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# From Orgasms to Organizations: Maslow, Women's Sexuality and the Gendered Foundations of the Needs Hierarchy

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**One of the most enduring theories in management is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in that its basic concepts, such as the needs for self-esteem and self-actualization, are accepted without question. This adoption of Maslow's theory has generally occurred without an examination of its empirical basis, which was his own 1930s' study of the relationship between self-esteem and sexual behaviour in young college women. In this article, we locate Maslow's study of women's sexuality in the sexological research of his time, and contrast it with a study undertaken by Katharine Davis in 1929. These two studies present very divergent pictures of women's sexuality. We argue that Maslow's portrayal, which is subsequently embedded in the needs hierarchy, has implications for our understanding of dominance and subordination in organizations, because implicit in Maslow's portrayal is an assertion of the naturalness of female submission and the eroticization of male dominance.**

*Keywords:* motivation theory, sexuality, sexology, needs hierarchy, Maslow

## Introduction

One of the most enduring theories in management is Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Despite its lack of empirical evidence (e.g. Mitchell and Moudgill, 1976; Wahba and Bridwell, 1976), the hierarchy both stands alone as a theory of motivation and underlies other theories such as

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Porter and Lawler's (1968) version of expectancy theory to such an extent that its basic concepts, such as the needs for self-esteem and self-actualization, are accepted without question and constituted as universal. This adoption of Maslow's theory has generally occurred without an examination of its empirical basis, which was his own 1930s' study of the relationship between self-esteem and sexual behaviour in young college women.

Maslow's study, according to his biographer (Hoffman, 1988, pp. 75–6), was innovative in American sexological research because it relied on lengthy personal interviews with 'normal' subjects. The small number of previous studies had relied either on written questionnaires or interviews with people who could not be considered representative of the population at large because, for example, they were in psychoanalysis at the time. In this article, we locate Maslow's study of women's sexuality in the sexological research of his time, and contrast it with a study undertaken by Katharine Davis in 1929, a study that Maslow knew of but dismissed (Maslow, 1942, p. 267). These two studies present very divergent pictures of women's sexuality. We would argue that Maslow's portrayal, which is subsequently embedded in the needs hierarchy, has implications for our understanding of dominance and subordination in organizations. Implicit in Maslow's portrayal is an assertion of the naturalness of female submission and the eroticization of male dominance and this assertion, in turn, forms the gendered foundation of the needs hierarchy.

## Maslow and Davis within inter-war sexology

Developments in sexological research in inter-war America were framed by intense cultural anxieties about gender roles. In the first thirty years of the twentieth century, a rapid expansion of the wage labour system and urbanization had created a context for increasing numbers of working-class women to live outside the heterosexual family. The newly-won right to education also produced opportunities for employment and independence among white, middle-class women. It has been estimated that from the 1870s through the 1920s between 40 to 60% of women college graduates remained single, at a time when 90% of all American women married (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, p. 253). With the rise of the economically independent middle-class woman came the solidification of female support networks and friendships (ibid). In addition, some feminists had begun to politicize sexuality and articulate an explicit resistance to the system of hetero-relations through advocating 'spinsterhood' (Jackson, 1994, p. 14). As Jackson (ibid, p. 23) contends, spinsters were a significant force in early twentieth-century feminism, embodying 'female sexual autonomy' and challenging in both their words and lives the heterosexual imperative that a woman without a man is sexually incomplete. The 'New Woman', unmarried, educated and economically independent, came to represent these feminist challenges and the anxieties they produced. The New Woman as cultural symbol was 'transposed into a sexually freighted metaphor for social disorder', expressing the transgression of gender roles and erosion of heterosexual marriage (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, p. 246).

According to feminist critics such as Jackson (1994) and Faderman (1991), early twentieth-century sexology was a response to this threat, through a rearticulation of normative heterosexuality and a pathologization of love between women. Sexology research provided a new inducement for women to becomes wives and mothers 'by holding out the promise, not of "equal rights", but "erotic rights"; in other words, sexual pleasure, in a form defined and controlled by men, and a form which eroticized male dominance and female submission' (Jackson, 1994, p. 123).

This broad critique of sexology as inherently antifeminist fails to appreciate the nuances and internal contradictions of sexological texts that could be at once disempowering and empowering for women. Sexology as an endeavour reflected the shift away from moral and religious regulation and embodied the modernist belief that, through science, the sexual could be revealed and social problems addressed. This shift, emerging in the nineteenth century, had the effect of constituting a conception of sexuality as identity — that is elaboration of fixed and bounded identity categories rooted biologically and/or psychologically and the concomitant hardening of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Broadly, as Foucault contends, the medico-scientific discourse of sexuality constituted a new technology of power deployed by the bourgeoisie to extend their influence through increasingly elaborate definitions of 'normalcy' and 'perversion' (Foucault, 1990; Francis, 1998, p. 87). But the scientific study of sexuality could be harnessed for vastly divergent objectives, including the decriminalization of homosexuality and the loosening of repressive norms around autoeroticism and birth control, on the one hand, and promotion of eugenics and the imperatives of heterosexuality on the other. While recognizing how sexology rooted gender roles in nature and tended to reinforce heteropatriarchal norms, the construction of sexology as 'backlash' ignores significant differences between sexologists and shifts in individual sexologists' theoretical perspectives (Bland and Doan, 1998, p. 4).

If it is sweeping and dismissive to cast all of early twentieth-century sexology as straightforwardly antifeminist, this interpretation does seem to capture the thrust and implications of Maslow's sexuality study. In contrast to the volumes of work on sexuality published over decades by researchers such as Havelock Ellis, Maslow's publications are confined to a few articles, the central one being 'Self-esteem (dominance-feeling) and sexuality in women' (1942). If contradictory and confusing, especially in attempting to account for the relative influence of biological and cultural influences, his sexual narrative is coherent. Maslow explicitly attempts to reconstitute normative heterosexuality, to erase the challenge of lesbianism and to eroticize and sexualize male dominance. Given that his research subjects were American college women, Maslow's study represents a very thinly veiled attempt to tame the renegade figure of the New Woman.

The Davis (1929) study also represents an effort to interrogate the New Woman; indeed, the majority of her sample of 2200 married and unmarried woman were college graduates. This study, like that of Maslow, must also be set within a context and a set of concerns, in particular a social reform agenda whose aim was to cast the objective light of science on 'normal' women's sexuality in order to better understand and control social problems related to 'sexual deviancy'. Nevertheless, even if the Davis study sets out to elaborate heterosexual normalcy, it resists the pathologizing thrust that so dominates Maslow's writings. The Davis study revealed extremely high rates of same-sex desire and behaviour among unmarried college women, and the presentation of her findings, while focused upon quantitative data, also included case studies through which Davis' subjects could and did construct their own sexual narratives, some that were explicitly narratives of resistance to heterosexual normalcy.

## Studying the New Woman's sexuality: Maslow and Davis

Maslow's sex study was part of his life-long attempt to understand the fraught nature of the relationship between women and men. He wrote in his journal in 1960 that, since his graduate school days, he had been trying to determine

> the 2-fold motivation of women (1) to dominate the man, but (2) then to have contempt for him, go frigid, manipulative, castrating, and (3) secretly to keep on yearning for a man stronger than herself to compel her respect, & to be unhappy, & [sexually] unfulfilled & to feel unfeminine so long as she doesn't have such a man. (Lowry, 1982, p. 28)

He speculated that this often unsatisfied female quest for a sufficiently dominant man was born out of a series of demographic changes in the United States, causing 'the average dominance level of women ... to [rise] steadily' (ibid). Here Maslow is clearly identifying increases in women's education and labour force participation as the fundamental cause of a crisis in heterosexuality. This explicit concern with the New Woman frames his interest in sexuality and dominance.

At the time of his sexuality studies, he observed that, although his interest was the relationship between dominance, sexual and social behaviours in humans, his initial attempt to study this relationship in people had been a 'failure', both because of the 'complexity of the problem', and because his 'own personality and social norms acted like a sieve' (Maslow, 1937a, p. 488). He therefore turned to animal studies, more specifically, controlled observation and experiments with laboratory or zoo-housed monkeys and apes, which enabled him to develop 'hypotheses to be tested, methods to be used, and in general a specific objective criterion or scale by which to judge human behaviour' (ibid, p. 489). Primate sexuality became, for him, a mirror for studying human sexuality, because, as he contended, 'human sexuality is almost exactly like primate sexuality' (Maslow, 1942, p. 291). Maslow carried out this work as the research assistant to, and first doctoral student of, Harry Harlow, who is best known for his studies of the sexual and social inadequacies of monkeys raised by surrogate mothers (e.g. Harlow, 1974). Over time, Maslow became fascinated with what appeared to him as the monkeys' continual sexual activity, activity in which biological sex differences appeared to have no meaning, activity that seemed to follow 'no fixed principles', had 'no discernible order', and was 'astonishing for its frequency' (Maslow, 1936a, p. 310). Put more succinctly, 'the screwing ... went on all the time' (Wilson, 1972, p. 154, ellipsis in original). Since the monkeys also seemed to continually struggle to exert dominance over one another, his research focused on the relationship between the two types of behaviour (see Cullen, 1997 for a detailed critique of Maslow's monkey studies).

From this research he concluded that there was a continuum of sexual behaviour, one end of which was behaviour motivated by 'sexual drive', and the other of which was that motivated by 'dominance drive' (Maslow, 1936a, p. 319). The ability to exert dominance was not so much dependent on factors such as the size, physical strength or sex, as it was on 'social attitudes, attitudes of aggressiveness, confidence or cockiness' (Maslow and Flanzbaum, 1936, p. 305). Applying this concept to humans, if social attitudes determined one monkey's ability to dominate another, social attitudes should also determine one human's ability to dominate another. At first, Maslow labelled this attitude 'dominance-feeling', but later renamed it 'self-esteem', in order to avoid the power-seeking connotation of 'dominance-feeling' (1942, p. 269). Maslow's sexology studies were thus an attempt to understand the relationship between sexual behaviour and self-esteem.

The data on this relationship were collected in intensive, unstructured interviews totalling, on average, about 15 hours with each subject (Maslow, 1940, p. 257). These interviews took place between 1935 and 1937 (Hoffman, 1988, pp. 75, 80), a time when Maslow was also publishing his monkey studies. The major paper on his human study is 'Self-esteem (dominance-feeling) and sexuality in women' (Maslow, 1942), in which he discusses the relationship between self-esteem and sexuality and compares his human and animal data. Since the needs hierarchy was published the following year (Maslow, 1943), his interpretation of his sexuality data is clearly a fundamental part of the conceptual framework for the hierarchy (see Cullen, 1994, 1997).

 

Initially, Maslow interviewed both men and women, but he found that 'the men were far more evasive and tended to lie, exaggerate, or distort their sexual experiences', whereas women, once they had agreed to participate, were more open (Hoffman, 1988, p. 77). In addition, Maslow found that interviewing women 'was more fun — illuminating for me, the nature of women, who were certainly, to a shy boy, still mysterious' (Wilson, 1972, p. 157), or, as his biographer describes it, the 28-year-old Maslow 'got a thrill of excitement interviewing the women' (Hoffman, 1988, p. 77). He recruited his female subjects through word of mouth among the graduate students at Columbia University, where he was then located (ibid, p. 76). In all, he interviewed about 140 women. However, he observed that a woman's self-esteem and/or sexual behaviour were influenced by other characteristics such as her socio-economic status, religion, cultural background and marital status, as well as the area of the country in which she grew up. In order to minimize the effect of these other influences, he reduced his original group to a 'Criterion Group' of about 70 women and it is on the basis of this group that Maslow makes generalizations about women's sexuality (Maslow, 1942, p. 270). This subgroup was

> (a) between the ages of 18 and 28; (b) of Protestant background; (c) college students or of college intelligence; (d) mostly unmarried; (e) mostly of urban, middle-class background; (f) all were relatively 'normal' people, some being maladjusted to a greater or lesser degree, but none being obvious neurotics. (Maslow, 1940, p. 256)

In attempting to erase the influence of cultural distortions and to construct the kind of 'homogenous group' that is 'necessary for the best results' (Maslow, 1942, p. 270), Maslow thus constitutes the dominant social group (white, middle-class, heterosexual and Protestant) as normative. Maslow draws a sharp line between the normal and abnormal. The abnormal or neurotic are 'severely maladjusted' (ibid). Lesbians are constructed as abnormal by definition, and 'of course not included in our criterion group of normal women' (ibid, p. 275).

Based on his interviews, Maslow assigned each woman a score on a scale of self-esteem, and also rated her attitude toward sex. This rating, like the rating of the woman's self-esteem, was an 'objective' rating, discounting what he believed to be other determinants of sexuality such as opportunity, fatigue and whether or not the woman loved her partner (ibid, pp. 263–4). His third rating was of the woman's sex drive, defined narrowly as the desire for heterosexual coitus. This rating was based on the frequency and intensity of local genital reactions, and of conscious sexual relations or masturbation, actual or desired; the percentage of frequency, ease and intensity of climax in heterosexual relations, and the kinds of stimulation needed to achieve it; ease of excitability; number and extent of erotogenic zones; and number of everyday stimuli regarded as sexual. He determined the presence or absence of technical virginity, or, if the subject was married, whether or not she was a virgin until marriage. He also asked about promiscuity (the number of men with whom the subject had had sex relations) and whether there existed a history of masturbation. Although he calculated correlations among these scores, Maslow relied more on the 'generalized qualitative relationships as they impressed the experimenter' (ibid, p. 272), to draw his conclusion that a woman's sexual attitudes and behaviour were more closely related to her dominance level than to her sex drive.

Maslow believed that, because of his focus on the relationship between dominance and sexual behaviour, his research was superior to the other studies of the era, writing that his findings 'cast a definite shadow of doubt on previous sexological studies' (ibid, p. 265). The basis for this argument was his observation, about halfway through his study, that the women who had volunteered to participate in his study were overwhelmingly high in dominance. Only about 10% were low in dominance, and all of these were virgins, non-masturbators, and had a negative attitude toward sex (ibid, p. 266). He therefore had to seek out and 'inveigle' (ibid), through the 'almost tearful pleadings of the by now distraught experimenter' (Maslow, 1937b, p. 418), low-dominance women to 'submit to interview' (Maslow, 1942, p. 266).

Once a sufficient number of low-dominance women were recruited, his sample, he argued, was more representative of the population as a whole. Consequently, he believed, his estimates of the percentages of virgins, masturbators, and homosexuality in the population as a whole were more accurate than those in other studies. These other studies were unrepresentative and 'a product of bad sampling' (ibid, p. 266) because they relied on volunteers and therefore contained a disproportionate number of high dominance individuals. One study he singled out for this criticism was Davis (1929), because this study relied on a mailed questionnaire.

The Davis study was sponsored by the Bureau of Social Hygiene, with special funding from John D. Rockefeller Jr. The social discourses that legitimated the sex research conducted by the Bureau could be found in the conservative operations of maternal feminism and moral reform (Francis, 1998, p. 79). While he had been drawn into sex research through his specific agenda of eliminating prostitution, Rockefeller became increasingly convinced that in order to eliminate 'deviant' forms of sexuality, one had to better understand its 'normal' expressions (Bullough, 1994, pp. 113–15). Davis, who had served as the warden of a women's reformatory and Commissioner of Corrections for New York City, came to Rockefeller's attention through her campaigns for the social and moral 'improvement' of female inmates and eventually began a study of the sex life of women (ibid). Davis initially examined the sexual behaviour of 1000 married women and, later, single women. Because a greater percentage of college women had responded to the married women's questionnaire, the study of single women was limited to college graduates. More specifically, potential subjects had to have graduated at least five years prior to the study, on the assumption that, by then, they 'would be more likely to recognize the need of such a study ... and also would have sufficient maturity of experience to give some weight to their opinions on various points connected with sex education' (Davis, 1929, p. xii). The decision to restrict the sample to white, middle-class, college graduates, however, could also be seen as a strategy of legitimation. In order to insulate the study from the charge of immorality, there was a conscious decision to sample only those women who embodied the norms of white, middle-class respectability. If the study challenged dominant sexual discourses in recognizing the sexual lives of these women, it bolstered its credibility through excluding black and working-class women who, through raced and classed assumptions, were already viewed as sexual and immoral (Francis, 1998, p. 79). As with Maslow, this narrow focus had the effect of constructing white, middle-class women's sexuality as normative.

A letter describing the purpose of the study and the ways in which anonymity would be ensured was sent to 10,000 women selected for both age and geographical distribution from the alumnae lists of colleges and universities. Those who were interested in participating were to send in a card requesting a mailed copy of the questionnaire. Although the questionnaire itself is not reproduced in Davis' book, she reports that it was twelve pages long, including two pages of definitions 'we had found it advisable to give' (1929, p. xii). Approximately one-third of those contacted requested a copy and about one-third of those (some 1200 women) completed the questionnaire.

The methodology of the Davis and the Maslow studies reflects a transitional period within sexology, poised between the case study method used by earlier sexologists and psychoanalysts and the large-scale survey becoming dominant with Kinsey. The case study method deployed by such researchers as Krafft-Ebing, Ellis and Freud relied on individual experience, as narrated to an investigator, as evidence of sexual phenomenon. Case studies were narratively framed and selectively chosen by the sexologist to construct specific interpretations; yet even so, as Bland and Doan contend, 'sexological labels often emerged as a unique and active collaboration between the sexologist and the ... informant ... rather than as an unwelcome imposition on a passive community' (1998, p. 2). The survey/interview method is, by contrast, directed toward the production of aggregate data, with individual narratives silenced. The Davis survey, while focusing on 'modern statistical tables', included several open-ended questions whose responses are faithfully reproduced in a detailed presentation of findings. The 430-page report also includes 'case study' narratives constructed by interview subjects from blank pages where the women had attempted to 'give a fuller account of their own experiences' (Davis, 1929, p. xiii).

 

Our interest in this article is not the relative accuracy of these two studies. Indeed, as we have emphasized, early twentieth-century sexological research, while cloaked under the banner of scientific objectivity, represented a discursive practice that shaped and constituted that which it claimed to reveal. It is nonetheless important to compare some of the findings of these studies, in order to interrogate their underlying assumptions and the divergent stories that they told about women's sexuality during this period. Maslow's (1942, pp. 270–1) raw figures for the percentage of women who had ever masturbated are 55.3% and 46.9% for the total group and criterion group respectively, while his 'corrected' estimates are 46.3% for the total group and 38.7% for the criterion group. Among the 20–29-year-old women in Davis' study (the age group most similar to those in Maslow's study), 63.6% reported they had masturbated (1929, p. 101). This difference might suggest that Maslow's contention was accurate, in that perhaps Davis's sample did include a disproportionate number of high dominance women. There is, however, another explanation relating to the context and way in which the questions were asked and answered.

The instructions that preceded Davis' questions about masturbation placed them in the context of developing sound principles of sex education. The study was being done for 'distinctly social ends' and 'the data for the determination of norms of sex behaviour can come only from the life experiences of sane, intelligent men and women' (Davis, 1929, p. 95). The instructions promised anonymity, and concluded:

> There is considerable controversy with regard to auto-eroticism. ... [A]uto-eroticism, particularly that form of it known as masturbation, has been vigorously condemned both on ethical grounds and as the cause of grave physical and mental disorders. Accumulation of facts indicates that the harmful physical and mental effects have been greatly exaggerated. It is maintained by some eminent specialists today that auto-eroticism, including masturbation, is a normal stage in the development of the sex nature. (Davis, 1929, p. 96)

Davis' refusal to pathologize, and the almost liberal approach to sexual practices that informs this study, provide scope for the articulation of her subjects' experiences.

This relative openness stands in marked contrast to Maslow. Since Maslow does not describe his interview protocol in any detail, it is not clear how he asked his subjects about masturbation. Indeed, he comments on the 'extreme flexibility' of his interview procedure; the questioning in the initial interviews was exploratory, while in later interviews a list of questions was used only as cues (Maslow, 1942, p. 262). However, we can get a sense of his almost 'confessional' approach from the following description:

> Before the interview proper was started, a short explanation was made of the general purpose of the interview; the subject was warned that many of

 

> the questions would be very embarrassing and that the whole procedure might be upsetting. They were at the same time assured that they would be benefited if they would go through with it, both because sheer confessing was desirable for its own sake and also because my résumé of the results at the end of the interview would be enlightening and would teach them much about themselves and others. (Maslow, 1940, pp. 257–8)

## The lesbian challenge

In general terms, the high-dominance women in Maslow's study are more masculine, independent, socially poised, extroverted, relaxed and unconventional than low-dominance women, who are feminine, timid, shy, modest, neat and retiring (Maslow, 1942, p. 261). Low-dominance women consider themselves comparable to others in their sympathy for others, and enjoy other women's company, while high-dominance women prefer men rather than women for company (they consider other women to be 'catty and petty'), and dominate both men and women of their own age (Maslow, 1940, pp. 267–70). Low-dominance women, however, were more honest than high-dominance women (Maslow, 1942, p. 261). Maslow does not seem to have fully realized the implications of this difference. He clearly believed that, since he had established good rapport and stressed the importance of telling the truth, his subjects were completely frank (Maslow, 1939, p. 5). Consequently, the possibility that his rating of dominance was simply a measure of a woman's willingness to discuss sex with him, or that high-dominance, male-identified women might have exaggerated and distorted their sexual experiences (as did men) does not appear to have seriously influenced his interpretations.

In this context, the lesbian takes on immense symbolic significance for Maslow, who disarms the threat of the lesbian by silencing her. The erasure of lesbian sexuality is achieved in a complex manner. Like Krafft-Ebing and Ellis before him on inversion (see Bullough, 1994, pp. 40, 70–82), Maslow draws a sharp distinction between congenital and 'acquired' homosexuality. Of his entire sample, only one subject is defined as 'really' homosexual (Maslow, 1942, p. 275). The true lesbian is presented as a masculine psyche within a woman's body, characterized not by her sexual desires but instead on the basis of gender inversion. As Maslow writes:

> Our one homosexual by preference ... did not look masculine but behaved so in many ways, preferring men's clothes, occupations, sports, etc. ... Sexual relations with men were reported but with no pleasure ... Her history consists of the seduction of one girl after another. They are always taller than she is, always beautiful and feminine, and she is initially attracted because they dislike her ... she systematically, over a

 

> long period of time, gets them to tolerate holding hands, embracing, kissing, etc. The climax comes at such a time when she first induces orgasm in her partner. 'At such times, I get a feeling of smug power, and of great satisfaction.' (Maslow, 1942, p. 275)

There is an effort here to cordon off the category 'female homosexual' and to construct this category as innate. This move is emblematic of early twentieth-century sexology in the sense that sexual dissidents become defined as a particular type of person, identifiable not by what they do, or who they desire, but instead on the basis of some inner identity (Foucault, 1990, p. 43). Expressing this discursive shift away from the stigmatization of certain acts and towards the invention of the pervert as an identity, Maslow writes, 'no single sexual act can be seen as abnormal or perverted. It is only abnormal or perverted individuals who can commit abnormal or perverted acts' (1942, p. 286). True lesbians are those women with excessively high (read masculine) dominance levels and their sexual desire is rooted in their need to exert power over other women. While rejecting physiological explanations for female homosexuality (ibid, p. 276), Maslow nonetheless paints this category as discrete and impenetrable, neurotic and abnormal, but fortunately miniscule. There is little danger that women will forego heterosexual pleasures *en masse* because the true lesbian is a tiny minority, a freak of nature, not a real woman. While the true lesbian may seduce other women, those women's natural desires lead them to the penis.

The *faute de mieux* lesbian or, in Havelock Ellis' term, the acquired lesbian, is a category that for Maslow exists because of a mismatch of women and men at different levels of dominance. The four women in his sample who have strayed from the heterosexual imperative are described as high-dominance women who have been unable to find 'a man suitably high in dominance feeling as a mate' (ibid, p. 275). Their natural desire for the penis has been 'repressed' and their homosexuality is artificial. For the artificial lesbians in his sample, when a 'suitable man came along, the homosexuality was dropped at once' (ibid), confirming in Maslow's mind that they were sexually adventurous rather than real homosexuals.

A considerably more complex picture of women's same sex desire emerges in Davis. Maslow had argued that, because Davis' subjects were volunteers, they were high in dominance. However, unlike the high-dominance women in his study, a significant proportion of Davis' subjects reported having emotionally intense, non-sexual relationships with other women. This, according to Maslow, was true only of low-dominance women, who had reported that they enjoyed other women's company. The Davis and Maslow samples are not directly comparable, since Maslow's subjects were students and Davis' subjects had been out of college for at least five years. Yet Davis' findings, reporting much higher levels of same sex desire and expression in both her married and unmarried samples, suggests that Maslow's efforts to minimize and erase lesbian existence were at some level deliberate.

In Davis' study, the nature and extent of same sex eroticism were determined through a series of questions about experiencing intense emotional relations with a woman prior to, during or after college; whether this experience had been with one or more than one woman; whether such relationships had been continued to the present and what influence this had had on the woman's remaining single; why such a relationship had been discontinued; and the woman's mental attitude toward such relationships: approval or shame, and whether it was helpful, stimulating or injurious to her health (Davis, 1929, p. 246). The sexual aspect of these relationships was determined through the following questions:

> (a) Was the experience associated with sex in your own mind at the time? (b) Later? (c) Was the experience without physical expressions other than kissing or ordinary endearments of close friendship? (d) Did the experience include such physical expression as bodily exposure, mutual handling of organs, mutual masturbation, or other intimate contacts? (Davis, 1929, p. 246)

Fifty per cent of Davis' (1929, p. 247) unmarried subjects (605 of 1200) reported having intense emotional relationships with other women. Of these, 38.6% (234 of 605) reported that these relationships were accompanied by mutual masturbation or other forms of sexual expression and were labelled as homosexual. However, Davis also decided to classify as homosexual the 12.9% (78 of 605) of the women who reported that they recognized their intense relationships as sexual, although the only physical expressions were kissing and hugging. Using these definitions, 26% of Davis' subjects, as she put it, 'admit that the [intense emotional] relationship was carried to the point of overt homosexual expression' (Davis, 1929, p. 248). The Davis data seem to confirm the insistence of historians like Smith-Rosenberg (1985), that female-centred support networks, familial and sexual relationships were widespread among the first generations of American college women.

Like Maslow, and consistent with the thrust of sexology in this period, the Davis study does draw a distinction between those who were 'naturally homosexual' and those whose practices were the result of the situation (1929, p. 293). Yet, even though she extensively reviews the conclusions of earlier sexological studies that rest upon the congenital/acquired distinction, Davis does not pass judgement on the 'etiology' of homosexuality in women. The designation 'naturally' homosexual depends upon her subjects' self-definitions and seems to rest on the absence of attractions to men (Davis, 1929, p. 279; Francis, 1998, p. 81).

 

Maslow's pathologization of same sex desire is also notably absent from the Davis study. Davis acknowledges that same sex desire and expression among women have existed cross-culturally and throughout history (1929, p. 239), and the point of her narrative is to emphasize the normality and pervasiveness of same sex practices. In the selection of case studies from her 'naturally' homosexual subjects, only one is designated as 'psychopathic' with the qualifier 'one of the very few in our group' (ibid, p. 295). Her empirical findings emphasize the emotional and physical health and happiness of those women reporting intense emotional relationships with other women with physical expression (ibid, pp. 260–2.) While she does find that a high percentage of these women (48.4%) view their same sex practices as 'unnatural; abnormal; perversion', she qualifies this finding by suggesting that 'this is probably a reflection of public opinion as to homosexuality' and she insists that this be read against the finding that a similarly high proportion (46.4%) report that the main effect of their homosexual relationships has been 'helpful, stimulating' (ibid, pp. 254–5). Only 18% regarded their same sex practices as 'a sex problem requiring solution' (ibid, p. 271).

Finally, the case studies presented reflect narratives of resistance to the pathologization of lesbianism. Indeed, as Francis comments of these case studies, 'despite the powerful discourses mobilized to deter women's same-sex intimacy ... [the Davis subjects] put pen to paper to document the power of connections "they would not have been without for the world"' (Francis, 1998, p. 83). The reflections documented in the case studies (Davis, 1929, pp. 279–96), include the following:

- 'I cannot believe that large numbers of women must forgo full development because they are attracted to a woman, rather than a man.' (Case number 1, p. 280)
- 'I have a woman friend whom I love and admire above everyone in the world and with whom my life is perfectly happy because of our mutual love and congeniality in all things.' (Case number 3, p. 282)
- 'I have always since childhood hoped for a woman partner and now I have her and would rather have her than any man.' (Case number 4, p. 283)
- 'I am not ashamed of this one relationship because I love, admire and am loyally attached to this woman, as much as I could be to a husband, had I chosen one. This relationship has been helpful in every way.' (Case number 5, p. 284)

These narratives stand in contrast to Maslow's presentation of the 'true' homosexual woman as neurotic, predatory and doomed to repetitive and unsuccessful quests of seduction. Davis' construction of lesbian relationships as happy and helpful and the notable absence of the mannish lesbian from her discussions, as Francis (1998, p. 83) has argued, undermine the notion of sexual identity based upon an exclusive heterosexual/homosexual binary. Extremely high levels of reported same sex behaviour among her married cohort (15%) (Davis, 1929, p. 298) and the narration of passionately felt emotional and sexual attractions existing prior to and alongside relationships with men work both to destabilize the categories of homosexual and heterosexual and reveal the precariousness of the heteronorm. In Maslow, by contrast, the New Woman's same sex attractions become rooted in dominance, which, within his discursive construction, works to confirm the stability of the heteronorm. This is a project that for Maslow depends most centrally on recognizing the inherent 'natural' connections between dominance and sexuality.

## Dominance, submission and the heterosexual imperative

What is the source of Maslow's belief in the necessity of innate connections between dominance and sexuality? We see inter-related reasons. Beginning in his graduate school days and throughout his career, Maslow believed that psychology was too scientific, and sought, through his humanistic project, to expand its boundaries into other areas and disciplines. But this expansion into areas such as love and religion, Nicholson (2001, p. 84) maintains, challenged 'the conjunction of masculinity and intellect that he revered', because of his concurrent belief in the essentialist nature of maleness and femaleness revealed in his studies of monkeys and apes.

Those studies were done in the context of the primatology research of the 1930s, research that was primarily concerned with the control of aggression through a dominance hierarchy or 'pecking order' among the members of the group (Haraway, 1989). Dominance and sexuality were linked: males competed to control access to sexually receptive females, and females accepted a subordinate status because their submission to the more powerful male gave them access to resources (such as food) that the more powerful males could command. In other words, dominance was necessary and male dominance was a natural consequence of this necessity. In his own studies, Maslow's (1936b, p. 183) main indicators of dominance were mounting (taking the male role in sexual behaviour) and bullying, and it was on this basis that he argued that sexual behaviour was motivated by both a sexual drive and a dominance drive. Consequently, not only is same sex sexual activity in humans an attempt to control and dominate others, 'normal' heterosexual sex is also based on a power relationship.

This power relationship is biologically determined; for Maslow, male domination and female submission are inevitable and essential to sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure, narrowly defined as orgasm in heterosexual coitus, requires male initiation and control. High-dominance women with high sex drives, reports Maslow, find themselves unable to orgasm with men who are 'weak', who fail to dominate them sexually (1942, p. 281). But under Maslow's tutelage, in 'two of the subjects whose husbands were instructed concerning suitable dominance behaviour, the orgasm was eventually induced' (ibid, p. 281). This stands as a bold statement of the eroticization of male dominance: women's pleasure is necessarily located in their sexual submission.

Maslow reports that the high-dominance woman unconsciously wishes to be raped. Not infrequently she has 'rape dreams' in which she is 'forced to submit to a large number of brutal men' and she enjoys rough love making, preferring men with 'enormously large sex organs, large enough to cause pain' (ibid, pp. 287, 289). He goes on to comment:

> in these few women, they strive incessantly to dominate all with whom they come in contact and tend to be sadistic in their dominance in so far as they are allowed by cultural formulations. They do seem to get a certain kind of sexual thrill from this behaviour. But when a man comes along who cannot be dominated, these women tend to become definitely masochistic and to glory in being dominated. Apparently the sexual pleasure so derived is strongly preferred over the thrill derived from dominating. (ibid, p. 289)

Middle-dominance women, by contrast, do not desire to be overpowered; instead, they desire to be 'seduced' and 'wooed', and 'sex as such must be hidden, swathed about with veils of love words, gently and carefully led up to' (ibid, p. 284). Even if shrouded in romanticism, the process of seduction is one located as being properly under masculine control. Low-dominance women, Maslow argues, often have very little desire for sex, viewing it only in relation to reproduction (ibid, p. 284). And for men, women's orgasm becomes a sign of their successful dominance: 'For a man to induce the orgasm in a woman supports his dominance-feeling and also, for the moment at least, gives him dominance status' (ibid, pp. 281–2).

Despite Maslow's ostensibly liberal endorsement of a range of sexual practices including 'cunnilingus' and other forms of 'sexual experimentation' (ibid, p. 285), women's sexual pleasure is here constrained within an iron-clad heterosexual script, in which women's autonomy, consent and initiation are erased. The orchestration of women's sexual pleasure remains inescapably under male control, and female pleasure is fused with male dominance.

Countless early twentieth-century feminists had articulated explicit critiques of the form of male sexual dominance that Maslow here constructs as natural and inevitable. Uncontrolled male sexuality, as feminists such as Pankhurst (1913) had argued, was the fundamental cause of a number of social ills, including prostitution, venereal disease and brutality against women. In response, feminists had sought to articulate a radical conception of women's sexual autonomy resting upon such planks as the right to refuse male conjugal rights, voluntary motherhood and an early form of political lesbianism, spinsterhood (Jackson, 1994, pp. 80–105). If Maslow's study sought to erase the challenge of lesbianism, so too did it resist and silence early feminist calls for heterosexual sexual autonomy. Davis, by contrast, is both more open and attentive to expressions of women's erotic and reproductive rights. Davis finds that a central factor in women's satisfaction with marital sex is education. Her conclusion, drawing connections between adequate sex education and pleasure in heterosexual sex, can be seen as a call for women's sexual empowerment through knowledge (Davis, 1929, p. 76).

Maslow completely ignores the obvious relationship between women's sexual satisfaction and control over fertility. This is at once surprising and at the same time consistent with his developing views on the gendered and biological basis of dominance which would root women's ultimate fulfilment in motherhood. Davis, in her detailed analysis of married women's attitudes towards birth control, finds that an overwhelming majority of her subjects (73.4%) support 'voluntary parenthood' and practise contraception (73%) (Davis, 1929, p. 13). Clearly access to contraception, which at the time was restricted under the Comstock Law, functioned as a significant barrier to women's heterosexual pleasure. Maslow not only ignores how the fear of unwanted pregnancy may have constrained women's sexual expression, his endorsement of male sexual coercion is antithetical to any recognition of women's sexual autonomy.

In his 'qualitative finding' of the naturalness and desirability of male sexual dominance, Maslow believed he had diagnosed the crisis of marriage:

> The best marriages in our society ... seem to be those in which the husband and wife are at about the same level of dominance-feeling or in which the husband is somewhat higher in dominance feeling than the wife ... In those marriages in which the wife is definitely dominant over her husband, trouble is very likely to ensue of both social and sexual maladjustment unless they are both very secure individuals. (Maslow, 1942, p. 278)

Inscribing the heterosexual imperative, Maslow boldly insists that 'there is a man for every woman', and the essential criterion for a good match is complementarity of dominance levels. A mismatch of dominance levels, particularly when the woman feels dominant to the man, is the essential and fundamental cause of marriage breakdown. The New Woman, the independent and dominant women, needs to be attached to a man who will satisfy her natural desire for subordination. Divorce and lesbianism are identified as the symptoms of a crisis that is rooted in the transgression of natural gender roles.

 

## Conclusion

A belief in the 'naturalness' of male dominance and female submission thus underlies Maslow's needs hierarchy and his larger humanistic project. Indeed, it must, since the hierarchy is innate, rooted in biology and thus universal (see Cullen, 1997). That there must be a gender difference in self-actualization, and the form that this difference should take, is clear from his portrayal of women's sexuality. In the same way that biology ensures that male monkeys must be dominant and female monkeys must be subordinate, men must be dominant, and women must be subordinate. Not only is this natural, but it is desirable: women want to be dominated.

As Nicholson (2001, p. 88) has pointed out, because Maslow found it difficult to reconcile 'biological constraint with psychological possibility', he deliberately minimized his discussion of the gendered nature of self-actualization. For Maslow, while both men and women could and should strive for self-actualization, 'true self-actualization for the female accepts ... the primacy of the family' (cited in Nicholson, 2001, p. 88), since, for example, one of his illustrations of self-actualization is 'the desire to be an ideal mother' (Maslow, 1954, p. 92). Moreover, Maslow's statement that 'the pursuit and gratification of the higher needs lead to greater, stronger and truer individualism' (ibid, p. 149) is an expression of the autonomous self, the male self that denies relatedness and thinks in terms of hierarchy rather than webs (Gilligan, 1982).

One basis for the enduring appeal of Maslow's hierarchy is now apparent. The conflation of self-actualization with masculinity, dominance and sexuality reinforces the sexuality of organizations (Hearn and Parkin, 1987), while at the same time justifying women's exclusion from positions of power. If dominance or hierarchical position requires masculine behaviours, women can supposedly achieve this dominance or hierarchical position by becoming more like men. This is precisely the sort of advice that aspiring women managers continue to be given (see Cullen, 1994). However, try as she might, a woman can never reach the top of either the needs or organizational hierarchy, unless, as with Maslow's depiction of the 'true lesbian', she becomes a gender invert. The 'normal' woman's biology, however, means that she can never be 'male enough', and thus male dominance in organizations is inescapable, even if unfortunate.

The phallocentricism of the needs hierarchy, as we argue, is clearly revealed through an interrogation of Maslow's sexological work and through his commentaries on gender roles. Self-actualization, the apex of the needs hierarchy, is based upon the normative characteristics of masculinity and a repudiation of those characteristics that Maslow associated with femininity. The motivational theory that results from the equation of masculinity with self-actualization supports a meritocratic ideal that not only denies and denigrates femininity, but at least for Maslow, constructs women's ideal roles as help-mate and mother to the next generation. Private patriarchy, scripted through the necessary links between sexuality and dominance, provides the foundation of the meritocratic society that Maslow prescribed.

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## Note

1. Our contributions to this article are equal; our names are in alphabetical order.

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