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Ideology as a Factor in the Consideration of Deviance

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There is increasing evidence that the manner in which scientists structure their material, the nature of the problems they study, the types of observations made, the interpretations of their work, and the theoretical conclusions they draw therefrom are influenced by the findings they wish to substantiate. The conclusions are all too often reached first and the evidence then amassed that will support them. Science is not the virginal muse, but a flirt, a tease, and sometimes a whore, and if she is often draped in the academic gowns of cold impartiality, it appears on closer examination that these may be but the dark shrouds of ideology.

The term “ideology” is a confusing one. It is used in at least two different ways, one of which has positive connotations, the other negative. In the former case, it refers to a set of values around which a group may rally. In the latter (and as being used here) it is Marx’s conceptualization of ideas employed as weapons; as such, the goal to which the weaponry is put becomes more important than the truth or validity of the ideas.

Mannheim (1936), in his classic work on the subject, emphasized that one’s view of reality is position-based, and hence at best must be partial and therefore distorted. While it is usually one’s socio-economic position (or social class) that determines one’s view of the world, it might be a political, religious, organizational, or any other position, which influences people to conjure up “false interpretations of experience.” A simple definition of the term “ideology” is offered by White (1961), who describes it as “a selective interpretation of the state of affairs in society made by those who share some particular conception of what it ought to be.”

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Ideology and Social Science

It is self-evident that ideology should be absent from the world of science, including social science. The vision of what the world ought to be should in no way influence a scientific observer in his view of what the world is. Only if the scientist, however, is aware of the danger that ideological bias may becloud the study of a given phenomenon, can such bias be overcome.

If Mannheim stressed social class as providing the position from which one sees the world, this is nevertheless not the only status that contributes to distortion. All the roles that men have in their highly segmented lives may influence them toward wanting to arrive at a conclusion (that is, wanting to see the world the way it ought to be), and therefore disorienting them in the view of the way the world is.

When applied to the sphere of deviance, there are several groups who share normative views which in turn influence their cognition, or at least their public presentation of this cognition. These groups include the deviants themselves, civil libertarians, sociologists, social workers, psychologists and psychotherapists generally and those with Freudian orientations specifically, sympathizers with underdogs, and many others. The position of some of these people on sex deviance should be viewed as an expression, not of their effort to arrive at truth, but rather to arrange reality in such a manner as to help convince themselves or the world that their goals are worthy of support.

Deviants and the Structuring of Reality

Let us take, for example, the deviants themselves. The deviate is living under a condition of extreme difficulty. He is frightened that his secret may be discovered; he does not have the public sympathy that supports most people suffering from physical, mental, and emotional disturbances; and his view of himself is frequently a hostile one. He develops an ideology of deviance for two reasons:

First, his self-image is constantly being attacked by the total impact of a culture that has rejected him and that expresses this rejection in language, humor, vilification, and the innumerable everyday experiences that make up his commonsense world. If he can create a set of firmly held beliefs in the propriety of his actions and in the worthiness of his person, these beliefs may serve as reinforcements so that he can function without self-punishment and self-castigation.
Second, if he can project to the world a set of ideas which will bolster the concept that his way of life is a good, sane, and healthy one, then he may aid in alleviating the social pressures which serve to victimize him.

In either instance, the goal determines the arguments, beliefs, and structuring of reality. Therefore, the deviants, their friends and supporters have (or believe they have) a vested interest in the development of a set of concepts that would enable one to reach any or all of the following conclusions: (1) that they are not responsible for having the desires to engage in a deviant way of life; (2) that they are as likely as anyone else to be mentally and emotionally well-balanced persons, undisturbed and essentially free from anxieties; (3) that such anxieties as they do have are exclusively the result of the oppressive social atmosphere in which they live; (4) that their condition is not in any way socially harmful, and can even be useful; (5) that their sex lives are as much involved with romance, affection, love, and stability, as are those of the allegedly normal; (6) that they would themselves be as happy as anyone else, if only they were not persecuted by society; (7) that their condition cannot be changed or cured, and that those who claim to have effected such changes are liars, charlatans, fakers, and money-grabbers; (8) that the only reason why the mentally well-balanced and happy persons among the deviates are not widely known is that only the disturbed and distressed are seen by therapists.

Normal Necrophiles and Transsexuals

In the effort to establish that the deviant is useful, well-balanced, and essentially normal, Ullerstam (1966) has proclaimed himself the champion of the rights of the erotic minorities. “The sexually orthodox,” he writes, “have always brainwashed the deviate into believing that his inclinations are shameful. Therefore it is now their moral duty to put things to rights.”

From the position that deviates are persecuted unfairly and irrationally, Ullerstam proceeds to question whether these people are disturbed, let alone anti-social. He writes:

For the necrophile, the adequate sexual object is a corpse. According to the views cherished by legal psychiatrists, all necrophiles without exception are individuals suffering from grave mental disturbances. This, anyway, is the way it is put in a summary of legal psychiatry included in the required reading of
medical students. How can this be known? The material available consists only of cases where the individual was caught in the act.

A similar argument is frequently encountered with regard to homosexuals and other deviates. The argument is advanced for ideological reasons; that is, in order to gain greater public sympathy for those engaged in a particular type of deviant behavior. It is entirely possible that one might obtain a distorted atypical sample of necrophiles or homosexuals from prisons and from clinical practice, but this is not necessarily the case. It is possible, in fact, that the reverse is true—that the clinician may see only those who are well enough to know that they are ill. There is little reason to believe that the necrophile who is apprehended is more disturbed than his luckier confreres. One can reach the conclusion that "without exception they are suffering from grave mental disturbances" by an understanding of the nature of the sex drive and the meaning death has for the human animal, as well as the psychodynamics that would lead an individual to seek this particular type of erotic gratification.

In a recent work on transvestites and transsexualists, Benjamin (1966) has gone to great lengths to create a favorable social atmosphere for these persons, by depicting them as constitutionally predisposed in their deviant direction, not changeable by psychotherapy, essentially well-balanced and certainly non-psychotic individuals, who need only the right to cross-dress or undergo surgery in order to pursue the correct path in life. Over and over again, Benjamin quotes therapists who, before the operation, found "no evidence [in the transsexual] of serious mental illness." Typical is one statement: "The patient is not psychotic."

The descriptions of the patients, however, belie this favorable diagnosis. For example, Benjamin writes:

The de-sexing attempt is merely one example of the frequent lack of realism among transvestites and their ever-present capacity for illusion and self-deception.... The often infantile and completely self-centered attitude of many transvestites and transsexuals is occasionally and strikingly illustrated, together with a deeply disturbed, unrealistic, frustrated frame of mind which is the more outspoken, the more the writer [in the transvestite journal] inclines toward transsexualism. More articles and letters, however, are remarkably sensible and sometimes humorous.

A word on the question of humor: even a cursory examination of the material will convince any behavioral scientist—who is not ideo-
logically wedded to a viewpoint that will prevent his reaching such conclusion—that the humor is overwhelmingly self-mocking and self-deprecatory.

Benjamin describes a condition in which “the male speaks of his female counterpart as of another person,” but to label this schizophrenia would constitute social condemnation, rather than diagnostic realism. The reader is told of transsexuals who, before any operation, “have normal boyfriends who treat them as girls whether they live as such or not.” (Italics added). Psychotherapy, the author states, “is a useless undertaking with present available methods. The mind of the transsexual cannot be changed in its false gender orientation.” Nevertheless, in some instances the mental condition improves “under estrogen treatment as well as after the corrective surgery.” (Italics added).

The transsexual is beset by a basic conflict: “fear of the opposite sex, which cannot be resolved by any psychotherapy.” Although the fear persists after the operation, it does so “without, however, disturbing the patient’s life”—now that the patient believes himself to be a member of the sex he is so frightened of.

One need only read the case histories, written by Benjamin or his collaborators, to note how disturbed are the patients. In a series entitled “Biographical Profiles,” written by Masters (in Benjamin, 1966), a young man identified by the letter H is described. H had transsexual interests at an early age. “His masturbatory fantasies were of males. . . . He also fantasied being whipped (as a small child) and being made to wear male clothing.” He slept in the same bed with a sister eleven years his senior, “until he was well up into his teens.” Sex play was “suspected by psychiatrists,” a suspicion that seems to have had some foundation in reality; as for the sister, she “believed herself to be the bride of Christ and to have been impregnated by Him.”

The boy had good affectional relations with his parents: “He reports that his father was always very affectionate toward him—the father tucking him into bed and kissing him good night even after H was past twenty.” At any rate, H was diagnosed as a psychopathic personality, with danger of psychosis, having paranoid trends, and infantile in his reaction to people, but all of this was evidently corrected by an operation: “The psychological results of the operation were described as ‘very good.’ ” Described by whom? One is not told.
Perhaps by the patient. Benjamin's remark on this case is an example of ideology leading one to draw an unwarranted conclusion from one's own arrangement of facts:

In any event, this case seems to prove that an unknown constitutional factor was at the bottom of the gender disorientation and that "conditioning" evidently played no part in this instance.

Youthful Seduction and Homosexual Patterns

The question of the influence of juvenile homosexual experience on adult sexual patterns is a most important one. A recent work (Ollendorff, 1966) was devoted entirely to this subject, but shed little light on it. It is a question in which ideology deeply obscures the issues. Those who cry out for punishment against the deviate claim he is corrupting our youth; those who ask for sympathy state that juvenile homosexual experiences have no lasting effects except on those with strong previous predilections in a homoerotic direction.

A journalist (Gerassi, 1966) with little previous knowledge of deviance and with no training in the problem, visited Boise, Idaho, some ten years after a homosexual scandal involving respectable adult citizens and high school youths. The writer approached the problem with sympathy for the adult men involved. Many of them had had their lives ruined, some had served long jail sentences, and some were victims of a lynch spirit worked up by the town newspapers and of trials that were shocking examples of American courtroom procedures at their worst.

Anxious to show how mistreated these people were, Gerassi made a superficial study of the men who, in their youth, had been involved in the scandal. These men were now in their mid-twenties, and had all emerged from the episode unharmed, as normal as apple pie—a conclusion that Gerassi reached after several minutes of conversation and the exchange of a few questions and answers. Gerassi was here dedicated to the proposition that the juvenile homosexual experience has no enduring effect on the personality, a conclusion that he wishes to reach because it will aid in the alleviation of social antagonism toward older males who had been involved with these youths. Later, however, in the same book, he focuses attention on these older men, seeks to create for them the greatest amount of sympathy, and suggests that these poor souls may have been the victims of youthful seduction!
Exclusive and Non-Exclusive Homosexuals

Since the publication of the first volume by Kinsey and his colleagues (1948), there has been confusion and misuse of their data on bisexuality, particularly when such data were applied to more or less exclusive homosexual patterns. An example of such confusion is found in a statement by one of Kinsey's colleagues, Pomeroy (1965):

While only about a third of human males and a sixth of human females engage in overt homosexual activity, about half of the males have either had overt homosexual relations or have been sexually aroused by males. For males, then, homosexuality is statistically almost normal; for females, it is not.

What Pomeroy fails to add, however, is that by his own figures and his own method of arranging reality, exclusive homosexual activity is far from being statistically normal for males.

In their volume on male sexuality, Kinsey and his colleagues (1948) made the same error, the ideological basis of which is quite apparent:

The opinion that homosexual activity in itself provides evidence of a psychopathic personality is materially challenged by these incidence and frequency data. Of the 40 or 50 per cent of the male population which has homosexual experience, certainly a high proportion would not be considered psychopathic personalities on the basis of anything else in their histories.

In both of these statements, there is an unwillingness to differentiate between the large number of males who have occasional and sporadic homosexual arousal and activity, and those who have excluded or almost excluded the heterosexual outlet. It is all the more surprising to find statements like the above, in view of the great pains to which Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin went to establish the continuum from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual.

For ideological purposes, the work of Ford and Beach (1951) is often quoted, paraphrased, and misunderstood. They reported numerous instances of homosexual arousal, mounting, and satisfaction among infrahuman animals, but almost no instance of the extremely strong preference for one's own sex that marks the human homosexual. Yet, their work is constantly cited to establish the mammalian or phylogenetic normality of homosexuality.

This confusion between intermittent and continual interest, and minor and major interest in one's own sex, is reflected in the report
of a speech given before the Mattachine Society, Inc., of New York by one Dr. Wainwright Churchill III. According to the report in *Mattachine Newsletter* (1964), Churchill told the audience:

... in certain primitive societies one hundred percent of the males participate in homosexual activities. In these societies it is actually the male who abstains from such activities who is considered odd.

*The Hopelessness of Psychotherapy*

Any student of the literature of sex deviance will frequently encounter statements attempting to demonstrate that psychotherapy is hopeless. Those expressing this view selectively ignore the long list of therapists who have reported successful change (the literature is cited by Ellis, 1965), and they offer neither empirical evidence nor a theoretical construction to justify their conclusions. Actually, they are motivated by sympathy for the deviant, which sympathy will in their view be difficult to “sell” to the public if it is generally believed that the deviant is an obstinate individual who has turned his back on those who are offering to help him live a normal life.

In order to support this view, the opponents of therapy frequently express pessimism on the prognosis for change from exclusive homosexuality to the reverse. They omit reference, however, to the greater successes in leading people more in the direction of heterosexuality than they had been before. Typical of such a biased statement is the following from the Wolfenden report (1957), hardly the work of reputable scientists:

Our evidence leads us to conclude that a total reorientation from complete homosexuality to complete heterosexuality is very unlikely indeed.

The ideologue here creates a straw man, in the form of the patient who is supposed to travel from one end of the continuum to the other. He refuses to face the more common problem of developing the germ of heterosexual interests in order that a choice may be made more freely, less compulsively, and with the spectrum of potential sex pleasures broadened.

The situation becomes a curious one in which a role conflict develops when the psychotherapist argues against the effectiveness of therapy. This, however, can be resolved without driving away too many potential customers, as witness the statement of Hemphill, Leitsch and Stuart (1958). First they declare: “We have yet to find
any evidence, in our experience or in literature, that the direction of intensely homosexual drives can be successfully altered,” and then add the further information that, although treatment in their own practice had not resulted in changing the individuals, nevertheless “other benefits had been derived.”

**The Incidence of Deviance**

A problem of considerable importance to the behavioral scientist is that involving the fluctuations in the frequency, incidence, and distribution of various types of deviance. It is quite common to run across the dire warnings of moralists that deviance is on the increase and has become so rampant that all modern cities, towns, and hamlets are becoming twentieth century Sodoms. The opposite statement is also made, for example by Westwood (1960):

There seems to be no evidence to support the view that the incidence of homosexuality is on the increase, in other words, that there are now more homosexuals in proportion to the population.

Obviously, Westwood is not in an authoritative position to make such a statement, and his view can be dismissed as worthy of no serious consideration. What interests us is not the truth or falsity of the statement, but what leads him to make it: namely, the will to believe the structuring of the world the way it ought to be and confusing it with the world as it is. His statement should be understood in the light of the widespread fear that new restrictions on sexual mores will prevail if it is shown that relaxed attitudes have resulted in greater deviance.

Many of those quoted above would agree that the lot of the deviant in our society ought to be one in which he is treated with kindness, looked upon with sympathy, and accepted for what he is. He should be allowed to live his life, they contend, as he finds necessary and possible, and punished neither socially nor legally for doing so. Having arrived at this conclusion, they proceed to arrange reality in such a manner as to support the conclusion; and in so doing, they do violence to evidence, truth, self-consistency and impartial objectivity. Their thought process seems to function somewhat as follows: If the deviant is to be accepted, then his promiscuity must be played down and love glorified, for the society is more likely to accept people who have love-sex relations in an unusual manner than those who have loveless-sex relations in this manner. Toilet room “romances”
and street-corner one-night stands are ignored, and lifelong devotion, reminiscent of both Damon and Pythias and of a Grade B Hollywood fantasy, is projected as the world that is.

In the same manner, deviation is seen as a normal manifestation of the human animal, and not an abnormal development, not because there is scientific evidence leading to this conclusion, but because such a conclusion is consistent with the image that one wishes to project. The transvestite, transsexual, or homosexual cannot be changed, not because psychotherapeutic efforts have so demonstrated, but because if change is accepted as a real possibility, then social condemnation may be escalated and the deviant blamed for obstinately and irrationally refusing to submit himself to the helping hand of the therapist.

The implications of this anti-scientific approach are worth investigating. The implied abandonment of deviance as it is, and the projection of deviance as it is not, is a repudiation of the very cause of the deviant that is supposedly being championed. For when one calls for acceptance of people who are in all respects like the general run of the population (except for the fact that they desire a sex object of the same sex or one that is dead), then there is an implication that if they were not like these others in all such respects, they would be unworthy of being accepted, tolerated, or treated with kindness.

Furthermore, since an individual deviant may have a way of life totally inconsistent with the image being projected, this projection, rather than alleviate his inner conflicts and offer him self-support, may very well make him feel unworthy even of the standards within the deviant group.

Values, Yes; Ideology, No

This is not to suggest that the behavioral scientist can or should be free of values; only that his science itself should be value-free. For example, he may conclude that the oft-repeated concept of the deviant as being anxiety-ridden, disturbed, plagued by inability to make lasting relationships with others, having a life marked by ephemeral contacts that lack affection, in no sense implies that he joins the ranks of those urging condemnation and punishment.

It is true that his conclusions may be used against the deviant and for purposes contrary to the scientist's own values. Although one should be on guard against the possible misuse of one's work, the
uses to which scientific findings are put can never be relevant to a consideration of their validity.

To describe the deviant as disturbed, anxiety-ridden, and in other terms that are considered by some as less than flattering, is not to vilify, except in the eyes of those who condemn the mentally ill and emotionally distressed. It is not to condemn a man to say that he is blind or has one leg; and to declare that he is senile or epileptic should be terms that carry no values with them. Thus, with the concepts of mental and emotional health, mental illness may be used to condemn, or as Szasz (1963) has shown, even to imprison, but this does not mean that the scientist, in making his diagnosis, is himself condemning (Ellis, 1967).

Only ideology prevents both the friends and enemies of the sex deviant from seeing him in a light analogous to the claustrophobe or the agoraphobe: a victim of an emotional disorder that has impaired his functioning in society, and who should be given greater, not lesser, aid by that society, except where his condition leads him into acts that are a threat to the well-being of others.

References

Mattachine Newsletter. 1964, 9: 2, 3.