

Sex and affection, what are Brazilians looking for?

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Abstract

Man is the only animal that in its evolution is distanced from nature, but not the only one with a prevalence of monogamy relationship. Is the sex by sex a disorder or a hedonistic option?

From a phenomenological existentialist perspective, on the advance of capitalism Man not only departed from the nature as also loose its own identity. Came to represent a 'desired Man' materializing its qualities in consumer goods mass marketing. 'Having' besides 'being' is the way found by the 'desired Man' to be concrete while is not real. This increases its distance from feelings and emotions creating a lack on happiness. To address that, the 'desired Man' find on sex the easiest way to feel again and get closer to nature. It is the moment in which sensations really touches.

This article discusses the issue of affection in the life of contemporary Man, based on observations of couples and singles visitors of 'swinging' houses in Sao Paulo, Brazil 'Swinging' houses means private places open to public were people go to have sex with multiple partners. We notice this lifestyle is heteronormative with a specific behavior code that drew our attention: a simple sign of affection among practitioners other then the spouse is considered treason or infidelity. They claim are liberal and are in search of pleasure, so why being afraid of feeling affection? Does it mean the feeling of affect fills something that is missing?

From that question we deepened our observation to identify evidence of shortcomings that would justify the search for pleasure of sex, totally separated from social reality. We found shy people, some with sexual dysfunction, others with feelings of rejection or grief, all of them trying to be someone different from what they represent in 'real life'. Are they really looking just for pleasure?

Key Words: Emotion, affect, sex, monogamy, swinging, relationship.

1. Introduction

Sex gives much food for thought. What a force as elemental, so glued to the body, give so much to think,

gives even more to think about. Sexuality is not only puzzling, as it also breaks hearts.¹

The Brazilian social, political and economical scenario has drastically changed over the past 20 years. There is no way to think the Brazilian sexuality without considering those changes. The economy moved from an 80% to 1% monthly inflation rate. It changed from IMF debtor to creditor. The military dictatorship government is now a democracy. The lack on technology in the past to an open market.

Eager to technology envisioned by the U.S. development, the Brazilian ushered in the era of consumption, or as Lipovetsky says, in the era of 'hyper consumption'². Nowadays people buy health, beauty, knowledge and even acceptance. More than ever the object means the person.

Sexuality followed this movement of expansion and liberation. Cinema bordering on porn erotic used to entertain the masses during the military dictatorship as a cartoon of Brazilians' sexual behaviour. Typically exposed when refers to another, veiled when back to himself, but always present. Sexuality has always been expressed in the active form of dress, walk, dance, speech and thus participating in the day-to-day language.

In this context the exchange of couples also gained ground from the 80's. Start with small groups of upper middle class, with very little exposure in magazines about sex. Gradually these groups grow and gain space in clubs and saunas, which start to dedicate a few days exclusive to swinging. In the 90's are opened the first fully dedicated clubs to the swing and the Internet becomes the best channel for dissemination of practice. The swinging forward toward the middle class and young people, usually above 25 years.³

Today swinging is more than couple exchange; it is a liberal party where the practice of sex with multiple partners is acceptable. Whereas in the past couples used to swinging looking for new incentives to revive years of marriage, today's young partners justify it for pleasure and liberty.

In the hyper-modernity era the pleasure, freedom, happiness and love feelings become mandatory. People decline any indication of pain or sorrow. Paradoxically, the objectification of these wishes into consumer goods moves Brazilians more and more away of its nature. The culture of 'have to be' places the individual into an endless cycle of work and consumption, deteriorating the subjective relationship of individual in society and especially the family dynamics. Father, mother and children are not together as a representation of a family unit. Each one is independent in his will, rights and time. To become an individual as formation of own identity has been intertwined with individualization of the person.

Like a symptom, the swinging growth phenomenon comes after years of military and religious repression and reveals a society in search of change. It is precisely the role of the psychologist rather than observe these symptoms, but understand this collective movement so to handle the unique needs of each one, free of prejudices and judgments.

2. Attitude: the feeling, the thought and will

What motivates a person to practice swing?

It would be reckless on our part a direct response to this question, given the uniqueness of each one, but here we will examine some of possible aspects.

In any act, voluntary or involuntary, precedes an intention of something. Cavazza has a good approach to this when considering the attitude and motivational effect of intention, based on beliefs and values and having a role to play. "The attitudes underlying the relationship between the individual and the environment, allow self-expression and the maintenance of self-esteem." ⁴

Being so, if the couple decided to go to a swinging club it means they have a positive attitude to the club and to what they will find there. The chosen club is within their ethical, aesthetic, moral and economic values.

We approach here the tripartite model of attitudes as postulated by Rosenberg and Hovland and quoted by Cavazza. This model maintains that the psychological construct of attitude is based on three components of different natures: a cognitive, an affective / emotional and behavioural component.⁵ Through them a person decide yes or no to an action, like to choose an outfit, hear a music, attend a local, be with someone or make use of any object that somehow represents its own identity and adds a positive or negative component on its happiness.

And what is the origin of attitude? Also in Cavazza, 'The attitudes are formed in direct relation with the object, but also through observation and communication ...' and the same author shows us through citations of Wundt and Zajonc that the attitude is directly related to the feeling, prior to reason.⁶ Thus, before rationally evaluating an object or action we make an emotional assessment, being it based on our impression of the object or based on past experiences with similar objects or situations.

This emotion or feeling directs our reason for an analysis of the object, generating interest, acceptance or rejection, and from this meaning to define what action to be taken on this object. Therefore we believe that the attitude comes from emotional and the action of a person is the rationalization of an attitude toward an object.

And so we got on an interesting point, a couple goes to a swinging club motivated by an emotion. On the other hand there is a widespread

informal rule among them where showing affection to other than the partner during intercourse is considered treason. We can not say that both emotions (affection and attitude) are of the same nature, but the question here is how the person itself can tell the difference, supposing there is one?

Let's explore some situations that lead couples to seek a swinging club. These situations have been raised in conversations from Internet chat rooms and in pubs inside the clubs.

When it comes to really married couples, the vast majority are seeking to expand their sexual relationship by considering their innermost life dull. They still feel attraction to each other but get more pleasure inviting other people to their intimate relationships.

As for singles, not being with a steady partner, we find some looking for love free of possession and sex just for pleasure. Others have reported fear of losing their partner (again) so opting for uncompromising pleasure. On our swinging club visits we also observed cases of single men presenting some sexual dysfunction as erectile dysfunction or premature ejaculation.

3. Ethics, sexuality, love and monogamy

I call sexuality the symbolic universe built on a biological reality: sex. This is a complicated mix of physiological structures, behaviours, experiences, feelings, interpretations, social forms, power games. To use a linguistic metaphor: sex is significant, and sexuality the set of meanings - emotional, practical or ideological - that we attach to it.¹⁷

Marina made an interesting definition of sexuality in the quote above. It is common in our Brazilian popular culture to make confusion between sex, love and sexuality. This is understandable given the intricate relationship between these three aspects.

One of our questions in this article refers to the possibility of human have sex just for pleasure without any affection, as some proclaim. Marina and Lins differ in this respect. Considering the above quotation from Marina, sex without sexuality would be meaningless, contrary to human nature. As the affect is a component of sexuality, we could not separate it from sex. Lins understands it is possible to separate love from sex to eliminate the sense of ownership relations. The sex would be much more in the field of sensations than emotions.⁸ This idea is very close to the religious morality where sex is carnal and love is spiritual.

Depending on what vision we take the swinging could be characterized as polygamous or promiscuous relationship. Both may represent a breach of ethics when we consider popular monogamy prevalent in human society.

According to Eibl-Eibesfeldt anthropologist quoted by Marina, it is unknown as of yet no group of people without stable marital relationship. Despite the tendency of men to polygamy and women to monogamy, this duality keeps the man in the unique relationship. In the Western world this duality of interests is manifested in the model of successive monogamy (divorce and remarriage).⁹

Marina founded the tendency of women to monogamy originated in the necessity of support by the man, especially in situations that have no other source of assistance. The affective component in the sexual relationship would then be a way to women makes a sentimental press to man, in the same way they do with the erotic.¹⁰ And how is this related to the emancipation of women emancipation?

In a recent survey of college students Amelio have identified that dating decreases the amount of attractions that a person feels for others, and he developed four hypotheses to explain the fall in love interest: incompatibility to love two people at the same time, less opportunity to flirt with other people, others avoid flirt who is already dating and ethical reasons to avoid being attracted to other people. But on the other hand he finds that dating does not eliminate the interest of love to others. The beauties, charms and sex appeal also sensitize who are dating.¹¹ is

If the dating where probably the passions are most heated there is sexual interest to others partners, Lins shows us that interest in marriage persists. Couples married for a while tend to substitute sex for love and the sexuality between the two tends to decrease, which leads the couple to seek other relationships.¹² In another research, Abdo notes that in Brazil, on a period of 12 months, more than 40% of married men had at least 1 extramarital affair. And also that more than 40% of Brazilian men and women had more than 1 sexual partner in the last 12 months.¹³ For these aspects we realize that the monogamous ethic does not reign absolute in Brazilian society.

4. Fields research – personal impressions

The fieldwork consisted on observation only with some casual conversation when appropriate. As it is common to find voyeurs in these clubs it was possible to be part of the public without interfering on its dynamics.

The following cases are those I consider relevant to the discussion. They are not necessarily presented on the chronological order that have occurred.

Case 1 - The power of mobilization: A couple nearing their 40s that have just arrived is routed to a table near the dance floor. They dressed quietly dressed and seem relaxed. While drinking they talk and hug each

other. Nothing different from what happens in any bar in Sao Paulo. Let's refer to them by a fictitious name, Anna and Bob. Both seem to be in love.

At some moment they go to one of the dark rooms of the club and begin to kiss and touch in a more intimate way. The room that was empty at the beginning gradually gets other couples and singles. They all crowd around Anna and Bob. Some begin to caress Ana while she kisses Bob. Other couples in the same room touch kiss and caress each other.

The distance between people is very small but do they not push and do respect those who do not want physical contact. After some time in this situation, I realize that Anna chooses one of the men who were playing with her. She whispers something in his ear and then to Bob who nodded, leaving the three to a private room. Soon after the departure of Anne and Bob the room we were empty. Even the other couples who were not playing to Anne and Bob disperse.

We can think of several issues from this case: How did Anna choose a man to play? It is not possible to say that was a feeling of affection, but anyway there was a choice. That person meant something to Anna.

Why Anna and Bob have attracted so many people and other couples did not? On late observations to other couples, we noticed that those like Anna and Bob playing passionate kissing and fully delivered to the excitement, attract more attention from others. It was clear the affection between Anna and Bob and it was so contagious. Fact not really occurred to couple in apparently 'mechanical' sexual intercourse, I mean without any demonstration of affection.

Case 2 - The projection room: What we have observed in this case was the opposite of the first one. This is a cinema room. On the screen was being projected a pornographic movie, and people on the room were having oral and genital sex without any demonstration of affection.

I observed a couple in which the man was masturbating himself while the woman was having sex with other partners. He just watched, without touching her. She received the men (one at once) with no other contact then the penetration. They seemed having sex without any affection.

I tried to capture what they were feeling. On the field of my imagination the woman seemed to say: 'Look how good I am, everybody wants me!' and the pleasure of the man was to not have the desired object.

It is worth mentioning here as the environment was conducive to this type of sexual harassment. The pornographic film did not contain the minimum of such sensuality and people on the room was behaving like the film.

Case 3 – Isolation: This case occurs in a room called the room of veils. A room with fabric hanging from the ceiling to pass a climate sensual environment. There was a young couple having sex passionately. People

came and touched the woman. She signed that did not want to be touched. All people respected her and no one else came close. The couple followed making love as if in a glass bubble, totally isolated. People around looked for others to get involved. The couple was left alone.

Case 4 – To be accepted: This case happened at the same place and time as case 1, with Anna and Bob. While observing Anna and Bob a boy quickly touched Ana's arm, as if he had touched something that could burn your hand. He made this move very fast, and then leaves. Another boy, also in this scene, seeking to win the mass of people and through small spaces reached Anna with his hand in a very uncomfortable position. He caresses Ana for a short time and leaves.

I thought at this point how treatment may have been that moment. Suppose these guys have trouble approaching the opposite sex. In this short time they were allowed to act and were accepted. Nobody repelled them.

Case 5 – Betrayal: We observed some cases of swinging in booth lattice. In this type of cabin it is possible to listen out and watch what goes on inside. In all cases the observed changes occurred in pairs. An important observation in these cases was the discussion that occurred after the sexual act, after one pair left the room. In such cases one partner demands that the other betrayed because of a kiss on the mouth or concerns about demonstration of affection to another. It was evident the lack of trust between the couple.

It drew our attention to the jealous by kissing on the mouth while the penetration was seen as normal. Considering the stages of personality development defined by Freud, a possible explanation may lie in the fact that the child on the oral phase has no abilities to verbalize its feelings which will remain nameless when adult. The same does not happen to genital phase. So a kiss can bring us feelings that we do not have control. And people fear what the can not control.

4. Conclusion

It is around two in the morning; I sit in the armchairs in the bar and watch the people around me, dancing, chatting, cheerful and apparently satisfied. I find myself with my moral values, my religious culture and ask why not?

It was the perfect place in which I was to strip me of all prejudice and seek an answer to this question. Give myself to the environment and absorbed bring to mind the last 4 hours there lived. I let all feelings recently awakened to surface and from them I transform the people watched into someone that I just tried to learn by observation. I know what I see is not real, is part of my buildings, but it does not matter. It is still part of human.

One of the feelings is the pleasure. Anyone who has practiced sports knows the feeling of bliss and enjoyment when it comes to its end muscular effort. Whoever wins will leave satisfied, the loser is left to frustration and lowered self-esteem. Those people seemed to feel the same. All of a sudden go to a gym or swinging club seemed the same quest for physical pleasure. If it is then you can sex just for pleasure. I confess my frustration at a conclusion so out of my moral beliefs. I looked at my other self deposited along with a hint of pity and follow with my observation.

All who are having fun are together. There is a girl in a chair next to my own, alone, she seems tired. I see other people also alone, and on this view there is no fun but search. It occurs to me that these people are looking for something real, real penis and vaginas, that to work need emotion and physical attraction. They need to feel that still exists and can be noted and desired. That sex was there in search of a physical pleasure but rather enhanced by the pleasure of existence as being attractive, capable of arousing emotions and affections.

Notes

- ¹ J.A. Marina, *O quebra-cabeça da sexualidade; tradução Diana Araújo Pereira*. Guarda-Chuva, Rio de Janeiro, 2008, p.3.
- ² Lipovetsky, G., *A felicidade paradoxal: ensaio sobre a sociedade do hiperconsumo*. Edições 70, Lda, Portugal, 2007.
- ³ B. Montana, O swing/troca de casais no Brasil, Arteprofana, posted on August 17, 2009, viewed on September 20, 2009 url: <http://www.arteprofana.com/arteprofana/o-swing-troca-de-casais-no-brasil/>
- ⁴ N. Cavazza, *Psicologia das atitudes e das opiniões; tradução Alda da Anunciação Machado*. Edições Loyola São Paulo, São Paulo, 2008, p.31.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, p.26.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p.31.
- ⁷ J.A. Marina, *O quebra-cabeça da sexualidade; tradução Diana Araújo Pereira*. Guarda-Chuva, Rio de Janeiro, 2008, p.23.
- ⁸ Lins, R. N., *A Cama na Varanda: arejando nossas idéias a respeito de amor e sexo: novas tendências. - Ed. Revisada e ampliada. - 3ª Ed.* BestSeller, Rio de Janeiro, 2008.
- ⁹ J.A. Marina, *O quebra-cabeça da sexualidade; tradução Diana Araújo Pereira*. Guarda-Chuva, Rio de Janeiro, 2008, p.24.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.26.
- ¹¹ Amelio, A., *O mapa do amor: tudo que você queria saber sobre o amor e ninguém sabia responder*. Editora Gente, São Paulo, 2001
- ¹² Lins, R. N., *A Cama na Varanda: arejando nossas idéias a respeito de amor e sexo: novas tendências. - Ed. Revisada e ampliada. - 3ª Ed.* BestSeller, Rio de Janeiro, 2008.
- ¹³ Abdo, C., *O descobrimento sexual do Brasil: para curiosos e estudiosos*. Summus, São Paulo, 2004

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