainty and heighten legitimacy for both the other or others as well as the actor himself or herself. Interpersonal scripts might be defined as the representations of self and the implied mirroring of the other that facilitates the occurrence of a sexual exchange. And while such scripts generally imply things about the internal feelings of the participants, only the representation of appropriate feelings need be manifested or confirmed. For virtually all, at one time or other, desire will follow rather than precede behavior.

Interpersonal scripts represent something of an analog to Freud's (1963) concept of "the reality principle": They represent our definition of the immediate social context. However, the motives, conscious and unconscious, that underlie what appears to be manifestly sexual behavior, may vary widely. Clearly, as might also be said for any significant area of behavior, there are many more reasons for behaving sexually than there are ways of behaving sexually. Almost a half century after the death of Freud, the quest for the sexual motives informing nonsexual behavior tends to provoke far less anxiety than a quest for the nonsexual motives that upon occasion organize and sustain sexual behavior (Burke, 1965). Moreover, to the degree that for our time and place the most current conceptions of sexual behavior imply a potential for sexual response, we also require an understand-

ing of the less directly observable dimension of intrapsychic scripting: that which elicits and sustains sexual arousal and at times making orgasm possible.

Again, there are some collectives where almost all interpersonal scripts represent, at best, minor variations around dominant cultural scenarios and, moreover, where the practiced interpersonal scripts satisfy the requirements of intrapsychic scripting. Most typically these come close to the sexual patterns that Freud viewed as characterizing the worlds of antiquity, where emphasis was placed upon the drive and little attention placed upon the object of the drive (Freud, 1962). However, writing as he did in a world of pervasive sexism, Freud failed to observe that this multiple congruence of scripting elements occurs most often where the concerns for sexual arousal and orgasm were the exclusive or nearly exclusive interests of only one participant – the male.

We must keep in mind the fact that part of the historical record of sexism is the fact that women rarely have been “selected” for sexual roles on the basis of their own interest in sexual pleasure. Indeed, the very idea of female interest in or commitment to sexual pleasure was, and possibly still is, threatening to many men and women. Indeed, even Freud, with what is simultaneously an understandable but still shocking display of sexism, casually comments upon the ease with which women, presumably more so than men, accommodate to varied sexual “perversions” once they have been sufficiently exposed to the potential pleasures of the sexual. This is not to say that women in such settings did not have commitment to effectively utilizing or responding to interpersonal sexual scripts but that these commitments rarely tended to be erotically or orgasmically focused.¹¹

¹¹If only as a terminological distinction, not all behavior that is defined, perceived, or experienced as sexual need necessarily be experienced as erotic. However, the reverse is probably not true; it is hard to conceive of an erotic experience that is not sexual in the sense of involving the physiological, as well as the psychological, processes associated with sexual arousal. The term *erotic* is frequently applied to other behaviors or responses, but more often than not with an “as if” implication. Only in a metaphoric sense (“viewing something from the perspective of something else” (Burke, 1969) can one speak of eroticizing work or food; the reference, of course, is to an intensity, potentially obsessive, and possibly addictive quality. The other possibility, sexual behavior without erotic response, characterizes a range of behaviors, a range of relationships. The client–prostitute relationship or interaction classically represent just such a relationship, where the prostitute is presumed to be exclusively or predominantly motivated by nonerotic motives. However, where sexual arousal is required as for example in the case of much of homosexual male prostitution, where the prostitute is paid to have an orgasm or in some instances to perform anal intercourse upon the client, the evoking of an erotic intrapsychic script becomes necessary. (This example provides us with a clear example of what, in frequently more subtle ways, characterizes much of our sexual lives, i.e., situations where the requirements of interpersonal scripting do not easily mesh with the requirements of intrapsychic scripting.) A more common experience reflecting the capacity for the sexual to occur with little or no erotic feeling is that of the modal female who traditionally may have had a large number of sexual experiences, coital and noncoital, without experiencing orgasm, and a still larger number of sexual experiences before she experienced orgasm with any regularity.

In the "modern" era, Freud also noted, the drive is "despised" and the emphasis is placed upon the object and, we would add, the quality of relationship with the object. This shift of focus from the drive to the object must inevitably occasion a growth of empathetic concerns. The transformation of the object into a participating "other" often requires the recognition of the other as another self. The sexual actor then must not only take cognizance of the behavior of the other, he or she must also take cognizance of the feelings communicated however uncertainly by that behavior. The eroticized sexual act, then, often represents for both self and other an act of offering and possession of what can only rarely, if ever, be wholly offered or possessed: the intrapsychic experience of another person, e.g., Did you really want it? Did you really enjoy it?

A social world that requires that we bargain for our identities inevitably trains us to bargain with ourselves. Desire, including the desire for desire, becomes one of the most pervasive currencies for negotiating cross-domain exchanges. The self in becoming a scripted actor becomes its own producer, managing resources, investing in long-term payoffs and short-term cash flow, while becoming its own playwright. Thus, while nonerotic motives frequently organize and lead us through our selection of interpersonal sexual scripts, an increasing emphasis upon the erotic pleasure characterizes much of contemporary sexual life not merely in response to the changing content of available cultural scenarios but as an expression of the very changing experience of the self.¹²

The estrangement of the erotic from the domain of everyday life, so fundamental a part of the modern Western tradition, made it available to fulfill the beliefs of those who sought the expulsion in the first place. The erotic became the badlands of desire; a domain where the abstractions of moral discipline could find a concrete and persistent test. Ironically, for just that reason, the erotic also became a realm where the laws and identities governing everyday life could be suspended and the self could be organized in ways that at least temporarily could include within the nuclear self aspects and qualities that everyday life otherwise exiled or expressed through muted disguises and/or contrary employments. The puritan tradition created, as it were, a road map where the dimensions of self that were to be excluded

¹²Though there is some ambiguity, in traditional Freudian thinking, the narcissism of ego, its instinct of self-preservation, wars with the pleasure principle, the basic expression of the id, in the name of the reality principle. The empowering of the ego, briefly sketched above, suggests that among the changes to be expected is ego's use and command of the capacity for pleasure. Consistent with Kohut's (1977), revisions much of the conflict between the reality principle and the pleasure principle can be conceptualized as occurring within the ego. Both reality and pleasure are negotiable within the newly empowered and enlarged domain of psychic reality.

from the everyday self or were denied full expression could rally, enriching the erotic and being enriched by the erotic, which is then to be experienced as having a domain, a license of its own.

Erotic license applies to both interpersonal scripts, wherein we are licensed to eroticize our ideals, and intrapsychic scripts, wherein we are licensed to idealize the erotic. A license for elaboration, it should be noted, that more often than not made problems of accommodation more difficult. An example of such a problem of accommodation would be the not uncommon experience of wanting to express a commitment to elements of interpersonal scripting that were consistent with stereotyped gender-roles postures, while, simultaneously, experiencing feelings intensely incongruous with those very gender-role postures, e.g., simultaneously to take possession of the object of desire (the male role) and to be the object of desire (the female role): to seduce and to be seductive, to conquer and to surrender, to desire and to be desirable.

The separation of an erotic identity from an everyday identity is reflected in the high disjunctive experience that commonly occurs upon the entry into explicitly sexual acts, an experience of disjuncture that commonly occurs even among individuals who have had an extensive shared sexual history. This is clearly reflected in the traditional and persistent practice of putting out the lights before initiating sexual activity; not to be seen, not to see, not to be seen seeing. The problem of disjunctive identities is also reflected in the questions: Who am I when I have sex? And, with whom am I having sex? In seeking answers to such questions, how often is our everyday identity reduced to being a coconspirator forever pleading its innocence? And, if not its innocence, its reluctant complicity?

In the most pragmatic sense, sexual scripts must solve two problems. The first of these is gaining permission from the self to engage in desired forms of sexual behavior. The second problem is that of access to the experiences that the desired behavior is expected to generate.¹³ Frequently this requires that the actor's experience becomes contingent not only upon what their partner appears to be doing but also upon what their partner appears to be experiencing. And while this empathetic inference derives partly from available cultural scenarios and partly from what is perceived as the actual

¹³Of course many desires are implicated in the sex act, not all of which are rendered easily mutually reinforcing or even compatible. More often than not, the continuing relationship with the other takes precedence over the immediate pursuit of sexual desire. Typically, this occurs not only because of the potential importance of the other but also because of the probable links between the other and what is commonly a complex network of shared social relationships upon which the social standing and reputation of the actor rests. The commonplace distinctions between sexual behavior within conventional, everyday contexts and unconventional, noneveryday contexts speaks to just this issue.

experience of the other, it also derives from what the actor requires the other to be in order to maintain sexual excitement. Thus, sometimes the actor, in his or her presented guise, merely provides the plausible access to behavior, while the desired experience is to be gained not from but from within the other: the not uncommon experience of the other becoming a metaphor for the self. Such a response was typified by a transsexual who when asked how she could have fathered several children while she was a he, replied, "There was always a penis there, but it never was mine."¹⁴

What Freud saw as fundamental to the "psychological novel," also describes the scripting of the sexual. "The psychological novel in general probably owes its peculiarities to the tendency of modern writers to split up their ego by self-observation into many component egos, and in this way personify the conflicting trends in their own mental life in many heroes" (Freud, 1963). The phrase "self-observation," of course, points to precisely the process that must follow the fashioning of an interpersonal script out of sometimes incongruous material: self-observation, often very careful self-observation. And self-observation represents incipient self-control and self-control becomes synonymous with the staging of the self. The actor ultimately must submit to the playwright, while both nervously anticipate the responses of overlapping but not always harmonious panels of internal and external critics (Bakhtin, 1981).

The concept of scripting, then, can take on a very literal meaning: not the creation and performance of a role but the creation and staging of a drama. As we are reminded by virtually all elementary sociology texts, roles are meaningless in themselves and take on meaning only in relationship to the enactment of related roles. What the actor/ego is (including what the actor/ego feels he or she should be feeling) is dependent upon the creation of a cast of others (including what they should be feeling), the others who complete the meaning of the actor; others who may be required to experience what the actor sometimes cannot experience, as it were, in his or her own name. The sexual script can be seen as "the *mise-en-scene* of desire" (Laplanche and Potentialis, 1974).

It is this complex process of sexual scripting that encourages the very conservative, highly ritualized, or stereotyped character that sexual behavior often takes. This conservative character is often cited as support for the view that the sexual is shaped early and possesses only a limited capacity for subsequent change. This conservative aspect, however, may depend more on the

¹⁴Edmund White (1983) describing the current gay male "clone"—a figure of hypermasculine costumes and postures—comments, "we became what we desired" (p. 13).

stability of social and personal history than an iron-handed legacy of the early developmental process.

Few individuals, like few novelists or dramatists, wander far from the formulas of their most predictable successes. Once finding a formula that works, i.e., the realization of sexual pleasure as well as the realization of sociosexual competence, there is an obvious tendency to on some levels "fix" or pararitualize that formula. This is not to say that variations cannot occur but that such variations generally occur within the limits of a larger stability of scripts both interpersonal and intrapsychic. The stabilizing of sexual scripts, often confused with the crystalization of a sexual identity, occurs partly because it works by insuring adequate sexual performance and provides adequate sexual pleasure. It also works because it represents an effective accommodation with the larger self process, where sexual practice and sexual identity do not disturb the many components of one's nonsexual identities.

Changes in status or context, expected or unexpected, as Kohut (1978) has observed, have the capacity to call into question the very organization of the self: "certain periods of transition which demand of us a reshuffling of the self, its changes, and its rebuilding, constitute emotional situations that reactivate the period of the formation of the self" (p. 623). A potential crisis of the self process and the production of scripts—sexual and nonsexual—is occasioned by change not merely because some aspect of the self is under pressure to change but also because the very ecology of the self has been disturbed; a moment requiring renegotiation of aspects of the self involved in or related to change but also a moment when virtually all aspects of the self that previously required a negotiated outcome must be reestablished. In modern societies there are relatively few individuals for whom the self process does not involve such negotiated outcomes or, if you will, outcomes of either compromise or dominance and repression.

It is important that the reader be reminded that much of the process of sexual scripting while appearing in the obscurity of individual behavior remains in most critical aspects a derivative of the social process. What appears to be the freedom of the individual from the determination of the social process may, in fact, be little (and yet a great deal) more than a reflection of the increased complexity of collective life.

SEXUAL SCRIPTING AND THE LIFE CYCLE

Few cultural scenarios are without age or life-cycle state implication. While rarely complete in the sense of specifying the full range of expected behaviors and responses to behavior, it is hard to designate a role that is without life-cycle requirements in the double sense of (1) either having entry

and exiting requirements that are life-cycle stage-specific or (2) having expectations that systematically vary with life-cycle stage attributions.

Some roles are very specific with reference to age requirements, e.g., "you cannot until age," "at age x you must." Similarly, for many roles and activities, particularly those that are universal or nearly universal, standards of evaluation can vary dramatically in terms of the presumed life-cycle stage of the actor, e.g., only the very young and very old are allowed to be sloppy, self-preoccupied ingestors of food. Indeed, the commonplace admonition, "act your age," speaks directly to the prevasive relevance of life-cycle stage conceptions to virtually all behavior. There are few roles or dimensions of identity that are more burdened with life-cycle stage specifications or more troubled by the transformations accompanying life-cycle stage changes than the sexual.

The fact that life-cycle stage conceptions implicit in the multiple roles most are expected to play make them an effective instrument for assessing the degree to which a collectivity might legitimately be termed *paradigmatic*. Clearly, the term paradigmatic can be applied where there is a high degree of consensus regarding the boundaries and the differential expectations associated with each life-cycle stage, where there is near universal respect for boundaries and expectations, and where the application of these causes little conflict in integrating the several roles an individual occupies.

Failing all else, highly differentiated or postparadigmatic societies, such as the industrial and postindustrial countries of the West, have great difficulty in effectively sustaining just this kind of syntagmatic integration. Thus, while undoubtedly much that is involved in the association of age with status persists, particularly in sexual domains, confusions, uncertainties, and flexibilities clearly abound. These persist in a double sense: Not only do the contents of age-specific expectations become ambiguously complex but even where there is consensus regarding such expectations, the applicability of such expectations frequently remains vague. What do we expect of the young? What do we expect of the old? Who is young? Who is old? The order in which these questions must be asked differs radically between paradigmatic and postparadigmatic social orders.

One consequence of this complexity is that the translation of cultural sexual scenarios into interpersonal sexual scripts has the effect of empowering the actor who often realizes considerable discretion in invoking specific aspects of the semiotic of the life cycle. This is an empowering, it should be noted, that is shared with others who also have considerable discretion in confirming or disconfirming the actor's representations. Thus an aging "playboy" whose partners, like the *Playboy* centerfold, never age may be simultaneously an object of ridicule and envy. What were once the coercive

obligations of "social facts" increasingly become bargaining chips in negotiation with others, as well as in negotiations with the self.¹⁵

For obvious reasons this is least troublesome at the extreme ends of the life cycle, the extremes of what, despite Freud, might be termed the presexual (childhood) and the postsexual (old age). This is not to say that sexually significant events do not occur during these periods; it is merely to observe that such events are not or only rarely anticipated in prevailing cultural scenarios dealing with the very young and the very old.

Infancy, childhood and, until recently, old age, were periods where the appearance of sex-seeking behavior was viewed as pathological; an assumption of pathology because those either too young or too old were assumed to be incapable of comprehending or experiencing the full meaning of the behavior. Community outrage at the rape of an elderly woman or a female child is often greater than an even more brutal rape of a mature woman, despite, or because of, the fact that the inappropriateness of the object bespeaks its greater pathological origins and often precludes even the suspicion of initial complicity on the part of the victim.

For some individuals the sequence of life-cycle based cultural scenarios continues to organize interpersonal sexual scripts in ways that facilitate the harmonizing of sexual commitments with other more public role commitments. For such individuals, cultural scenarios covering conventional family careers serve as the organizing principle of sexual careers; for them, family careers, sexual careers, and the definition of life-cycle stages tend to happily (or, in some cases, unhappily) coincide. Suggestive of the expectation of this integration is the fact that for Kinsey, and virtually all others, conceptualization of heterosexual behavior have been organized in terms of marital status. Sexual careers were subsumed under the headings of premarital, marital, extramarital, or postmarital experiences.

¹⁵Folk traditions or common conventions regarding life-cycle stage distinctions and recognitions appear to have become less common and less commonly effective over the past century. Siegal and White (1982) suggest that the very mandating of the study of child development rested upon the need to create statistical norms against which the behaviors of specific children could be evaluated in social settings where traditional expectations lost generality of application. (A loss of stability of expectation at the very point in social history where enlarged proportions were charged with an accepted responsibility for the social and moral destinies of their children, a development that ironically proceeded in approximate correlation with a growing inability of parents to fully control these destinies.) An expression of this increasing complexity is the sheer number of available life-cycle stage distinctions or developmental watersheds, i.e., points in the life cycle where sufficient shifts in either observed behavior or expectations require new bases for evaluations and explanation, new bases for scripting our own behavior, the behavior of others, and anticipating the interpretation others might bring to our own behavior.

Once such a congruence of elements of scripts and identities was essentially mandated by the institutional order. However, for increasing numbers this coincidence fails to occur or, when it occurs, it occurs with the kinds of strains that undermine stability. The fairly dramatic recent changes in patterns of sexual behavior reflect not only a profound change in the requirements and meanings attached to the sexual but also equally profound changes in the ordering of family careers and, ultimately, in the very definition of the life cycle itself. How relatively simple and coercively linear was Erikson's (1950) initial description of the life cycle, a description that is less than four decades old. How quickly it has required amendment and qualification.¹⁶ Where life-cycle stage conceptions once offered the comfort of appearing to specify behavior, it is commitment to behavior that increasingly specifies, with understandable uncertainty, one's life-cycle stage.¹⁷

¹⁶Recent considerations of the Eriksonian model have required increasing attention to dimensions of personality "off the diagonal" of his epigenetic chart; the emphasis shifts from the linear developmental line to the maintenance of the self process with multiple sources of uncertainty. Similarly, where popularizers of Erikson too quickly converted the stage-specific outcomes, e.g., trust versus mistrust, into the positive and negative poles of a continuum, there has been a renewed appreciation of the essentially dialectic character of these paired outcomes, where the balance between the pairs is seen as a continuing dynamic, i.e., a dynamic whose meaning, whose value becomes increasingly context-specific. The embattled self of Freud becomes the self as battleground of post-Freudian theory. What was once understandably perceived as a failure of socialization, a failure of identity crystalization, increasingly comes to be seen as the flexibility whose dialectical partner is cohesiveness.

¹⁷The reformulation of symbolic interactionist theory to focus more explicitly upon interaction as "negotiation" (Stryker, 1980) not only represents the press of ethnomethodological and Goffmanesque approaches but also represents a recognition of a profound shift in the most general views of everyday social life. The development of a "generalized other" is obviously as much dependent upon the existence of a fundamental and pervasive societal/community consensus as it is dependent upon the specifics of the individual's developmental history. Increased social differentiation, which translates into different experiences and different meanings (including the inevitability of different meanings for otherwise identical experiences and identical meanings for significantly different experiences), substantially undermines the very possibility of that necessary societal or community consensus. Indeed, given both the facts of increased differentiation and persistent social change, one must ask what could possibly constitute either the form, content, or stability of a "generalized other" in most of the social settings of contemporary society? (The former, differentiation, creates problems of consensus within cohorts; the latter, persistent social change, creates additional problems of cross-cohort consensus.) Mead's conception of the generalized other implicitly assumes shared, and as a result of their being shared, coercive cultural scenarios: a social psychology, as it were, of a paradigmatic society. The emphasis upon negotiation almost always assumes a significant loss of the taken for granted character of such a consensus. The very idea of negotiation, while still resting upon the assumption of shared meanings, implies a loss of in many ways of this taken for granted quality. What is missing in the construction of symbolic interaction is an equal concern for the necessarily enlarged intrapsychic negotiation. Perhaps in the attempt to protect the primary of the social, that is too often left to a series of psychological processes as abstract in their indifference to content as they are unexamined, the structuralism of inner life becomes the Siamese twin to the structuralism of social life: They protect each other from the corrupting implications of experience.

It is quite common to hear reference to a “blurring of life-cycle stage boundaries.” This is often accompanied by an admiring appreciation of more traditional societies that appear to have maintained clear and nearly univesal application of life-cycle stage distinctions. Not untypically, such collectives are admired for facilitating the journey across the conventional life course by utilization of “rites of passage.” The implied comparison is with contemporary societies that often appear to provide very little “instruction of individuals in how to manage such transitions, failing not only to provide training in the behaviors associated with a new stage but also failing to provide a clear basis for reciprocal recognitions.

However, what appears as a blurring of boundaries on the collective level is not necessarily fully descriptive of what occurs on the individual level. Indeed, it is often not fully descriptive of what is happening on the collective level as well. A highly differentiated society is unlikely to formulate instructive life-cycle scenarios that can simultaneously realize a level of abstraction sufficient to override existing differences and that can, at the same time, become an occasion for evoking powerful feelings. For example, the questions of what constitutes minimal sexual maturity varies considerably across time and cultures. It varies rather dramatically across the contemporary social landscape. Where “serious” involvement in sociosexual activities once marked the boundaries between adolescence and adulthood, it increasingly comes to mark the boundaries between childhood and adolescence.

Sexual cultural scenarios endure but no longer provide the exclusive interpretive context. To the contrary, the specifics of person and place effectively compete for legitimating the appropriateness of a specific scenario. Age or life-cycle stage suggest the possibility of sexual activity at the same time that sexual activity affirms our claim to a specific stage of the life cycle; if I do “it,” I am either old enough or young enough depending on “where I am coming from.” Here we can observe the commitment to the sexual following the essentially nonerotic motive of gaining interpersonal and/or intrapsychic confirmation. Current adolescent sexual patterns speak to this rather eloquently. The fairly dramatic sexualization of early adolescence provides an exemplification of the desire for meaning, i.e., confirmation of status competence, preceding a commitment to the meaning of erotic desire (Miller and Simon, 1982).

This is not to even imply that the sexual is entirely organized directly by the press of external requirements. While operative cultural scenarios substantially condition overt behavior, both in behavior and in the anticipation of behavior, internal rehearsals represent the trials or experiments where the confluence of a multitude of accumulated desires are tested for compatibility with each other, allowing for an initial crystalization of a sexual identity (Laufer, 1976). The early eroticization of such trials through mastur-

batory reinforcement may serve to additionally strengthen the claims of the emergent intrapsychic scripts in seeking expression—however muted—in operative interpersonal scripts. Occurring most typically in contemporary society during a period of heightened narcissism, such fantasied rehearsals often find their narrative plausibility far more dependent upon personal ideals than upon social ideals. Moreover, occurring in the realm of fantasy, such emergent intrapsychic scripts have a capacity to more effectively harness social ideals to personal passions than may be possible in the externalized enactment of interpersonal scripts. Thus, training in the mechanisms that are requisite for eliciting sexual excitement may in fact create problems in establishing the kinds of interpersonal sexual scripts that must simultaneously serve the erotic and the conventional.

While emotionally charged, not all—possibly very few—erotic rehearsals or fantasies are acted out, though many in varied representations continue necessarily to be acted within, the sexual dialogue with the other can often bare little by way of resemblance to the sexual dialogue with the self. Unfortunately, almost all of our concern with the sexual activities of adolescents centers upon overt behaviors—which indeed have important consequences—while virtually none of this concern focus upon the imagery informing that behavior. With the exception of the work of Stoller (1979), virtually none of its focuses upon the sexual acts within sexual acts. Most, however, find a negotiated compromise between the requirements of both levels of scripting, though the stability of that negotiated compromise is rarely assured.

Sheltered by its internality, the imagery of the intrapsychic yields to change far more slowly than the more externally monitored production of interpersonal scripts. With shifts in life-cycle status—from adolescence to adulthood in its varied stages, from being children to being parents, from engaging in violative behavior to engaging in mandated behaviors—the very accommodations effective at one stage become problematic at subsequent stages. However, aside from its own intrinsic requirements, the sexual also shares the burden of demonstrating social, gender, and moral competence and, as a result, the demands placed upon interpersonal scripting often represent compelling influences. Thus, rather than being reciprocally reinforcing, the requirements of interpersonal and intrapsychic scripting of the sexual frequently represent a continuing—and for some a costly—dialectic.

One consequence of this partially narcissistically fashioned sexual repertoire is that it is highly responsive to subsequent narcissistic wounds or threats (Kohut, 1978). The midlife crisis for example, often manifests itself in terms of reactivated sexual experiments, though it may represent more of a renewal of the sexual rather than a failure of previous strategies of sexual repression or containment. This is renewal in the sense that the failure of self-cohesion

giving rise to such renewed focusing upon the sexual may have roots in aspects of the self initially remote to the sexual, aspects of the self that link the individual to social life and his/her past and future far more critically than any burden the sexual may carry. Typical of these might be the conflicts between the self as child and the self as parent, as well as the crises attending both success and failure in the world of work.

The sexualization of this kind of crisis serves two distinct functions. First, while appearing initially as a threat to the traditional social order it actually lessens the estrangement of individuals by mandating a transformation of the self within the social order and not a transformation of the social order. That is, it moves the individual toward a quality of interpersonal scripting that personalizes discontent and its solutions. For example, much, perhaps most, of the increase in female participation in extramarital sex may not be an expression of a feminist revolution so much as it is a more comfortable alternative to such a revolution. Second, as a postadolescent phenomenon it generally follows the eroticization of the sexual and, as such, it utilizes the powers of the intrapsychic to create new metaphors of desire; metaphors of desire that effectively link the "archeology" of desire with new and often unanticipated social destinies. Both the anomie of deprivation and, even more profoundly, the anomie of affluence focus the individual's attention upon available repertoires of gratification in ways that commonly highlight the promise of the erotic (Simon and Gagnon, 1976). The enlargement of psychic functions attending the anomic condition are attracted to the promises of erotic experience: promises of intensity, promises of confirmation. As Lichtenstein (1977) observes, the role of sexuality in providing identity confirmation, however temporarily, tends to become particularly salient during those moments when self-cohesion is itself in question. And despite a traditionally bleak prognosis offered by Durkheimian and psychoanalytic traditions, for some the promises may be kept and the confirmation sustained.

For all the confusions attending both adolescence and the vaguely bounded midlife crisis or postadolescent identity crises, it is easier to consider the role of the sexual within such contexts than it is during other segments of the life course. These have become matters of sufficient public concern that the speculation on the scripting of the sexual within these contexts becomes possible. Other segments of the life course remain largely uncharted domains. One suspects, however, that even where the journey through the life course appears untraumatic—as it well may occur for any—the problems of adapting sexual scripts to changed circumstances is an important, if relatively unattended issue.

The power of sexual scripts—perhaps much of the power of the sexual—is tied to the extrasexual significances of confirming identities and making them congruent with appropriate relationships. Where identity is for

the moment confirmed and relationships stabilized, the meanings and uses of the sexual must shift in very basic ways. Almost inevitably, for any there is a shift from the sexuality feeding off the excitement of uncertainty to a sexuality of reassurance. The stabilizing of identities and relationships tends to stabilize the structuring of interpersonal scripts; even variations and elaborations take on a predictable character, accounting for what for most becomes a declining frequency of sexual activity itself (Greenblat, 1982). It is possible that the sources of sexual interest, if not sexual passion, depend increasingly upon materials drawn from aspects of intrapsychic scripting that can be embedded within the stereotyped interpersonal script. A useful but potentially alienating adaptation that encourages what has always been to varying degrees a potential aspect of sexual exchanges is that we become dumb actors in one another's charades.

The problematic qualities of managing the scripting of the sexual by adults may be seen in two fairly general ways. First, as suggested above, the major cultural scenarios that shape the most common interpersonal scripts tend to be drawn almost exclusively from the requirements of adolescence and young adulthood. There are virtually none tied of the issues of subsequent segments of the life course. Indeed, the interpersonal scripts of these early stages, along with the intrapsychic elements they facilitate, may become in part the fantasied components of the intrapsychic at later stages, particularly the confirmation of attractiveness and displays of passionate romantic interest. And while this transfer sustains sexual commitment and performance, it also has the capacity to provide a disenchanting commentary on such performances.

Second, partly derived from the very process of evolving intrapsychic scripts and, as we have already observed, partly derived from the isolation of erotic realities from everyday reality, the imagery and content of intrapsychic scripts tend to change very slowly. The language of accumulation and reorganization might in fact be more accurate. Drawn from what we once were as well as from what we were not and still are not allowed to be or express in more explicit form, the intrapsychic in muted form feeds our continuing sexual experiences and, not uncommonly, opportunistically enlarges its claims during moments of crisis, disjuncture, or transition. These are words that to varying degrees describe the transversing of the life course for all of us: transition, disjuncture, and sometimes, crisis.

CONCLUSION

Explorations such as the present endeavor almost inevitably begin with promise and conclude with apology. What has been offered is not a theory of sexual behavior but rather a conceptual apparatus with which to begin

a long overdue examination of development and experience of the sexual. An examination that must inevitably take us beyond inarticulate permanence of the body to the changing and diverse meanings and uses of the sexual. And in doing so, seeking the sexual not in the traditional terms of biological imperatives but in terms of the natural imperatives of the human: our national dependence upon social meanings—upon symbol and metaphor—to give life to “the body without organs” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977). Additionally, it is offered as an approach that seeks to explain the appearances and uses of the sexual in terms of a more general approach to the most general issues of human behavior in our times.

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