

Preface

Research tells us that sex is often “unsafe.” A survey of sexual behavior reported that only 40% of 16 to 45 year olds in the U.K. consistently use a condom with a casual sex partner. This compares with 69% in France, 56% in the U.S., 48% in Italy, 36% in Spain, 32% in Germany, 28% in Russia, 25% in Canada, and 20% in Poland (Durex, 1996). Large proportions of individuals in the same age range say that they have been unfaithful in their relationships: 50% of Americans surveyed, 42% of British, 40% of Germans and Mexicans, 36% of French, and 22% of Spaniards (Durex, 1998). These figures portend the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, the possibility of pregnancy in the absence of contraception, and the physical and mental health consequences that may accompany chronic infection and/or unwanted or unplanned pregnancy. Monogamy has been touted as the proactive remedy for these unwanted consequences. Yet, it is assumed, first, that we all mean the same thing when we speak of monogamy and, second, that the structure of the relationship is determinative of both its quality and safety. However, sex may be unsafe for other reasons as well. “Partnering” may be accomplished through force, coercion, or outright violence. In such circumstances, the term “partnering” is a misnomer; there is no negotiation or mutuality in such situations.

Similarly, it has been asserted that two-parent households are more likely to have a positive effect on children than are other partnering arrangements. Such statements have ignored the context and quality of the partnering relationships to which the children may be exposed. It has been alleged that exposure to pornography will lead

to increased aggressiveness. But, does the effect of viewing pornography vary between the individual who watches pornography online in the privacy of his or her home and the individual who views it together with a group of beer-drinking buddies?

This book explores various dimensions of partnering, in an attempt both to re-contextualize sexual behavior within human exchanges and the social and political environments in which they exist, and to examine the health effects of various forms of partnering. Many of the ideas in this book are not new, but it is hoped that their re-visitation will prompt renewed efforts to examine behaviors in their context, rather than dissociated from the persons who perform them and the environments in which they occur.

Chapter 1 focuses on various understandings of monogamy or single pair-bonding between consenting adults. It becomes clear through this examination that, in discussing monogamy and the health implications of such an arrangement, that individuals may have very different conceptualizations of the topic under discussion. Chapter 2 examines family structures that consist of multiple adults as partners. Chapter 3 is concerned with “partnerings” that involve children: incest, pedophilia, and child marriage. In many such instances, if not the vast majority, the use of the word “partnering” is a misnomer because of the child’s lack of ability to consent and/or the use of force or coercion to effectuate the sexual interaction. Chapter 4 addresses commercial partnering: sex work, trafficking, and pornography. Clearly, there is overlap between these concepts, just as there also exists interplay between child marriage and child trafficking, between pedophilia and child trafficking.

Chapter 5 explores object relations, that is, fetish behavior that is premised on an attraction to objects. Although chapter 5 is clearly delineated as having a focus on object relations, it must be kept in mind that, in many circumstances, such as commercial sex work and trafficking in humans for the purpose of sexual exploitation,

the individuals involved in the encounter may view the other or be viewed as mere objects, rather than partners, in an exchange.

Each chapter concludes with a review of the health implications that flow from the partnerings examined. The final chapter discusses the implications of existing findings for research and practice.



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