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Social Networks and Normative Tensions

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Introduction

The body is our fundamental, primary environment. It offers us pleasure and pain. Sexual activities usually induce pleasure, but they can also induce illness and pain. The basic terms of the individualistic approach to health-oriented sexual behaviour suggest that: a) human beings are our secondary environment, and b) they can offer different kinds of physical and non-physical pleasure and pain because of who they are and how we are related to them. Sexual relations provide the most enjoyable and rewarding pleasures.

This chapter aims to transcend this individualistic approach and stress the relational dimension of sexual life from a sociological perspective. First we move from individual sexual behaviours to interpersonal-oriented sexual behaviour. Like all personal relations, sexual relations are embedded in personal networks. The relational perspective on sexual behaviour makes it necessary to understand how personal networks are formed and maintained and which functions they can fulfil. Among these functions we emphasize the production and reinforcement of collective norms of sexual behaviour, conditioned by specific properties of networks.

Sexual Life as Relational Processes

The most characteristic feature of sexual life is the impulse, feeling, affectivity between persons. Sexual life is made of links between pairs (or larger groups) of persons. These links exist at several levels: physical contact, language, and other types of interaction – including pure fantasy. Nobody can contest the general approach to analysing individual sex lives that takes the orientation

of ego (the focal actor) toward alters (possible partners) in terms of mono/pluri-partnership, homo/heterosexual orientation, self-erotization (as a retreat from the encountering of alter), and so on, into account.

Much research into sexual behaviour is based (often implicitly) on the paradigm of an actor trying to obtain sexual satisfaction from an inert environment. Within this paradigm, sexual interactions are explained mainly by the psychological and sociological backgrounds of separate individuals and the constraints implied by these backgrounds. Actors are assumed to pick more or less rewarding sexual partners as objects of their conscious and unconscious strategies. Such separately considered individuals are designated in this chapter as *focal actors*. This paradigm, however, raises the following theoretical problem: If the focal actors have a diverse set of characteristics which influence their strategies and actions, why are the sexual partners' properties defined simply in very broad, rough terms (such as gender, age, social and marital status)?

A relational theory of sexuality re-introduces into its approach the symmetry between ego and alter. Moreover, such a theory recognizes that the behaviour of actors (or partners) is not only restricted by the social context, but simultaneously influences and shapes the social context. All of us are egos to ourselves; to others we are alters as well as components of the social context. An example of the last aspect is that everybody has a role of upholding social norms, a role which may be fulfilled in strict, loose, deviant or other manners. The social environment, therefore, is not inert but in dynamic interaction with individuals. Such a relational theory of sexuality is complex. We prefer it because it has a better logical correspondence to the phenomena of sexual behaviour, because we hope it is also empirically more powerful, but not because it is more simple. This relational paradigm is grounded on a few basic postulates given below.

Postulate 1: Dyadic nature of sexuality: Sexuality is defined from the specific point of view of interactions between actors, with a focus on pairwise (dyadic) interactions. The object of the theory is the variety of processes by which social interpersonal relations are sexualized. These various sexualization processes are a specific domain in the broad field of interpersonal relations. Thus, the theoretical frame is partly the general frame of interpersonal relations and partly specific to sexual behaviour.

Postulate 2: Anticipation of alter's reactions: Any relation is viewed as a sequence of interactions. Dyadic interactions are a specific kind of behaviour in which an individual (*ego*) acts on the basis of the expected and perceived answers of another individual (*alter*). Expectations are also based on contextual social knowledge, norms, personal experiences and subjective expectations. Interactions involve reciprocal attempts at adjusting both actors' expectations and behaviours.

Postulate 3: Bargaining and change: Implicit or explicit bargaining allows actors to define what is at the present moment relevant for their relationship. Any relation is a process, and may be stable over a long period or change

rapidly. Different kinds of sexualization are steps in a whole relational process. They appear at certain moments, they can be transformed into different relational behaviour, and they can end.

Postulate 4: Embeddedness of relations in networks: For each actor, any relation is an element in his or her system of interpersonal relationships, the so-called ego network. A relation links two actors and simultaneously takes part in the composition and structure of the two relational systems of the actors involved. In addition, other people can observe part of the relational behaviour of the two actors. This observation is incomplete and often distorted, but may influence the two actors as well as other persons.

Postulate 5: Flexibility of norms and values: Social norms and socially determined expectations are not rigid. Individuals and social groups can and do adjust their norms and expectations to their preferences, constraints, and the information available to them. This holds also for norms and expectations that have a bearing on the ways in which relationships are sexualized. For example, when in many western countries the pill became available in the 1960s as a convenient new method of contraception, this implied a change in restrictions on sexual relations and the consequences of unprotected sexual intercourse. This led to important changes in behaviour and, eventually, norms and expectations. The information that may initiate or facilitate changing norms and expectations can be of a public nature (e.g., generally available knowledge about the reliability of contraceptive methods) but can also be formed of personal experiences (e.g., having undergone an abortion).

Bargaining (Postulate 3) and embeddedness (Postulate 4) imply a theoretical ambiguity of each relation, which must be understood partly as a specific relational process with its own history and partly as an element in both egos' network structures. Clearly, at present, there does not exist a complete and explicit theory that integrates this ambiguity. Instead, the ambiguity is managed through partial, middle-range propositions (based on the psychosociology of relational processes and the sociology of network structure).

It is impossible to engage here in a thorough discussion of the implications and developments of these general postulates. We shall thus mention five specific aspects.

- 1) Sexualization covers the whole range of interactions by which a relation can provide affective, physical, and social rewards defined by actors as sexual: from platonic *rendezvous* to hard intercourse. Sexualization as a process, as a sequence of different kinds of interactions, is a central issue for the prevention of health-endangering behaviour. For example, often regardless of any new information about each other, sexual partners may abandon condom use simply because their relationship, by its own existence, generates new conditions for self-continuation. The chance of HIV transmission through sexual contacts creates a contradiction between the durability of the objective risk attached to an infected person, and the dynamics of any interpersonal love relation. Rapidly evolving reciprocal trust impedes the partners' ability to maintain safe sex conditions (Peto *et al.*, 1992). Similarly, actors who meet socially after a short

separation often suppose they know each other's sex life and therefore don't have to take precautions when they engage in a sexual relationship. Many people assume that their own social circle is clean; social proximity is thus often seen as a guarantee of safety. This illustrates again how the new situation created by the HIV epidemic has upset the balance between emotions, cognitions, and behaviour that regulates the sexualization of social relations.

2) A study of sexuality along these lines cannot be based merely on cross-sections of behaviour, but must take into account the development of interaction processes. As it is already difficult to propose a robust typology of instantaneous sexual behaviour, the idea of studying the relational process, thereby identifying successive changes in relationships, seems enormously complex and diverse. But we have to keep in mind that a prevention-oriented analysis is possible only on the basis of the study of relational processes, were it only because it is necessary to capture the change from the unsafe to safe condition and from safe to unsafe.

3) As a consequence, actors do not have *a* behaviour. They may have several behaviours in a given relation through time and, at the same time, in different relations as a result of specific bargaining with different partners.

4) It follows from Postulate 4 (embeddedness) that the affective, symbolic, and social demands made by actors in a sexual relationship depend also on actual and expected rewards in other possible sexual relations; and, more broadly, in other significant interpersonal ties. For example, the routinization of leisure life and socializing can lead to exceptional sexual relations' focusing on demands for change, uncertainty, and risk. Such compensation is one of many possible patterns.

5) Because individuals are embedded in social networks (Postulates 4) and social norms are not rigid (Postulate 5), there is a feedback between actors' behaviour in a social system, mediated by a change of norms. When individuals perceive changes in sexualization patterns in the behaviour of others in their personal network, this will change their expectations and norms, which will in turn change their behaviour; this changed behaviour will feed back to and influence the behaviour of the others in their personal network.

The Influence of Sociability on Sexuality

Effects of Social Context on Sociability

Since sexual relationships are a specific subset of interpersonal relations, we present some relevant general traits of sociability, i.e., of the general ways in which people relate to one another. Two important aspects of the social context are: the composition of the wider social surroundings; and the social

network, i.e., the network in which ego's social network is embedded. The mass media plays a major role in disseminating information from the wider social environment, such as information about the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases. The media provides a base value for the individual's estimates of the risks associated with various sexual activities. The social network may be regarded as the carrier of norms about behaviour and of more specific information about individuals infected with sexually transmitted diseases, etc.

Demographic Structure of a Community and Ties between Individuals

Who meets whom? Who maintains some sort of interpersonal relationship with whom? These are two of the more general questions about sociability. An important aspect is the social hierarchy of status: how do attributes, such as the domains of professional occupation or social prestige, have an influence on interpersonalities? A classical postulate is that everybody prefers to meet another ego, someone of the same status with characteristics similar to one's own; such a tendency is called *homophily*. This postulate is confirmed in many empirical studies. However, the existence of a relation presupposes that actors have a chance to meet. Peter Blau has shown that this chance depends upon the social composition of the local community: 'our macrosociological objective is to examine how patterns of social relations in a community are affected by the social environment because the other people in their environment determine the options people have in establishing social relations' (Blau and Schwartz, 1984). The demographic composition of the population imposes limits on interpersonal choice, regardless of the value-orientations and preferences that individuals may have. The merit of such an analysis is to define statistical objective boundaries to personal choice; it is of little value to try to explain why so few people have good friends or lovers from a local minority if a high proportion of love-relationships with people in this minority is simply statistically impossible. An interesting study in this respect is Morris (1993), where the spread of a disease is modelled while taking into account sizes of sub-populations and differential contact rates between members of sub-populations.

Normative Differentiation and Overlapping of Social Fields in a Community

The cultural differentiation of the local community can also influence sociability. Cultural differentiation supposes that specific religious orientations,

leisure activities, artistic trends, or modes of sexual behaviour have a sufficient number of supporters to reach a minimum level of collective institutionalization through clubs, meeting places, social events, specialized shops, etc. The process of differentiation implies the emergence of various 'moral milieux' (to put it in the terms of Park) and contributes to the diversity of the urban way of life in the community (Gans, 1962).

The effect of cultural differentiation of the city is that a greater difference between personal networks is possible. Fischer (1982) has shown that this effect is mediated by personal involvement: 'City life seems to aid people in finding other people who share their "most important" interest, but not in finding those who share lesser interests.' Those people involved in any kind of marginal sexual life have a higher chance of finding relational support and contextual legitimation of their behaviour in differentiated communities than in homogeneous communities. The question here is not the structure of the market of potential partners, as in Blau's perspective, but the emergence of social circles or contexts in which particular activities and relationships can be legitimized even if they are marginal or disapproved of by the silent majority. Thus cultural differentiation does not have a systematic effect on the composition of personal networks.

Another structural property of a community is the socio-spatial pattern of the activities that constitute specific social fields and offer opportunities to meet people. Locations of jobs, housing, shopping areas, leisure places can be separated (this is the typical pattern of modern *urban functional zoning*) or overlapping, which is a pattern found in the neighbourhoods of old European towns or in some ghettos where residential, economic, and symbolic activities are clustered in the same place. If the cultural differentiation of the community allows the legitimation of different kinds of behaviour and patterns of relationships, the way in which that differentiation occurs does not determine directly the kind of social life one can have, but offers differential opportunities to get involved with others in various normative contexts or in a unique normatively homogeneous milieu. Such a differentiated community will also offer opportunities to choose between either dense interconnected or loosely knit segmented sets of interpersonal relations and contacts. Some consequences of these various opportunities will be presented below.

Mass Communication and Network Effects

Information and knowledge are disseminated through educational activities and mass media. Today, most people in modern countries have been informed about risks of transmission of AIDS. In several countries the risks of HIV infection are now covered in high school biology classes. What is the effect of such information on behaviour? This effect seems to be variable and

often weak. Clearly, if networks of interpersonal relations affect how people react to the existence of the AIDS epidemic, it is not through their purely cognitive content.

Networks mediate information transmission in various ways. First, people make decisions about suggestions made in the public media because they are influenced by leaders or innovators. In the hypothesis of the 'two-step flow', the effect of a message is more powerful when the message is relayed by a 'local' opinion leader (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). More broadly speaking, people seek differential advice from different persons in their social surroundings depending on the kind of decisions they have to make. The speed with which an innovation is adopted depends on the number and the type of interpersonal links people have that are related to the field of innovation (Coleman, Katz and Menzel, 1966). Second, a more basic question is how the media messages are given meaning by the receivers through their interactions with other individuals. This question is treated in the *convergence communication model* of Rogers and Kincaid, who address the issue not of *diffusion* but of the *creation* and sharing of mutual understanding of information (1981).

Interpersonal discussions are certainly influential, but their influence on HIV/AIDS-related behaviour may increase or decrease the risk of becoming infected. From the prevention standpoint we have to explore the conditions under which networks help or prevent people having accurate perceptions of and reactions to risks.

Norms about Safe Sex

Norms and Sanctions

The information transmitted through social networks pertains not only to events such as sexual behaviour and the occurrence of disease, but also to attitudes and norms. The social network maybe be regarded as the structure that maintains and adapts norms through forms of social control.

What are norms? In a somewhat naive way, they can be understood as explicit, socially standardized prescriptions that actors mention when asked 'what to do and what not to do'. But social reality usually deviates from this ideal pattern. There are important gaps between explicit prescriptions, average behaviour and abstract models. The behaviour of actors is not so much influenced by the explicit norms professed in the subculture as by the perceived behaviour of significant others. In other words, alter's perceived behaviour determines ego's evaluation of the validity or seriousness of norm.

A second question is how this influence operates, how norms arise and how they are maintained. Coleman states, '... a norm concerning a specific

action exists when the socially defined right to control the action is held not by the actor but by others' (1990). The norm is followed if the actor carries out the action in the way that these controlling others desire. Ego's behaviour, as perceived by others in ego's personal network, may lead to a sanction that is positive when the behaviour conforms to the norm, negative when it is deviant. The degree to which norms are respected depends on the positive and negative sanctions that are applied or expected, and on internalization of the norms. It is important to realize that people seek approval more than they fear punishment. The influence of networks on actors is mediated to a large extent by the fact that approval by 'significant others' is important.

How Do Norms Come to Exist and Be Maintained?

As indicated above, networks can be a means of reinforcing externally produced norms that are transmitted by the media. In the network normative perspective developed here, however, we have to understand how and why norms are created by networks.

Coleman (1990) proposes a rational perspective that tries to explain the conditions under which norms are held by individuals and groups. In such a view, norms give rules for behaviour which are convenient or profitable for the controlling actor(s) or for the group because of the consequences that the behaviour will or is expected to have. A basic assumption in this model is that the consequences of an actor's action are supposed to be collective as well as individual. This basic definition of normative control fits well with contagious disease in general: the behaviour of an individual can affect others as well as the individual. A first step in the elaboration of this perspective is to indicate whose behaviour is interesting to whom. A second step is to understand how norms can be maintained. As Coleman explains, in order for norms to be realized in a social group, the following two collective action problems must be solved: 1) actors must be brought so far that they comply with the norm, even though it is individually irrational for them to do so – each actor would be better off if everybody else complied with the norm, but he alone did as he liked (*the first order of public good*); and 2) actors must be brought so far that they apply sanctions to uphold the norm, even though each actor would be better off if the burden of applying sanctions were borne by all the others without him (*the second order of public good*).

Whether individuals are willing to comply with the norm and sanction others in order to uphold the norm depends to a great extent on their expectations about the consequences of their actions. Whether a person will comply with a norm about safer sex will depend on his or her perception of risks; and a specific cost/benefit assessment of the expected relational sanctions. The pressure to comply with safer sex is stronger when this pressure

is exerted in the social field in which the sexual relations are embedded, for example, the social circle of friends.

In this analysis of norms concerning safe sex it is important to identify who is concerned by and thus interested in the sexual behaviour of another individual, and who might be in a position to apply sanctions. As Coleman (1990) stresses, it is not at all automatic for alter to sanction ego's behaviour. Usually, there are costs attached to carrying out a sanction. Alter may find these costs too high and hope that somebody else will perform the sanction. Whether alter applies a sanction when he or she perceives a violation of the norm will depend to a large extent on the costs and benefits to alter of ego's norm violation and of alter's sanction. Different roles as possible sanctioners of unsafe sexual behaviour are played by steady sexual partners, potential sexual partners, and friends or acquaintances who are not viewed by ego as potential partners, as we shall describe below.

Sanctioners as Actual and Potential Sexual Partners

Sexual partners have a special role as holders of norms. For his or her own health, for the quietness and trust of the sexual exchange with ego, alter is interested in ego's behaviour. Alter may find it in his or her interest that ego have no sexual relations at all with third persons. If ego does have sexual relations with third persons, overtly or covertly, then clearly it is in alter's interest that ego's behaviour is *safe*. This implies that alter's problem is to know and control the modalities of ego's relations with third persons. For his or her own interest he or she has first to obtain reliable information on ego's behaviour. In an open sexual market it is problematic to obtain such information. Second, if necessary, alter may try to change ego's behaviour by sanctions, such as showing disapproval, refusing unprotected sexual intercourse with ego, and, finally, refusing ego any kind of sex. These sanctions, however, may be costly in terms of foregoing sexual pleasure and jeopardizing alter's relationship with ego.

If reliable information on ego's relations with third persons cannot be obtained, and/or if alter does not want to incur the possible personal cost of sanctions against a potential love and/or sex partner, then alter's interest needs the intervention of another person. A possible way to obtain such intervention is for alter to try to promote some kind of safe sexual conduct in his or her social milieu. This implies that alter is interested in the general existence and maintenance of a network norm of safe sexual conduct. If such a norm is followed, then alter does not have to bear the risks of sanctioning his or her sexual partner.

There also exists a weaker form of this norm of safer sexual conduct. If ego is part of a social network of persons who are not infected and all these

persons' sexual relations are either within this healthy network or (for relations with outsiders) involve safer sexual behaviour, then ego's health is not endangered by sexual contacts. Such a system implies a collective gatekeeping job, i.e., seeing to it that the network remains endogamous or, less strictly, seeing to it that if members of the network have sex with non-members, they protect themselves.

Alters Who Are Close Friends

For alters who are close friends but not potential sex partners, their interest is to have those uninfected with HIV remain uninfected. How can they control these friends? Two forms of sanction are possible. A direct negative sanction is showing disapproval. Indulgence is a value often attached to friendship, and it is often thought that friends should not condemn each other, but friends may have the feeling that, in these cases, criticism means help and solidarity rather than rejection. Furthermore, the sensitive nature of an issue such as sexuality implies that when alter sanctions by exhibiting disapproval this can be perceived by ego as meddling in his or her private life. On the other hand, friends often are the rare persons allowed to be informed of such personal matters. So the values in question are ambiguous, and sanctioning can be costly to alter. A second, but weaker, kind of sanction is more diffuse. Alter could simply tell ego's other friends, acquaintances, or potential sex partners that he or she disagrees with ego's sex life. This is not a very nice but in some cases a quite rational reputational sanction. However, it creates a contradiction, for trust and fairness are basic components of friendship.

Weak Ties and Control

Potential sexual partners and close friends are interested in the behaviour and the health of ego, but sanctioning ego directly is costly for them. The existence of a network norm may permit the escape from the contradiction that the sanctioning endangers the very relationship for the security of which the sanctions would be applied. However, it is difficult to solve the 'second order public-good problem' necessary for maintaining the norm: for whom are the advantages of sanctioning large enough to overcome their costs?

The costs may be lower when the control operates through weak ties in the network. The above-mentioned gatekeeper's job in particular seems possible for social friendship relations who have weaker ties to the ego. Such individuals can try to prevent sexual relations of acquaintances outside the safe

endogamous network. Information on sexual relations themselves (who sleeps with whom) is transmitted with less difficulty in the network than information about the precautions taken, so it is less difficult to reduce the frequency of sexual relations with others outside the safe network than to control the safety of such relations once they are there. The weakness of the tie does not decrease the importance of the sanction, because the sanction may be mainly reputational (the controller might speak to others in the network). For the controller the cost is low because the tie is weak. For the controller the advantage may be important; others may be grateful to him, first, for having given information important for their own interest, second, for having imposed a sanction which could have been of very high cost to themselves.

Information and Norms on Sexual Behaviour in Social Networks

As we have seen, information is a particularly problematic aspect of maintaining norms about safe sexual conduct. Information is necessary if a sanction on unsafe sexual activities is to be applied. In addition, information about what is going on will be helpful for the sanctioner to get support from third persons and thus decrease the costs of sanctioning.

In the domain of emotional and sexual matters we have to address a preliminary set of basic question, to wit: Which aspects of an individual's sexual behaviour are known to certain members of his or her intimate or wider social environment? How truthful is this knowledge? And how fast, and with which distortions, is this knowledge further transmitted through the social network? Close relationships and common leisure activities allow members of the personal network of an individual to know the kind of sexual partners exhibited socially by this individual – but no more. Other sexual partners can be hidden from the day-to-day network of acquaintances. At the other end of the spectrum, sexual exploits and, sometimes, sexual practices, are in many subcultures a domain of boasting and window-dressing. From the point of view of prevention, the hidden sexual activities, which are outside the reach of direct social control, are particularly important; while on the other hand overt bragging about sexual activities may have a detrimental effect on perceptions, expectations and norms.

People can talk and disclose to specific others some dimensions of their private lives. A methodological test has shown that people agree to describe with whom, and in what kind of relations, they discuss sexual and emotional matters and how they themselves perceive the sexual behaviour of these confidants (Ferrand, 1991; Ferrand and Mounier, 1993). The answers to such questions in the French national survey on sexual behaviours (Spira, Bajos and ACSF Group, 1993) indicate that 53 per cent of men and 69 per cent of women have at least one person with whom they talk about love and sex

affairs. Confidants are mainly friends (same age 37 per cent, different 24 per cent), kin (24 per cent), colleagues (14 per cent). Compared with other data on sociability (Heran, 1988) this shows that not all alters nor all kinds of relation are equally able or allowed to transmit such information.

Norms about the transmission of information about sexual practices can be quite different in different social contexts or social circles. First, norms can compel actors to exchange more or less information which is more or less truthful regarding the kinds of social and sexual lives they have. The availability of information depends largely on how free people are in talking about sex. As a consequence, we can predict that norms on safe sex will be stronger in contexts and subcultures with freedom in talking about sex than in subcultures with a taboo on frank talk about sex, provided, of course, that the perceived risks of HIV infection are not negligible. This prediction means that promoting a free atmosphere to talk about sex and sexual experiences in general, without a necessary reference to HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases, must be an important ingredient of HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns. At the opposite end of the continuum, people involved in married or otherwise steady sexual relationships are often in a context where there exist norms prohibiting any promiscuity or extra-marital sex or any explicit discussion about sex. In such a context there is no established move for applying social pressure, even if accidents occur. Second, social control and possible pressure exerted by the network or portions thereof depend upon the roles that alters can have with respect to ego. The available information, the costs of sanctioning, as well as the effects of the sanctions on ego, depend on these roles. The role and the kind of social context in which a given aspect of ego's sexual conduct is known can facilitate or prohibit intervention by alter in his or her personal or sexual affairs. For example, co-workers can act as if they knew nothing, when friends feel legitimized to say something, and members of the family feel compelled to give explicit advice. So, advice as well as control by the network depends upon the kind of relation between the person and the potential advisor or controller.

Network Structure and Information Flow

As sanctioning presupposes information about ego's sexual behaviour, ego may find it in his or her best interest not to give certain information. He or she can try to manage the information that is transmitted through the network in such a way that approval is maximal and negative sanctions are minimized. However, this management presupposes certain structural properties of the network which depend upon general features of the community.

The more differentiated and the more segmented a community, the more actors can meet culturally and normatively diverse persons, but also the more

they can manage their relations in such a way that their networks are non-overlapping. In such a situation, actors can play different roles, and/or it is possible that their (sexual) relations come under the control and approval of only one part of their network. Diverse or even contradictory behaviours are allowed for the same actors if they separate their lives through various circles and special networks, each able to be informed of and to recognize only one aspect of their personal diversity.

Overlapping of sexual networks and the networks of personal friends and acquaintances is more likely to provide greater social pressure. If sexual and non-sexual relations are to some extent mixed in the same network, members can feel more concerned by others' love relationships. For example, networks of friends – where potential sexual partners are often met – are, in many cases, deeply concerned about the sexual lives of the member individuals. In such networks, a norm of free talk can exist more easily. Overlapping also mechanically facilitates the circulation of information. As we have seen previously, it allows diverse actors to share the burden of sanctioning.

Until now, most people who found sexual partners in their day-to-day network of friends behaved as if there were no risk because their day-to-day contacts implied knowledge and trust in non-sexual affairs. This kind of situation and behaviour may be considered dangerous. On the other hand, we can expect that it is also in such structural overlapping of acquaintance and sexual networks that norms of safe sex have a higher chance of being collectively upheld.

Communication and the Emergence of Norms

It is clear to everybody that risk perception is important for norms about safer sex. This has a paradoxical consequence (which is generally present in many questions about the existence of a norm that serves to protect a social group from risks from within the group), to wit, the norm can be maintained only if it is perceived as not being maintained perfectly. If none of ego's potential sex partners is supposed to have risky sexual contacts, then not only is it superfluous for ego to comply with the norm, but it is also superfluous for ego to exert him or her self to maintain the norm. (If ego cares not only for his or her own health but also for the health of his or her friends, then the condition extends also to his or her friends' potential sex partners.) In other words, precisely the networks with the more generalized sexual exchange (the more sexually liberal and, at the beginning of the epidemic, the more risky ones) are more interested in maintaining strict norms of safe sexual conduct and reciprocal control. This means also that it can be predicted that as soon as information about one case of an infected person in a network of potential sexual 'clean' partners begins to spread, stricter norms will emerge.

In social networks that include individuals who engage in sexual relations that are not strictly endogamous, general information about the AIDS epidemic, and more certainly specific information on particular cases of infection will lead to changes in norms about sexual behaviour. The eventual pressure in such a social network towards changes in norms must be great, because unsafe sexual behaviour by other persons, even by persons who may be completely unknown to ego, increases the perceived probability that ego will be infected by HIV. This hypothesis does not suggest that an individual's sexual behaviour is directly affected by the fact of knowing someone infected by HIV. It says only that collective normative pressure will increase with the number of people in the network of friends and sex partners who are informed about significant cases of HIV-infected persons. It is for fundamental ethical reasons that public campaigns urge people not to reject seropositive persons. Nevertheless, it is also possible to suggest that as seropositive people are approached in a more open and friendly way, communication about sexual behaviour and risk will also be more open and norms of safe sexual behaviour will be more strongly supported.

Conclusion

This chapter approaches social life and sexual life not as different domains which interact but as two dimensions of the same reality, i.e., networks of interpersonal relations. Networks are constrained by broader community contexts and they constrain individuals' relational strategies. Four major functions are fulfilled by networks. They

- 1 relay and personalize public campaign messages;
- 2 provide a market of potential sexual partners;
- 3 channel information about personal lives;
- 4 produce and support collective norms.

The approach presented here does not treat norms as a kind of exogenous independent variable that can be taken as given, and of which the power and influence on the individual level must be studied. Collective norms are not prescribed by medical or public health agencies, but maintained by groups and networks, on the basis of some collective interest (in the past or present) in their application.

In love relations, because love is love, sexual partners are obviously interested in their sexual partners, others, as alters, in a more detached and cool appreciation of what is going on, are also interested by the health of friends or former and future mates.

AIDS prevention is recognized as a public issue because this disease

endangers the population. On the other hand, one's sex life is seen as a private issue. The way in which the question is often addressed creates a conflict between the duty of the state and the freedom of the individual. The basic idea that emerges from the model presented here is that an intermediate level – networks – exists. Because of networks of friends and acquaintances, the behaviour of lovers can be something which interests people around them. A first conclusion is that we have to mind not only how lovers engage in their private relations, but also how people around them are, in fact, concerned by that relationship and can pressure them to adopt safe behaviour.

From this perspective the authors tried to point out some properties of networks which facilitate or impede the emergence of collective norms of safe sexual conduct. The model suggests that the overlapping of friendship and sexual networks is important, but this overlap often appears spontaneously in social life. Another theoretical result can be summarized in a brief sentence: to prevent the spread of HIV, information about personal life must spread through interpersonal networks. A second conclusion, therefore, is that it is important to recommend frank talks as well as French letters.

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