TOWARD THE HEALTHY CHILD

About Genital Self-satisfaction in Children (1927)*

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Editorial note:

True natural-scientific progress is very slow. It usually takes several decades for a basic discovery to penetrate the public mind. This also applies to the change in attitude toward the genitality of the infant which took a rather sharp turn for the better in the USA beginning around 1945 (Die Funktion des Orgasmus appeared in English excerpts in 1930, in the International Journal of Psychoanalysis, and The Function of the Orgasm in 1942, Orgone Institute Press). Only very few people today know that this basic change from suppression and condemnation to public discussion of the issue of infantile genitality in positive, life-affirmative terms had its roots far back in the '20s of this century. In 1928 the Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag issued a number of the Zeitschrift für psychoanalytische Pädagogik which was devoted exclusively to a discussion of infantile sexuality.

In this number of the Zeitschrift, Wilhelm Reich published the paper which is being reprinted here. This paper introduced, in accordance with a discussion in the Vienna Psychoanalytic Association on Nov. 2, 1927, the principle of affirmation (and not merely of toleration) of infantile genital sexuality. It was the first paper ever published in psychiatric, including psychoanalytical, literature which, resting on medical experience, clearly said: We should not be so bashful and apologetic about infantile masturbation; we should not regret its existence and we should not try to avoid it and talk it away; we must recognize the fact and affirm it that the small child quite naturally passes through a phase in which genital pleasure and genital games govern the development of the healthy child. It is not, as was assumed hitherto, the presence of masturbation, but quite the contrary, its absence which constitutes an abnormality. This was a novelty at that time; it might not appear as a novelty today. It should, however, be kept in mind that for millennia up to 1927 infantile genitality was considered to be

*(After a discussion at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Association on November 2, 1927)
First published in the Zeitschrift für psychoanalytische Pädagogik, 1928.
something pathological, immoral, sinful, bad, dangerous to health, as something that by all means must be smothered or at least "gently diverted." Millions of children in each new generation had to succumb to the torture of bound hands, severe bodily punishment, moral degradation, humiliation, "diversion," and thwarting of the character by the life-negative attitude on the part of ignorant parents, educators, and wrong public opinion in general.

Reich's paper differed from all the rest in that it did not try to excuse the existence of infantile genitality; it did not search for some way out of the trouble of its mere natural givenness, but confirmed it. It took nearly another 20 years for this affirmative view to get into the daily newspapers, appearing first in the USA.

Let us hope that soon enough the last remnants of a hideous error in human thinking which has damaged countless millions of human lives and still damages millions of newborn infants here and abroad will finally vanish from the surface of this planet.

The next murderous human error soon to follow it into oblivion will be the demand of "chastity" for human beings in the prime of their lives, the idea that human beings in the maturing prime of life are "sexually immature."

Among our adult patients three groups can easily be distinguished with regard to self-satisfaction in childhood:

1) Psychoneurotics who fully reached the phallic stage of libido development, that is, who masturbated genitally and who as a result of specific vicissitudes of their Oedipus complex either repressed genital Eroticism and later became sick hystERICALLY, or who withdrew their libido from its genital position, regressed to earlier levels and consequently developed either a compulsion neurosis or a similar illness.

2) Psychoneurotics who reached the genital level of libido development only incompletely or not at all, be it because of a powerful pregenital, particularly anal disposition, or be it because of a severe castration trauma which blocked the development of the genital stage. In these cases a process occurred which I have termed "pregenital erotization of the genital" and which is specific for a certain illness, namely, chronic hypochondriacal neurosis. In these patients we see the genital cathered with pregenital wishes and fantasies; the genital acquires the significance of the breast, the anus, or another erogenous zone, and loses its own importance. The result is usually the severest form of impotence, premature ejaculation with flaccid penis, in which, as Abraham was the first to note, the glans penis

has not developed as the primary zone. Here, genital self-satisfaction in childhood was completely absent.

3) Finally, in the few healthy individuals whom we have had the opportunity to analyze we see that self-satisfaction was practised undisturbed for a long time in childhood and was continued again in puberty in spite of any accompanying guilt feelings.

If we also take into consideration the fact that genital self-satisfaction in childhood has proven to be a favorable prognostic sign, its absence, as in cases of premature ejaculation, an unfavorable one, then we are forced to the conclusion that self-satisfaction not only is not a sign of perversion, but, on the contrary, is a prerequisite for later genital primacy and for an ordered sexual life, and, with it, for psychic health generally. Not only the prognostic importance of self-satisfaction in childhood, but also the great role which genital self-satisfaction plays in the process of cure, teaches us that the capacity to be able (not to be compelled) to masturbate undisturbed without guilt feelings or even in the presence of some accompanying guilt feelings belongs to psychic health.

Here we are not discussing the question of the harmfulness of self-satisfaction in children, but, on the contrary, the problem of the inhibiting effects of education. For such a discussion it is, first of all, necessary to be quite clear about the nature of the child's self-satisfaction. When we speak of genital self-satisfaction, we mean in the boy not just the manipulation of the genital, but the equally essential accompanying genital fantasy, that is, the wish to penetrate with the genital into something (a hole, etc.); a sadistic coloration of this wish and the total genital activity belongs here.

As an antithesis to the above, i.e., as deviation from this norm, are to be subsumed all fantasies which cannot be regarded as models of the later sexual embrace. In the girl, the matter is more complicated; normally she masturbates not with the female, but with the male genital organ, i.e., with the clitoris; in favorable cases this active-phallic manipulation is connected

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Footnote, 1949: The statement that the boy's clitoral masturbation is normal is also due to the then prevalent psychoanalytic concept that the little girl had no vaginal genitality. The lack of vaginal genitality was later shown by sex-economy to be an artifact of our culture which suppressed genitality completely and instills castration anxiety not only in the boy but also in the girl. This creates a true secondary drive in the form of penis envy and predominance of clitoral genitality. Psychoanalytic theory mistook these artificial secondary drives for primary, natural functions.

Footnote, 1949: The above statement about the sadistic coloration of the boy's genitality is, of course, wrong. It was made 23 years ago under the influence of the erroneous psychoanalytic concept that all male genitality had a sadistic quality.
with a feminine fantasy, e.g., that of surrendering to the father. However concealed such an idea may be in little girls, its existence can be demonstrated in a deep-reaching analysis as a typical transitory stage. Not until puberty, if the subsequent development is orderly, is this fantasy shifted to the vaginal zone.

The kind of orgasm that takes place is important in the consideration of self-satisfaction in children. In the young baby, self-satisfaction presumably is without fantasy, occurring only as a local stimulation, while in puberty fantasy and friction to ejaculation in the boy and a similar process in the girl take place. In the child's self-satisfaction, the genital fantasy already is at work, to be sure, but, on the other hand, the orgasm occurs in a smoothly rising and declining curve which shows no sharp peak (acme). The sensation in the child's orgasm can best be likened to the sensation in scratching a strongly itching region.

It is particularly significant under what conditions the child experiences its first masturbatory genital sensation. The fate of the later sexual constitution often depends upon this first experience. Thus a genital excitation which the child feels for the first time when being spanked can lay the basis for masochism; an excitation in urination can, in the presence of a strict bladder training, cause a predominance of urethral pleasure and enuresis. Very often the genital stimulation emerges with an anxiety excitation, for instance, from listening to a sadistic sexual act between the parents or from some other anxious situation. This "pleasure-anxiety" leads to a fixation of an anxious expectation whenever a genital sensation arises. This is clearly expressed in puberty when the orgasm occurs; it is then experienced anxiously as a sensation which overpowers one and robs one of clear consciousness. Many cases of protracted or avoided end pleasure can be traced to the infantile fear of sexual excitation. In every case all these experiences damage the normal genital function in more or less outspoken fashion and in so doing form a disposition to neurosis.

Pleasure anxiety, spite against the frustrating training, and, last but not least, hatred against the frustrating object are usually the chief causes of a fixation in infantile self-satisfaction. One must assume that just as in puberty and at birth somatic evolutions in the genital apparatus determine the libido functions, so also at the Oedipus age a somatic development at the genital apparatus establishes the genital organization and self-satisfaction. This fixation of an anxious expectation whenever a genital sensation arises. This assumption is psychoanalytically necessary; its confirmation is a question of physiology. With the diminishing of this assumed somatic development and the Oedipus phase, self-satisfaction also had to diminish or to disappear completely; if this does not occur, then probably only a severely frustrating education is responsible for the fixation. But still it is better that an enlightened education fixes self-satisfaction at an infantile level than that it completely represses it or does not let it come about at all. One must criticize attempts of "progressive" educators "to divert the child gently" from self-satisfaction, for undoubtedly the child has a sure feeling for the unconscious of the adult who wishes to prevent him from enjoying genital pleasure.

If one reviews the matter in its entirety, then the dangers which result from self-satisfaction are due only to the "Verbots." These "Verbots" cause a feeling of guilt and a hypochondriacal anxiety which disturbs the course of excitation in self-satisfaction and produces neurasthenia. As I have elsewhere tried to show with numerous examples, the Freudian assumption that excessive self-satisfaction produces neurasthenia remains correct with the limitation that the disturbance is due to guilt feelings which directly interfere with the course of excitation; cases who masturbate without such a direct disturbance of the excitation do not fall ill with neurasthenia, but probably with a psychoneurosis if self-satisfaction is not replaced at the right time by sexual satisfaction in the sexual embrace.

We cannot here go into the possible dangers of an unlimited toleration of infantile as well as adolescent self-satisfaction because of our lack of experience with this aspect of the question. However, one must contend against those who like to look darkly on the subject or who are concerned with cultural sublimations, that it is rarely satisfied, but always unsatisfied sexual activity which has been distorted by guilt feelings which interfere with sublimation. Moreover, further experiences in this realm would be needed to show again how much even the analyzed adult still remains under the pressure of sexual repression; it is this repression which in questions of self-satisfaction as in questions of sexual life generally, blocks the emergence of a simple concept corresponding to the natural functions.

Footnote 1949: This assumption has been proven true through the discovery of the organismic orgone energy which governs the sexual apparatus. It clearly shows 3 peaks in functioning during the first 20 years of life. The first is a surging of sexuality shortly after birth, the second around the fifth year of life, and the third through several years of puberty. Thus the physiological assumption of early psychoanalysis about the development of infantile sexuality has been confirmed as well as put on a sound bio-energetic foundation.
Projeto Arte Org
Redescobrindo e reinterprelando W. Reich

Caro Leitor

Infelizmente, no que se refere a orgonomia, seguir os passos de Wilhelm Reich e de sua equipe de investigadores é uma questão bastante difícil, polêmica e contraditória, cheia de diferentes interpretações que mais confundem do que ajudam. Por isto, nós decidimos trabalhar com o material bibliográfico presente nos microfilmes (Wilhelm Reich Collected Works Microfilms) em forma de PDF, disponibilizados por Eva Reich que já se encontra circulado pela internet, e que abarca o desenvolvimento da orgonomia de 1941 a 1957.

Dividimos este “material” de acordo com as revistas publicadas pelo instituto de orgonomia do qual o Reich era o diretor.
01- International Journal of Sex Economy and Orgone Research (1942-1945).
02- Orgone Energy Bulletin (1949-1953)
03- CORE Cosmic Orgone Engineering (1954-1956)

E logo dividimos estas revistas de acordo com seus artigos, apresentando-os de forma separada (em PDF), o que facilita a organizá-los por assunto ou temas. Assim, cada qual pode seguir o rumo de suas leituras de acordo com os temas de seu interesse. Todo o material estará disponível em inglês na nuvem e poderá ser acessado a partir de nossas páginas Web.

Sendo que nosso intuito aqui é simplesmente divulgar a orgonomia, e as questões que a ela se refere, de acordo com o próprio Reich e seus colaboradores diretos relativos e restritos ao tempo e momento do próprio Reich. Quanto ao caminho e as postulações de cada um destes colaboradores depois da morte de Reich, já é uma questão que extrapola nossas possibilidades e nossos interesses. Sendo que aqui somente podemos ser responsáveis por nós mesmos e com muitas restrições.

Alguns destes artigos, de acordo com nossas possibilidades e interesse, já estamos traduzindo. Não somos tradutores especializados e, portanto, pedimos a sua compreensão para possíveis erros que venham a encontrar.

Em nome da comunidade Arte Org.
Textos da área do desenvolvimento infantil

Texts from the area of child development

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International Journal of Sex Economy and Orgone Research

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01 Ernst Walter. A Talk With a Sensible Mother 1936
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02 Paul Martin. Sex-Economic Upbringing 1942
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International Journal of Sex Economy and Orgone Research Volume 1 Number 2 1942
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04 A.S.Neills. The Problem Teacher I 1939
International Journal of Sex Economy and Orgone Research Volume 1 Number 2 1942
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05 A.S.Neills. The Problem Teacher II 1939
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06 A High School Student. The Sexual Behavior of Adolescents in a New York Borough 1943
International Journal of Sex Economy and Orgone Research Volume 2 Numbers 2 3 1943
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07 Theodore P. Wolfe. A Sex.economist Answers I 1943
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08 Paul Martin. Reviews Which Kind Progressive Education 1943
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10 Theodore P. Wolfe. A Sex.economist Answers II 1943
International Journal of Sex Economy and Orgone Research Volume 3 Number 1 1944
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11 Theodore P. Wolfe. Reviews The Boy Sex Offender 1943
International Journal of Sex Economy and Orgone Research Volume 3 Number 1 1944
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12 A.S.Neills. The Problem Teacher IV 1939
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International Journal of Sex Economy and Orgone Research Volume 4 Number 1 1945
Interval 56-60 Pag. 54-58

17 Felicia Saxe. A case History 1945
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23 A.S.Neills. That Dreadful School III 1945  
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24 Felicia Saxe. Armored Human Beings Versu the Healthy Child 1947  
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25 Ilse Ollendorff. About Self-Regulation in a Healthy Child 1847  
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26 Elizabeth Tyson. The Armored Teacher 1947  
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Wilhelm Reich Orgonomic Functionalism
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02 Wilhelm Reich The Biological Revolution from Homo Normalis to the Child of the Future 1950
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