



Reconsidering Perversion – a Conceptual Proposal¹

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Abstract:² There is still no simple or agreed-upon definition of perversion. Furthermore, changing cultural opinions on sexuality question even the use of this term. In answer to these challenges, a conceptional distinction is proposed between sexuality per se, describing an aspect of an individual's personality, and sexuality in actu, describing manifest sexual fantasy and behavior. Sexuality per se subsumes hetero- and homosexuality as well as conditions traditionally called "perversions" on the same de-pathologized level and calls them adult sexual organizations. The use of the terms perversion and perverse is restricted to a specific mode of sexuality in actu, i.e. when, in sexual activities, non-sexual functions have gained priority over sexual drive satisfaction. This clarifies which sexual activity may be an issue of psychoanalytic scrutiny and of often successful therapy and which not. Two case examples and a brief look into psychoanalytic literature illustrate the proposal.

1 Introduction

In spite of multiple profound theoretical efforts, there is still no simple or agreed-upon definition of perversion (Holtzman & Kulish, 2012, p. 275). Pfäfflin (2010, p. 81) states:

A roughly consistent definition of perversion that can be agreed upon by psychoanalysts does not exist. (author's translation)

Nevertheless, many psychoanalysts writing about perversion most commonly seem to assume that their readers have some shared definition of the concept.³ This contradiction is astonishing and causes a great deal of confusion. One reason for this contradiction might be, according to a statement by Nobus (Nobus & Downing 2006, p. 15), that

the purportedly value-free principles governing the direction of the psychoanalytic treatment reaches its limits with regard to the psychoanalyst's own thoughts and feelings towards perversion.⁴

Values are further challenged by cultural developments in sexual activities, described by Sigusch (1998, 2005) as “the neosexual revolution”. Therefore, the traditional use of the term perversion is increasingly questioned. Under the influence of the gay liberation movement, homosexuality is mostly considered as a regular sexual orientation equivalent to heterosexuality. The demand to depathologize not only homosexuality but also other conditions hitherto called perversions becomes ever more influential. There are serious researchers who are active on the sadomasochistic scene and use their activity there as an additional basis of their scholarship (e.g. Woltersdorf, 2008). Sadomasochism and fetishism are, in recent years, more frequently considered to be sexual orientations on a par with hetero- and homosexuality.⁵ These depathologizing tendencies are usually motivated by changing political and cultural attitudes rather than by conceptual reasons.

This article, on the one hand, shares the intention to depathologize unusual forms of sexual behavior. On the other hand, it does not propose to relinquish the terms perverse or perversion. It rather advocates to restricting the use of these terms to sexual activities that are experienced as disturbing by the subject performing them. The reason for this is a clinical one: these activities may be a core issue of psychoanalytic scrutiny and often successful treatment. Hence, the paper proposes a conceptual foundation for both: the depathologizing tendency as well as the continued clinical usefulness of the terms perverse or perversion in a restricted sense.

First, the confusion in the use of the term perversion must be resolved. This confusion has its origin – according to my thesis – in the fact that there is no definite and consequent distinction between the following two *viewpoints on sexuality*: the viewpoint of sexuality *per se*, as it is, i.e. as an aspect of one’s personality, and the viewpoint on sexuality *in actu*, as it happens, i.e. manifest sexual activity in fantasy as well as in behavior. These viewpoints correspond to two different logical categories. It is a categorical difference between stating “this patient *is* perverse” and “this patient, in a certain moment, *fantasizes and/or behaves* in a perverse way”.

If, in the discourse on sexuality, these two logical categories are distinguished, the following conclusion would be: sexuality *per se*, as it is, as an aspect of one’s personality, cannot be qualified as pathological and hence as perverse.

If we accept this presumption, a second problem needs solving: how must a concept that is able to gather on the same conceptual level both forms of sexuality hitherto considered “regular” sexual orientations and some forms hitherto considered “perversions” be constructed? Such a concept has to describe sexuality exclusively *per se*, as a part of the adult personality. The term *adult sexual organization* – as an “organization of the partial drives” (Freud 1905d, p. 197) – will be

proposed and justified. In contrast to *sexuality per se*, any qualification as *perverse* or as *perversion*, to my understanding, belongs to certain forms of sexuality *in actu*, as it happens in fantasy as well as in behavior. From this viewpoint, and *only* from this viewpoint, I will focus on the fact that *every* manifest adult sexual activity has both sexual and non-sexual functions. These functions always coexist. They constantly interact in a dynamic way that, in every single situation, determines which is the *leading function* one that foremost motivates a specific manifest sexual activity, and which functions are submitted to this leading function. The leading function is seen as the function that *gains priority* in motivating a particular sexual activity. If the satisfaction of sexual drives *has priority* over non-sexual functions, sexual activities will *not* be considered as perverse. They will only be considered as perverse if one or several non-sexual functions gain priority over the satisfaction of sexual drives. This qualitative difference helps decide which sexual activity can and should be an issue of psychoanalytic therapy and which not.

The non-sexual functions are expressions of various other needs or urges, such as release of aggression, heightening of self-esteem, conflict-resolution, compensation of developmental scars and deficiencies, handling of trauma. These needs or urges *involuntarily* lead to symptomatic forms of sexual activities.

The conception I have adopted does not aim at a kind of “rating” of any specific sexual fantasy or behavior in any individual. This will remain a difficult and often controversial task in the psychoanalytic exploration of every single case.⁶ My proposal may only *shift the conceptual framework* of individual psychoanalytic scrutiny from a confusing one to one that hopefully is less confusing. By adopting this shift, both partners of a psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic process could approach a “value-free” working attitude more easily.

As a consequence of this shift, I will propose the *same abstinence in explaining the psychogenesis of sexuality per se* in fetishist, sadomasochistic or pedophile individuals as is usually a matter of course in heterosexual ones.

After some methodological considerations (section 2), this conceptual proposition will be elaborated step by step and justified in detail. To begin with, the confusion issuing from the intermingling of the two logical categories in which the term *perversion* is used will be described (section 3). In section 4, focusing on sexuality *per se*, the term *adult sexual organization* will be introduced and justified by metapsychological considerations (section 4.1). Further considerations on this term follow, justifying the proposed abstinence regarding *psychogenetic* theories of adult sexual organizations (section 4.2). An alternative to such *psychogenetic* theories will be outlined in section 4.3. Section 5 deals with *sexuality in actu* in

behavior as well as in fantasy. The sexual versus the non-sexual *functions* of these activities will be worked out. The dynamic interaction of these functions is seen as pivotal in determining what might be defined as perverse and what might not. Section 6 contrasts my conceptual proposition with a widely accepted traditional one. Two casuistic examples follow (sections 7 and 8). A brief look into psychoanalytic literature (section 9) precedes the conclusion of this paper.

2 Methodological considerations

In my experience, there are some methodological issues needing special consideration:

1. Scrutinizing the *same* issue under *separate* viewpoints or perspectives: in spite of the fact that Freud himself proposed an approach of different viewpoints, by distinguishing a genetic, a dynamic and an economic viewpoint, there is no widespread tradition in applying this method. Applying different viewpoints or perspectives to the same topic consequently does not imply splitting it into different parts. In fact it corresponds to the dialectic principle of the “unity of contradictions”. When I distinguish the perspective of *sexuality per se* and *sexuality in actu* in this paper, I do not aim at two different sexualities; I only approach *one* sexuality under two different viewpoints.
2. My point of reference is the Freudian drive theory: I set out with a psychodynamic perspective, which is rooted in Freud’s drive theory and his theory of neuroses. I put the accent on *intrapsychic* dynamic of drives, urges and (unconscious) motives, as illustrated predominantly in section 4a. As a consequence of many discussions with colleagues, I am especially conscious of the potential misunderstandings that might arise by not highlighting object relations, neither in view of the *genesis* of the different adult sexual organizations nor in view of *defining* sexual activities as perverse or not. This does not imply that I reject the importance of object relations; I only would like to exhaust the full potential of a point of view that appears to me an approach that is given too little consideration in modern psychoanalytic theorizing. This may unravel some potentially new, unusual and fruitful insights.
3. I often use the terms *sexual fantasy and behavior* in one breath. This does not mean that I ignore the fundamental differences between fantasy and behavior. The reason simply is that *sexuality in actu* is not restricted to behavior, but includes fantasy as well, albeit in different ways, with different meanings and consequences.

4. The so called “value-free” psychoanalytic attitude is, at its best, a desirable ideal requiring an adequate awareness of the fact that it can never be attained; at its worst, it conceals the fact that values mark the origin of every approach in the humanities, my own approach discussed in this paper included. Hence the quotation marks for this term. Nevertheless, it remains useful as a technical tool: When, in my work as analyst, I notice that I am consciously far more concerned with values than usual, I may scrutinize my own unconscious for interfering resistances or countertransferences. Furthermore, values are challenged by the ethical dilemma of dealing in practice and theory with pedophile clients, especially when we strive to depathologize their *adult sexual organization*. Some general remarks regarding this issue are inserted in the case presentation in section 7.

3 Two different logical categories

Traditionally, sexual conditions such as fetishism, sadomasochism, exhibitionism, voyeurism, pedophilia and so on form the core of what are considered perversions. However, sexual violation, rape, incest, compulsive promiscuity, obsessive use of pornography or prostitutes, compulsive masturbation with “bizarre” rituals etc. are often also called perverse. These activities are performed most frequently by individuals with a heterosexual adult sexual organization, simply because this group is the largest one.

Evidently, the term perversion as it is used conventionally designates different notions belonging to different logical categories. One category deals with *sexuality per se*, the other with *sexuality in actu*. *Sexuality per se* describes aspects of an adult personality, i.e. how sexuality is *organized* within an individual, abstracting from his or her sexual activities. “Regular” sexual orientations – hetero- and homosexuality – and some of the conditions traditionally called “perversions” belong to this category. In contrast, *sexuality in actu* describes *manifest sexual activities* in behavior as well as in fantasy of an individual, independently from how his or her sexuality is organized.

The intermingling of the different logical categories in which the terms perversion and its adjective perverse are used seems to be the origin of the contradiction described at the beginning of this paper.

It is essential therefore to begin by clarifying which aspects of an argumentation belong to which logical category.⁷

4 Sexuality per se – adult sexual organizations

Sexuality per se describes aspects of an adult personality, i.e. how sexuality is *organized* within an individual. For this reason, I propose to designate the existing different forms of sexuality per se as different *adult sexual organizations*. This definition allows putting “regular” forms of sexuality per se – hetero- and homosexuality – and “perverse” forms such as fetishism, sadomasochism, pedophilia etc. on an equal descriptive and psychostructural level. In addition, the term *adult sexual organization* has the advantage of not containing pathologizing or stigmatizing qualities.⁸

4.1 Metapsychological derivation of the term *Adult sexual organizations*

To start with, I will derive the proposed terminology from the following metapsychological considerations: in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud (1905d) conceptualized a *polymorphous perverse disposition* that consists of different *partial drives*.

He named these partial drives either after their source, their aim or their object. I am aware that Freud never spoke of a *homosexual* or a *heterosexual partial drive* and that neither he nor, to my knowledge, anyone else, contemplated a – homosexual or heterosexual – *pedophile partial drive*. Nevertheless, it seems logical to subsume such desires under the partial drives named after their object just as well; as is the case with the fetishist partial drive, for example.

Based on these considerations, I assume that the development of any of the various adult sexual organizations starts *under the lead of a particular partial drive*, stemming from the subject’s polymorphous perverse disposition. If, for example, the sadomasochistic partial drive takes that lead, it directs the sexual development through all the infantile and adolescent stages to a sadomasochistic adult sexual organization. The same applies if the exhibitionistic, the voyeuristic or the fetishist partial drive takes the lead in the development. Moreover, to push this analogy one step further: the development of an adult homosexuality occurs under the lead of the homosexual partial drive, whereas the development of adult heterosexuality takes place under the lead of the heterosexual partial drive. The leading partial drive establishes its priority over the remaining partial drives in either case.

If we accept the fact that “regular” forms of sexuality per se – i.e. hetero- and homosexuality – are on a par with other forms traditionally called “perversions”, it may no longer be adequate to call their germinal forms, the partial drives, *perverse*. Therefore, the term *polymorphous perverse disposition* is no longer really suitable. In an earlier paper (Binswanger, 2011), I already proposed to rename it *disposition*

of *polymorphous partial drives*. In that paper I also dealt with the question of what happens to the partial drives that do not attain the lead in the development of an adult sexual organization. My supposition was that they may remain eroticized, i.e. they keep their erotic potential and serve to enrich sexuality. Other partial drives however may no longer be usable in adult sexual activities. Quite the opposite: Individuals of a particular adult sexual organization generally perceive conscious fantasies and behaviors that are expressions of other possible adult sexual organizations as unpleasurable or even abhorrent. According to Freud (1905d), this also applies to the correspondent partial drives:

(...) these impulses would seem in themselves to be perverse—that is, to arise from erotogenic zones and to derive their activity from instincts which, in view of the direction of the subject's development, can only arouse unpleasurable feelings [author's emphasis].
(p. 178)

Therefore, the partial drives and their representations that are consciously perceived as unpleasurable or even abhorrent must be desexualized during an individual's development. If the desexualization⁹ of those partial drives succeeds, they may enhance the performance of non-sexual activities: The desexualized homosexual partial drive enables heterosexuals to enter into a close friendship or to cooperate well with individuals of the same sex, the desexualized exhibitionistic drive helps us to perform well in front of an audience, the desexualized sadistic partial drive enables us to handle aggression in a constructive manner, the desexualized homo- or heterosexual pedophilic partial drive helps us to relate to children and to feel at ease with them, and so on.

However, if the desexualization of the non-usable partial drives for some reason *fails*, there are two possible outcomes:

Either, their representations will remain *preconscious* and therefore accessible to consciousness in a sexualized state. This results in a specific form of “phobia” towards persons or situations arousing “*unpleasurable feelings*”. Paradigmatic for this phenomenon may be what we call *homophobia*, a character trait in individuals usually experienced as ego-syntonic by themselves. Analogous reactions may be observed as *heterophobia* in certain homosexuals,¹⁰ or in other specific situations wherein expressions of any adult sexual organization trigger *unpleasurable feelings*. An actual mass-phenomenon seems to be what might be called *pedophobia*. Pedophobia can easily be rationalized by legitimate concerns for protecting chil-

dren against possible abusers. Nevertheless, quite often, the underlying fanatic trait in rejecting pedophile individuals reveals a kind of phobia. This furnishes strong evidence for the existence of a pedophile partial drive – or, to be more specific, of a homosexual pedophile and a heterosexual pedophile partial drive.

Or, – herewith I shall outline the other possible outcome of a failed desexualization – the representations of partial drives consciously perceived as *unpleasurable* are *repressed in their sexualized state* and hence remain *unconscious*. The corresponding non-sexual activities of the individual are neurotically impaired. In such cases, psychoanalysis speaks of “latent homosexuality” or “latent sado-masochism” or describes the results as an impairment of curiosity, as an exhibitionistic or aggressive inhibition and so forth. Clinical experience suggests that there are corresponding *latent* neurotic syndromes for every partial drive which is repressed in a sexualized state, regardless of whether it is *named* after the sexual object (homo- or heterosexuality, fetishism or homo- and heterosexual pedophilia), after its sexual aim (sadistic and masochistic or exhibitionistic and voyeuristic adult sexual organizations) or after its the source (oral, anal or genital). Accordingly, there must be corresponding syndromes of *latent heterosexuality* in male and female homosexuals, too, and possibly also in other adult sexual organizations such as homo- and heterosexual pedophilia. Slightly modifying Freud’s claim that “neurosis is, as it were, the negative of perversion” (1905d, p. 165), all the neurotic syndromes mentioned above can be regarded as *the negative of adult sexual organizations*¹¹, with adult sexual organizations serving as the corresponding *positive*. Hence, if we conceive adult sexual organizations as the positive of certain neurotic syndromes, they neither can be of neurotic origin – because the positive cannot be the negative at the same time –, nor can they be “healed” through the unraveling of dynamically unconscious conflicts.

Accordingly, the definition of *adult sexual organizations* that I postulate can also be justified by this particular view on the theory of neuroses: All of the “latent” neurotic syndromes are *pari passu*; they all have a similar history of origins, they all appear equally on the same descriptive, dynamic psychogenetic and psychostructural level – regardless of whether their correspondent positive (i.e. adult sexual organization) is heterosexuality, homosexuality, fetishism, sadomasochism, exhibitionism, voyeurism, pedophilia and so on.

In fact, it was precisely this focus on the theory of neuroses that eventually led me to the current reconsideration of the concept of perversions.

4.2 Further considerations regarding adult sexual organizations

It is true that Freud commonly uses the term *sexual organization* in a different way, i.e. to distinguish *different developmental levels*: pregenital and genital sexual organizations:

We shall give the name of “pregenital” to organizations of sexual life in which the genital zones have not yet taken over their pre-dominant part. (Freud, 1905d, p. 198)

In contrast to this definition, the proposed term *adult sexual organization* designates different conditions on the *same* developmental level, the adult one. There is one single occasion - when Freud dealt with a case of female homosexuality – where he uses the term *genital organization of sexuality*¹² in the sense of homosexual versus heterosexual orientation:

Further unfavorable features in the present case were the facts that the girl was not in any way ill (she did not suffer from anything in herself, nor did she complain of her condition) and that the task to be carried out did not consist in resolving a neurotic conflict but in converting one variety of the genital organization of sexuality [author’s emphasis] into the other. (Freud, 1920a, p. 150–151)

In my view, this specific use of the term *sexual organization* can easily be expanded to all forms of sexuality *per se*. By its name, it refers to how sexuality is organized in an individual. It corresponds to Freud’s use of the term “organization of the partial drives” (1905d, p. 197). The word “genital” is omitted because it suggests a “primacy of the genitals”, i.e. the subordination of the partial drives under genital goals in the service of reproduction, a normative notion that should be avoided. As I am looking for a notion designating different sexual organizations *on the same developmental level*, I add *adult* to *sexual organization*.

Hence, *sexuality per se* encompasses all adult sexual organizations. In this category, no differentiation is made between “normal”, “healthy” or “higher psychostructural levels” versus “abnormal”, “pathological” or “lower psychostructural levels”. Adult sexual organizations hitherto called “perversions” such as fetishism, sadomasochism, pedophilia and so on are put on the same descriptive and psychostructural level as “regular” adult sexual organizations such as homo- and heterosexuality. Consequently, there is no use of the terms “perversion” or “perverse”

in this category. This opens up the possibility of depathologizing all adult sexual organizations, regardless of whether *their practice* is unacceptable for others or society in general, as in the case of exhibitionism or, to an even higher degree, pedophilia.¹³

Using the term *adult sexual organization* allows us to describe e.g. an individual with a heterosexual adult sexual organization, but presenting a lower or pre-genital level of personality structure, or another individual with a pedophile adult sexual organization, presenting a higher or genital level of personality structure.

These considerations led me to the proposition of the same abstinence in explaining the psychogenesis of *all* adult sexual organizations as is usual with heterosexuality. The conservative role psychoanalysis played during the process that ultimately ended in the depathologization of homosexuality may have been motivated by the “need” felt by us to understand and explain its psychogenesis; the proposed abstinence regarding all adult sexual organizations may contribute to avoid this trap vis-à-vis all adult sexual organizations.

4.3 *How do the different adult sexual organizations arise?*

Proposing the same abstinence in explaining the *psychogenesis* of sexuality per se in *all* adult sexual organizations implies that there is no need to look for specific burdens and conflicts in order to explain their genesis. On the contrary: adult sexual organizations may explain the possibility and capacity to neutralize or compensate those burdens and conflicts.

If we accept that there are no *psychogenetic* causes, how then could the different adult sexual organizations arise? They exist in a more or less fixated form, as if they were inborn. Certainly, genetic or epigenetic¹⁴ influences may play a role in their genesis, but the fact that monozygotic twins are often discordant where adult sexual organisation is concerned (cf. e.g. Långström et al., 2010) excludes a *purely and direct* genetic transmission. Similar studies also exclude *exclusively* environmental causes. We are used to suppose that the two causal factors intertwine. We consider the *disposition of polymorphous partial drives* as rather to be inborn, whereas environmental burdens or infantile conflict processing might determine the development of an organization of those partial drives. Nevertheless, according to the core conceptual framework of this paper, the search for such psychogenetic explanations has proved rather misleading.

It is useful here to refer to Robert Stoller (1973) who repeatedly used the term *imprinting*. In imprinting,

the central nervous system is modified without the interposition of psychic processes in the infant. (Stoller, 1973, p. 218, author's emphasis)

Stoller based his argument on Heinz Lichtenstein (1961), who used it as an analogy:

Obviously, imprinting as innate releaser mechanisms, if applied to human development, is used as an analogy. What makes this analogy possible are two striking similarities in early phases of individuation. First, that certain responses on the part of the infant to the mother seem to be restricted to "critical phases of ontogenesis"; secondly, that the effect appears to be irreversible. (pp. 204 ff.)

There is a very serious objection against transferring the term imprinting from animal research to human development: a possible biologism, which regularly implies reactionary tendencies. Meanwhile, I know of two psychoanalytic authors who seek to reverse this reactionary tendency: Harold Lincke (1981) and Werner Fessler (1993).

In a time when research on the interactions between genetics and environment was not yet on today's level, Lincke stated:

The popular question how much behavior is innate and how much is environmental is a mistaken one; it prevents us from investigating those mental phenomena that indeed are environmental, but behave as if they were genetically determined. This part of the psyche alone forms the basis of human characteristics. (p. 151, author's translation)

His findings may be *interpreted* as follows: Innate "orders of the id", in sensitive developmental periods, lead to spontaneous acts of "finding" or "inventing" something, which is attached to certain objects or certain aims. Contrary to the ideas how learning processes are conceptualized, this happens according to Picasso's statement: "I do not seek, I find." Lincke supposes that this mechanism is responsible for the creating of symbols and in the same time for the "discovery" of a sexual organization. And this coincides with Stoller's use of the term and his explicit statement that a modification – maybe less of the central nervous system per se,

but of the organization of the partial drives within the developing personality of individuals – takes place *without the interposition of psychic processes* in the infant.

Werner Fessler (1993) investigated this further:

Imprinting opens a new dimension of freedom in choosing objects. In contrast to the genetically fixed object situated in the phylogenetic other world, the object of imprinting is found in the ontogenetic here and now, but without a "right of return". (p. 176)

Such an interpretation of imprinting makes any possible suspicion of biologism inapplicable. Furthermore, the infantile precursors of adult sexual organization do not appear as a pathology, but as "an early act of human creativity". These acts may even be able to neutralize or compensate burdens and conflicts arising within a specific environment. If e.g. one sibling "finds" a heterosexual and the other a homosexual or fetishist sexual organization, it strengthens the delimitation of each other, avoiding the danger of symbiosis. The reason for children to "find" one or another mode of imprinting corresponds to Fessler's "piece of freedom without a right of return". Another piece of freedom may consist in the *extent* to which individuals let themselves be imprinted or not. This "turning of switches" determines if an adult sexual organization is fixated very early and distinctly or if a playful handling of different organizations remains possible and desirable in later life.

5 Sexuality in actu – manifest sexual activities

In this section, the *viewpoint shifts* from how sexuality is *organized* in an individual to how it *happens* – not only in behavior, but also in fantasy. From this point of view, it will be possible to distinguish what kinds of sexual activities may be called perverse and what kinds not in a new way.

Fonagy (2006) sums up an overview of psychoanalytic literature of perversions as follows:

(...) like any human activity, sexuality is seen as serving multiple functions, and it is the service to which sexuality is put that indicates a fundamentally maladaptive character. Thus sexuality in the service of psychic survival, the substitution of a pseudo-relatedness for genuine intimacy, the disguising of hostility or hatred, or the erotization of aggression that could be triggered by intimacy – in

these contexts modern psychoanalysis considers sexuality to be perverse. (p. 13)

This statement clearly addresses sexuality as an activity, i.e. manifest *sexuality in actu*. I therefore reason as follows:

Every manifest adult sexual activity has both sexual and non-sexual functions. The sexual function serves the satisfaction of sexual drives. The non-sexual functions serve various other needs or urges, such as:

1. Release of aggression
2. Stabilization of the sense of autonomy
3. Stabilization of the narcissistic equilibrium
4. Covering up of grief
5. Experiencing intimacy, warmth, care, comfort, symbiosis
6. Compensation of depression
7. Staging and working out conflicts from the oedipal past
8. Staging and working out of early infantile stains
9. Compensation of trauma

All these non-sexual functions play important roles in “normal” sexual activities. They may be indispensable for triggering sexual appetite or arousal, for shaping the scene of foreplay and eventually for orgasm (Stoller, 1976; Schorsch, 1978). If, with the assistance of non-sexual functions, the satisfaction of sexual drives succeeds, the non-sexual functions finally submit to drive satisfaction. Hence, drive satisfaction attains priority. This is the situation called *priority of drive satisfaction* in a nutshell. If this happens, sexual fantasies and activities *cannot be regarded as perverse*, regardless of their possible “perverse” appearance.¹⁵

A paradigmatic example of such a case is described by Avgi Saketopoulou (2014):

Adam was 4 years into his analytic treatment when he described the following experience. He and his husband had visited a bath-house. As Adam hung in a sling a stranger walked into the room. The stranger’s whole being screamed abjection: he wore a yellowed, stained jockstrap, his hair was noticeably greasy, and he reeked of cigarettes. Adam found this man ugly, instantly repulsive. He began to feel queasy. However, whereas his husband left the room

in disgust, Adam stayed behind, 'torn between my repulsion and the desire opening up in my body.' My patient not only had sex with the abject stranger but also, he told me, it was the most fabulous, memorable sexual encounter he had ever experienced. When orgasm came, "I exploded into thousands of tiny pieces, was hanging out in space like overheated pieces of dust". (p. 254)

Whatever the unconscious and possibly non-sexual motives might have been that "set the stage" for this intense sexual experience, it most certainly ended in the satisfaction of sexual drives, an experience by which Adam was "transformed" (p 255). I agree with the author that analysts must be open to the progressive, creative potential of these kinds of experience. Yet, unlike the author, I think they are not of a perverse nature – that is *not perverse* in the clinical use of the term I am suggesting in this paper.

In other cases, one (or several) of the non-sexual needs become the main motivation to engage in sexual fantasies and behavior. They make use of sexuality in order to attain their own goals. These non-sexual needs are often very pressing and urgent, and their sexualization may appear as an addiction-like dependency on sexual activities (Reiche, 2005). Nevertheless, the priority definitely lies on the non-sexual functions, whereas drive satisfaction submits itself to this priority. These needs or urges *involuntarily* lead to symptomatic forms of sexual activities.¹⁶ This is the situation shortly called *priority of non-sexual functions*, as an expression of a *pathology called perversion* of a minor or more severe degree. Satisfaction of sexual drives may continue to play an important role, but one usually observes that in the long run perverse fantasy and behavior become less and less satisfactory and therefore result in an additional burden for the person affected.

A paradigmatic example of such a case is represented by a 28 years old man, as described by Fritz Morgenthaler (1988 [1974]):

The patient is a manifest homosexual with a masochistic perversion. He seeks out rough, undistinguished partners, teases them to pursue him, and submits – often under risky circumstances, with ritualized defense acts and in great pain – to anal intercourse, thereby experiencing orgasm. In analysis, he told extensively, haltingly, and in a low voice, of his desperation about his sex life (...). I told him I felt he was suffering more from a dreadful sense of emptiness and an inner lack of relationship than from his sexual

disturbances. I seemed to understand that, to the contrary, it was precisely the sexual contacts that removed the frightening sense of emptiness, and that he therefore felt a sense of relief even though his sexual experiences were always painful for him. (p. 19–20)

Evidently, the compensation of a narcissistic problem had the priority in the manifest masochistic sexual behavior of this patient. Morgenthaler then describes the subsequent steps in the psychoanalytic treatment in the course of which the patient's masochistic behavior abated and eventually led to a surprising outcome:

(...) for the first time in his life [he] found a gentle partner with whom he was able to enjoy homosexual love. (p. 23)

I consider this patient's masochistic sexual behavior to be perverse because the non-sexual function had priority over sexual satisfaction, despite the fact that it ended in orgasm. Yet it was "always painful for him" and – of capital importance – it faded away through psychoanalytic treatment.

It remains the task of psychoanalytic scrutiny to accomplish the required clinical work on the different sexual fantasies and behaviors of the different analysands, as illustrated by the paradigmatic casuistic examples, mentioned above, which I selected from psychoanalytic literature. Despite the fact that the sexual behavior of those two patients resembles one another on the surface – masochistic intercourse with accidental, gross "partners", performed by men with a homosexual adult sexual organization – analysis reveals that, in the depth, the sexual behavior of the two patients is of contrary character. Hence, any attempt at clinically "rating" such behavior will merely lead to fallacies. In fact, *the same sexual activity* may occur in one individual under the priority of a non-sexual need, is hence an expression of perversion, whereas in another individual it occurs under the priority of sexual drive satisfaction, hence should not be considered as perverse.

Regarding one and the same individual, in a certain situation sexual activities may not be called perverse if the satisfaction of sexual drives has priority, whereas in other situations the very same activity may be considered as perverse, if non-sexual needs have priority over drive satisfaction.

It follows that my conceptual proposal must not be *imposed* on complex *descriptive or clinical realities of individuals*. It does not aim at any kind of "rating" those realities. It just furnishes a theoretical framework of how psychoanalytic scrutiny may lead to gradually better understand those realities. In other words:

My proposal may only *shift the conceptual framework* of individual psychoanalytic scrutiny from a confusing one to one hopefully less confusing. By adopting this shift, both partners of a psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic process could approach a “value-free” working attitude more easily. This may avoid unnecessary tensions and confusion in our work.

Furthermore, priorities and subordinations of sexual and non-sexual functions may frequently shift, according to intra- and inter-individual psychodynamic and psychoeconomical influences. This fact allows subsuming the notion of perversion under the psychodynamic and -economic viewpoint and avoids rigid classification.

And last but not least, the conceptual proposal helps to distinguish which sexual activity can and should be an issue of psychoanalytic therapy and which not.

Again: It is beyond all question that sexual as well as non-sexual functions always coexist in every sexual activity; the question that arises is which function is the most important one in a given sexual activity or, in other words, which function has the priority over the other *coexisting* functions that are *submitted to* this given priority. Such an approach applies what Wälder (1936) identified as a “principle of multiple functions”. In addition, Schorsch et al. (1990 [1985]) quote Stolorow (1979):

The priority in clinical work is to select among these “multiple functions” those which have “motivational priority”. (p. 26)

One question remains regarding *sexuality in actu*: *How are sexual and non-sexual functions configured within the individual sexual activities?*

The sexual function i.e. drive satisfaction, is configured in the manner in which *sexuality* in an individual is *organised* – regardless of whether the sexual function has priority or not.

The specific non-sexual functions are selected and configured in the manner in which the personality of an individual is structured and in the way its conflicts and biographical burdens have been coped with. The more successful the coping, the more likely non-sexual functions will submit themselves to sexual drive-satisfaction. In this case, sexual activities normally are not of a distinct compulsive or obsessive nature. The contradiction between drive-satisfaction and the ability to love, which is inherent in the nature of human sexuality from start to finish, can then, as a rule, be resolved in a constructive way.

The less successful however the coping with conflicts and biographical burdens was, the more likely the non-sexual functions will override the drive-satis-

faction. The structural level of personality organization and the extent to which an individual might have been traumatized will determine which one of the non-sexual functions will claim priority.

In personality organizations operating on a higher structural level, the unconscious staging of sexual activities will be determined by prevailing mental stress – an object loss that was not mourned, for example – or unresolved conflicts of the oedipal stage. In personality organizations operating on a lower structural level, the forming of sexual activities will be determined primarily by their deficits and/or their attempts at compensation. If a narcissistic personality disorder (Kohut) takes centre stage, we will find what Morgenthaller called the “filling-function” (Morgenthaller, 1988 [1974]); in specific forms of borderline personality disorder (Kernberg) we’ll find the necessity to resolve conflicts by alloplastic action or to transfer unbearable tension to others; in the context of the experience of traumatic early separation anxieties (Greenacre, 1996 [1979]), we find corresponding compensation efforts; in the event of traumatization this will be an identification with the aggressor, which leads to the passing on of the trauma; and in cases of severe neglect structure, a longing for intimacy, warmth and symbiosis will prevail. This list could easily be extended.

As for the implementation of many of these functions, a heightened admixture of aggression plays an important part; it can be discharged together with the subordinated libidinous function and lead to extreme forms of destructiveness – the “erotic form of hatred” (Stoller, 1975). Many of these non-sexual functions are driven by anxieties – in some cases to the point of severe disintegration anxieties. This lends, as it has been described again and again, a compulsive or addictive character to the corresponding sexual activities, an urge “not to be delayed” (Reiche, 2005).

6 Comparing the proposal with a widely accepted psychoanalytic view

What is new in the proposed reconsideration of the term perversion? Let us take Stanley J. Coen's contribution to Nersessian's and Kopff's (1996) Textbook of Psychoanalysis as an illustrative example of a widely accepted approach. Coen distinguishes *perversions* in the narrower sense from *bits of perverse behavior* occurring in subjects with a heterosexual orientation. This allows him to give the following definition:

Perversion is regarded as an adult psychopathological formation [author's emphasis], consolidated through adolescent develop-

ment, that is obligatory for the person with a perversion so that he or she can function sexually. (p. 382)

Coen's definition obviously addresses "sexuality per se", i.e. possible adult sexual organizations such as fetishism, sadomasochism; exhibitionism, voyeurism, and pedophilia. But the word "psychopathological" makes clear that these adult sexual organizations are viewed as something different from hetero- and homosexuality, considered as "regular" sexual orientations. There is no room for them to be depathologized. But what happens if the words "psychopathological formation" is replaced by "adult sexual organization"? The word "perversion" doesn't fit anymore, because the definition fits perfectly for all adult sexual organizations, hetero- and homosexual ones included:

Heterosexuality and homosexuality are adult sexual organizations, consolidated through adolescent development, that are obligatory for the person (...) so that he or she can function sexually.

From a *structural* viewpoint, Coen distinguishes higher level perverse functioning from lower-level functioning, as proposed by Kernberg (1992, 2006 [1997]). However, this distinction cannot be used *specifically* for a definition of "perverse" functioning because also heterosexual or homosexual functioning are commonly distinguished in this way. And – as argued in section 5 – every sexual activity, apart from the satisfaction of sexual drives, contains some defensive functions or serves compensatory goals.

Coen also presents a definition of what he calls "bits of perverse behavior":

In the looser attitude, bits of perverse behavior that serve important defensive requirements, whether or not they are obligatory for the patient's sexual functioning, are considered to be the equivalent of perversion . (p. 382–383)

This definition, in contrast to the former one, clearly belongs to "sexuality in actu". Evidently, "bits of perverse behavior" may occur in individuals with every kind of adult sexual organization. A common – constructed – example could be a happily married heterosexual man who, shortly after having loving sexual intercourse with his wife, has to go to a prostitute compulsively. The intimacy with his wife primarily serves sexual drive satisfaction and hence should not be considered

as perverse; but, at the same time, it might trigger fears of symbiosis and of a loss of his inner autonomy. For this reason, the subsequent visit to the prostitute serves primarily the non-sexual function of restoring his self-delimitation and his sense of autonomy. For this reason, it may be considered as a “bit of perverse behavior”.

Again, Cohen's use of this term suggests that corresponding behaviors always have to be considered as pathological. But there is another possibility: Activities that he calls “bits of perverse behavior” may enrich hetero- or homosexual activities. A common example is the desire to show-off or watch in “normal” sexual activities – bits of exhibitionism – voyeurism – or the use of some latex gadgets as bits of fetishism. Kernberg (1992) has shown that sadomasochistic fantasies and activities frequently are a part of “normal” loving relationships.

The following two case examples aim to illustrate this difference. They may add to the plausibility of the reconsidered notion of perversion, including its practical value.¹⁷

7 A pedophile adult sexual organization with a neurotic mode of conflict processing¹⁸

Many years ago, I analyzed a now retired, married man who had worked as a dentist in state schools. His professional performance was highly respected by his colleagues with whom he had stable professional relationships and often good friendships. He was a pedophile but never had legal problems as he avoided any real abuse of children – before, during and after our analysis. He loved his wife and was able to have sex with her, because during intercourse, he himself and his wife allowed him to indulge in his pedophile fantasies. During his adolescence, he found a psychoanalyst to whom he could tell everything. This gave him vitally important support for many years. The analyst, however, used to interpret his pedophile sexual organization as a defense against excessive heterosexual fears that he attributed to a pathological relationship with his mother and excessive castration fears. The patient regularly was sensitive to these interpretations, he showed depression and a loss of vitality in the following days. He felt that the analyst wanted to “analyze away” the core of his sexuality, the best and only one that he had. Many years after having stopped seeing this analyst, he sought analysis with me because of severe panic attacks accompanied by depression.

Triggered by the media hype about pedophilia, he developed complicated mental constructs about how his bosses might detect his love for schoolboys. As a youth he had undertaken trips to an Asian country two or three times, hoping to engage in intercourse with child prostitutes. He did, however, never accomplish

this because he could not bring himself to do the boys any harm, as he felt real love for them.

Within transference, he always tried to encourage me to pathologize his pedophile sexual organization. I often answered by showing him specific parallels between the development towards pedophilia and the development to, e.g., heterosexuality, as proposed in this paper. My "clarifications" were regularly followed by laughter and a clearing of his depressive mood. I considered this form of laughter to be an expression of a transference reaction, allowing him to displace his pedophile sexual drives in a desexualized form on me. Eventually, I interpreted this to him, which helped him bring back genuine vitality to his life.

He told me about his secret masturbation rituals: Using marionettes that he had created himself, he staged self-invented fairy tales, which ended in fantasized pedophile relationships. He sometimes even performed marionette plays at annual fairs. These performances, in contrast to his masturbation rituals, did not contain pedophile scenes, but scenes of preadolescent children being bullied cruelly by an adolescent boy. In these stories, the courageous children would fight back and outsmart the older boy, managing to pull down the trousers of their abuser, thus embarrassing him both for his nudity and foolishness. The joyous laughter of his little spectators would provoke a joyous long-lasting sexual arousal that, later on at home, was brought to orgasm by masturbation. I considered the sadomasochistic aspect of the performance to be "a bit of perversion" belonging to the forepleasure of the pedophile satisfaction through masturbation.

"Confessing" this to me was preceded by intensive anxiety and missed sessions. In contrast to his fears, I approved this ingenious staging, by which he temporarily relieved himself from his retained drive tension in a distanced connection to his desired objects: The children received adapted infantile sexual satisfaction in their joyous laughter that followed the detrousering of the tormentor; the patient eventually experienced full satisfaction of his adult sexuality within an intense but unphysical connection to the children in the audience. There was no abuse and no "confusion of tongues between adults and children" (Ferenczi, 1933).

Some basic remarks regarding the ethical dilemma of dealing in practice and theory with pedophile clients seem appropriate, especially when we strive to depathologize their adult sexual organization.

According to a certain consensus, perversion and regular sexual behavior is distinguished by the *result* of sexual behavior: Is it doing harm to others or not.¹⁹ Whereas this distinction may be useful on a purely descriptive or moral or

juridical level, it might at the same time be misleading on a logical as well as on a clinical level.

It is true that sexual activities of pedophiles, and – to a lesser degree of exhibitionists and voyeurs to –, are harmful. Especially *pedophile behavior* generally implies a certain amount of ruthlessness towards desired and often beloved objects. Ferenczi made this clear as early as 1933. In consequence of sexual incidents with adults, children are often heavily traumatized. These harmful effects of adult sexual activities involving children often suggest that there must be a heightened element of aggression not only in pedophile *sexuality in actu*, but already in the unconscious factors contributing to the genesis of a pedophile adult sexual organization *per se*. Is the *erotic form of hatred* (Stoller, 1975) not evident in these conditions? I consider this view to be a fallacy which is a consequence of the moral difficulties we experience in adopting a scientific attitude in facing these conditions. The fact that many pedophiles abstain from abusive behavior *exactly because of the harmful effects on their beloved objects* suggests that a heightened level of aggression should not be attributed to the pedophile sexuality *per se* – i.e. to a pedophile sexual organization – but to sexual activities involving children as they happen. And those activities are not exclusively performed by pedophiles but often by other individuals presenting polymorphous forms of perverse sexual activities.

The fact that those activities must be prohibited does not automatically imply that pedophile sexual organizations are pathological. Intermingling pathological and criminal behavior may lead to a fallacy, not only in psychoanalysis. Robberies are also prohibited, in spite of the fact that they need not always be considered pathological.

A pedophile sexual organization *per se* is neither a crime nor an erotic form of hatred or another defensive formation, but rather a misfortune because there is no possibility to discharge sexual drives within an object-relationship. Therefore, pedophiles must handle a higher level of drive tension than well-structured homo- or heterosexuals, a fact that may cause an additional amount of frustration-aggression or neurotic symptom-formation. But this possible additional amount of aggression is rather a consequence than a cause of a pedophile sexual organization.

I will continue with the case-presentation: Years after having finished analysis with me, the patient returned. He had got into an anxious and agitated mental state after the announcement that the apartment building he lived in would be renovated. He worried that a hideout in his cellar, where he had inconspicuously placed his marionettes and some texts with his sexual fantasies would be detected

by construction workers. He had stored the material in a waste bag hoping it would be disposed of without detection in case something happened to himself.

Shortly before he returned, Judith Le Soldat (1994) had published a book in which she widened the concept of penis envy for both sexes. According to her theory, boys as well as girls in the infantile-genital phase wish to be equipped with both, penis *and* vagina, in order to be able to satisfy either active or passive drive aims (Gsell and Zürcher, 2011²⁰). In frustration over the lack of one of the genitals, the child fantasizes about robbing his or her father's penis. In unconscious fantasy, she/he flees with this bounty. Fearing retribution from the father the child must then develop a fantasized way of hiding this bounty.²¹

After having read this I recalled a childhood-story the patient had told me several times. His mother had given him a ticket and sent him to the cinema. By coincidence, he met his father on the way, who became suspicious as to why his son was alone. Leaving his child there, his father ran home to discover his wife in the company of another man. He threw the visitor out, his furious shouts were heard throughout the whole neighborhood. He thus made a fool of himself as it was not clear whether or not the visiting man was indeed a lover. This event led to the separation of the parents. From this moment on, the mental power of the father over his son was broken.

Unconsciously, this seemed to work as a screen memory for the fantasized robbing of the father's penis, which he had to hide for the rest of his life. He deferred the corresponding fears onto his pedophile adult sexual organization. The two fit perfectly together: both must be hidden by this patient, one in fantasy and the other in reality. So he had hidden the traces of his pedophilia in a waste bag in the cellar, a 'substitute by displacement' of the fantasized penis robbed from his father. The crisis was triggered by the danger that construction workers might detect the fantasized "bounty" in form of the signs of his real pedophilia that substituted it.

For many years, the patient had had the experience with his former psychoanalyst who tried to "analyze away" his pedophilia. This would have meant snatching the prey from him. He had repeatedly tried to induce me to do exactly the same thing; and he repeatedly felt relieved when I left "the best he had" untouched. Up until this point, we had acted out this complex instead of understanding and interpreting it.

The neurotic symptoms and the corresponding fantasies described above existed *apart and independently* from the pedophile adult sexual organization of this patient, evidently without any function for the psychogenesis of this organization. But his adult sexual organization suited very well to serve as a substitute

by displacement and was not changed in any way by working through his neurotic conflict.

The essence of this case may be summarized as follows:

1. There is a pedophile adult sexual organization on a genital level of the development of the drives and the ego, i.e. on a high structural level.
2. Sexual fantasy and behavior was in no way perverse, because drive satisfaction had the priority over non-sexual functions of manifest sexual activity.
3. The neurotic symptoms and the corresponding fantasies described above didn't express themselves by manifest sexual fantasy or behavior. They existed independently of the pedophile adult sexual organization.

8 Extramarital promiscuity as a perverse sexual activity

A 55 year-old tour guide was referred to me by a marital therapist. She wanted to continue working with his wife alone, because he caused his wife too much stress in joint counseling. He himself admitted that he had traumatized her throughout their 35 years of marriage. In the first years, he had even occasionally raped her. Later on, she suffered because of his repetitive extramarital affairs. He regularly tried to cover them up with flimsy excuses until he had to confess them. Then, he terminated the affairs instantly and promised to change his behavior, but never succeeded. Within the affairs he often tried out different sexual practices. Once, he was arrested for exhibitionism. On the other hand, the couple repeatedly undertook adventurous trips of several months all over the world to explore new tours to guide. They spent a wonderful time together on these trips with the result that the wife regularly forgave him.

The man held different positions in the middle management of touristic enterprises but he never was able to keep them for long periods, due to his difficult character. He succeeded to maintain a labile psychological equilibrium with the help of his constant promiscuity until about six months before he was referred to me. He once again had lost a good job where he felt bullied and pushed out, and, more to the point, his wife grew tired of his exploits and was no longer willing to forgive him.

The patient was raised in a medium-sized town as the second of three sons of an alcoholic father who committed suicide some years before the patient sought treatment. He maltreated the patient's brothers with complex and intense forms of sexualized violence, whereas he idolized the patient. The father forgave him everything and was jealous of the patient's young wife whom he tormented with sexual harassment. The mother was a religious sectarian. She was repeatedly

hospitalized for religious delusions in which she also involved her children. The godfather of the patient showered him with expensive presents in exchange for sexual services from the beginning of his school age. He was disgusted but never felt traumatized by this. The infringements were felt as simply part of the general deficient emotional climate within the family that comprehensively hampered his personal development.

The patient gave the impression of an “as-if” personality (Deutsch, 1934, 1942; Keable & Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1999) whose guilt feelings, self-incriminations and insights were not convincing. His power to seduce women seemed inexhaustible. To my surprise, he authentically entered into the process of a psychoanalytic psychotherapy. I did not give the patient the illusion – nor did I have it myself – that he should eventually be able to cease his affairs. His professional performance as a tour guide was excellent and, contrary to the fears of his wife, he never had affairs within this role. After a while, I got the impression that he really loved his wife, in contrast to the other women. I began to confront him with his “as-if” attitude and interpreted it as a chronic defense rooted in his character. He became able to give it up from time to time and even seemed to be grateful to me for confronting him. Like this, a good emotional rapport was established.

Following the principle that patients should be considered as healthy as possible (Morgenthaler, 2005 [1978]), I focused less on the heavy disturbed and perverse manifestations of his personality, but rather on those parts which were able to compensate the pathologies and to stabilize his emotional equilibrium. The first step involved interpreting the manifest drive satisfaction in his affairs as a latent satisfaction of the super-ego. The compulsion to confess and the need to be punished (Reik, 1959 [1925]) became accessible to his consciousness.

Considering the heavy pathologies of his childhood home I once asked the patient where the healthy sides of his personality might stem from. “They come from my grandfather”, he answered spontaneously and decisively. The grandfather had a little farm 40 km away from his childhood home. From age twelve on, the patient visited him by bicycle and spent his vacations with him – an impressive autonomous and sportive performance as the route to the farm was entirely uphill. On the way up, out of a mood of pleasant anticipation, he regularly shoplifted or committed other small misdeeds. By the time he arrived his grandfather would be waiting for him, already having been informed of his offences by phone. He would give him a beating as punishment and then lock him in a small room. After some hours, his grandfather would return with a glass of fresh milk, bread, butter and a smile to free him: Everything was good again! These moments of authentic for-

givenness had been the patient's greatest childhood joy. He had not been conscious of the fact that he committed the offences in order to relive those moments and to construct a predictable and reliable relationship with his grandfather. It became clear that he was repeating this behavior with his wife. His affairs were the new version of his childhood misdeeds. They served in a paradoxical way to maintain his fragile capacity to love his wife.

We focused on the adolescent's efforts to create a reliable object-relationship and the capacity to love, "with a little help from his friend", the grandfather. This activity was later displaced, as a leading function of his sexuality, into his affairs, and into the relationship with his wife, whom he loved as he had loved his grandfather. Only when she ceased to forgive him, did this form of precarious stabilization of his personality fail. This failure finally forced and also enabled him to enter into a psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy. The psychogenesis of his perverse promiscuity was unraveled and interpreted, and the symptomatology receded. Moreover, more mature and object-directed traits of his personality gained priority over the pathological ones. Having worked through this and other issues, the patient became quieter and more authentic and was able to cease his affairs. Unfortunately, he may already have traumatized his wife too much, and by the end of the therapy, it remained uncertain whether the relationship could be restored or not.

Why is it legitimate to call the escapades of this patient *perverse*? Isn't it a kind of a normal sexual behavior of a heterosexual man?

The patient's escapades can be termed a perversion because a non-sexual function of sexual behavior took priority over drive satisfaction. Apart from this central criterion, other phenomena support the perverse character of his sexual activities. On the clinical level, the escapades of the patient had a clear compulsive character. As a young adult, he even raped his wife several times, maybe transferring the sexual abuse by his godfather to her. One is not surprised that, in the confrontation with a religiously bigoted and psychotic mother and a sexualizing and violent father, the narcissistic development of this patient was not successful, early separation experiences could not be integrated, object-relationships not be established and the challenges of the oedipal situation were in no ways resolved. Neither is it therefore surprising to see an egocentric, unstable, and insecurely bonded "as-if"-personality without consistent emotional depth. Isn't it plausible that this man acts "the erotic form of hatred" (Stoller, 1975) in his object relations, especially by traumatizing his wife? That he tries to act out his fantasies of grandiosity in his professional career where he cannot but fail, making others responsible

for his failures in an alloplastic mode of conflict resolution? And that he exploits the partners of his affairs, abandoning them without affection when they have “accomplished their duty”?

In contrast to all the unfavorable features, the treatment of this patient was surprisingly easy. This illustrates the central and evident difference between the proposed concepts of perversion and adult sexual organization. The former may be treatable by revealing its pathogenesis. By interpretation and working through, the symptoms may be reduced or even cleared away. Has anyone cleared away an established homosexual, heterosexual or fetishist sexual organization by interpretation and working through its origin? It is true that there are individuals presenting homosexual, heterosexual, sadomasochistic or fetishistic sexual activities that serve as a defense against conflicts issuing of the hitherto hidden adult sexual organization. In such cases, the mentioned sexual activities may clear away through therapy, but then, they were not expressions of sexuality per se, but of a perverse sexuality in actu, because non-sexual functions had priority over drive satisfaction.

Back to my patient: in its course, the treatment resembled more and more a *psychoanalytic focal therapy*. This implies that many important aspects of the case remained unexplored, whereas *one specific* psychogenetic focus was thoroughly explored, interpreted and worked through: The patient’s adult and infantile unconscious struggle to establish *just one* constant and reliable object relationship – as an adult with his wife and in his childhood with his grandfather. The infantile symptom-formation by which he achieved this goal with his grandfather – a ritual of “misdeed – punishment – reconciliation – gratitude” – was repeated in the same pattern with his wife that eventually turned out to be dysfunctional and even traumatizing to her. The mutative effect of the interpretation of these unconscious attempts of conflict resolution and of the reconstruction of their analogy validated this understanding in a coherent way. This was at first surprising, but later on evident for both partners of the therapy.

The essence of this case may be summarized as follows:

1. The patient presented a heterosexual adult sexual organization, along with a lower level personality structure.
2. The *promiscuous sexual behavior* corresponded to a perversion because a non-sexual function of manifest sexual behavior – to stage a new edition of his infantile attempt at constructing a reliable object relationship – took priority over drive satisfaction.

3. Uncovering the unconscious motivation of his promiscuous behavior revealed it to be a symptom formation. Its working through cleared it away and allowed the level of his personality structure to be lifted to a certain degree.

9 A brief look into psychoanalytic literature

Psychoanalysts have proposed a broad variety of psychogenetic concepts explaining adult sexual organizations and perverse fantasy and behavior.

Freud was rather cautious in developing theories about the causes of male and female homosexuality. He stated that his female homosexual patient was not a sick person.

In general, to undertake to convert a fully developed homosexual into a heterosexual does not offer much more prospect of success than the reverse, except that for good practical reasons the latter is never attempted. (Freud, 1920a, p. 151)

In regard to psychogenetic mechanisms of adult sexual organizations traditionally called “perversions”, he considered strong narcissistic character traits and an over-identification with the mother as typical. In a later, short paper (Freud, 1940e [1938]), he described a “splitting” of simultaneously recognizing and denying the fact that women have no penis as the reason for creating a fetish also described the avoidance of women because of excessive castration-anxieties as a possible pathogenesis for male homosexuality. This reasoning dominated mainstream psychoanalysis for all unusual adult sexual organizations until the fifties, e.g. in Fenichel (1945). Since then, different authors have focused their interest on a variety of different psychogenetic, dynamic or functional factors such as release of aggression and hatred (Stoller, 1975; Glasser, 1979; De Masi, 2003 [1999]), stabilization of the narcissistic equilibrium (Morgenthaler, 1988 [1974]), externalization of pathogenic internal objects (Khan, 1979), coping with early separation anxieties or traumata (Greenacre, 1996 [1979]), the dynamic reverberations of bisexual and primal scene fantasies (Mc Dougall, 1995), among others. Kernberg (2006 [1997]) tried to attain a certain order by classifying perversions under the psychostructural viewpoint.

Hence, there is a rich choice of literature with plenty of case presentations from the different currents of psychoanalysis. They all have their value in understanding perverse sexual fantasy and behaviour, i.e. *sexuality in actu*; but in general,

literature of this sort also tries, in most instances, to uncover psychogenetic roots of unusual adult sexual organizations, i.e. of sexuality *per se*. When I am reading cases that try to illustrate a supposed psychogenesis of an unconventional *adult sexual organization*, I am regularly reminded of homo- or heterosexuals who have experienced similar burdens. This is the reason why I plead for the abstinence in explaining the psychogenesis of *sexuality per se*. But as theoretical framework for uncovering the psychogenetic background of perverse forms of *sexuality in actu*, all these theories have their specific value. Unfortunately, the scope is often reduced to *just one* of the mentioned non-sexual functions. One example is Morgenthaler's "filling-theory", another Stoller's "erotic form of hatred" and so on. In fact, when explaining the broad variety of perverse activities, all possible non-sexual functions deserve due consideration.

10 Conclusion

My basic contribution to a new sight on perversions consists in the net distinction of two viewpoints on human sexuality: *sexuality per se* and *sexuality in actu*. The two *viewpoints* are developed separately in this paper, beginning with sexuality *per se* and continuing with sexuality *in actu*.

In sexuality *per se*, the core concept is a *metapsychological* one. Metapsychological considerations result in deducing and justifying the term *adult sexual organization*. It is a term without pathologizing or stigmatizing quality. Hence, the terms *perversion* and *perverse* are not useful anymore *when considering sexuality per se*. According to my proposal, adult sexual organizations encompass, on the same depathologized level, conditions hitherto called "perversions" as well as "regular" sexual orientations, hetero- and homosexuality.

In *sexuality in actu*, the core concept is a *functional* one. It describes the *dynamic* between *sexual* and *non-sexual* functions *that always coexist* in every sexual activity. Perverse and non-perverse sexual fantasy and behavior may be distinguished by exploring, in every singular individual and for all of his or her different sexual activities, whether sexual or non-sexual functions *gain priority* over the other ones. According to my proposal, *non-perverse* sexual activities are characterized by the fact that sexual drive-satisfaction gains priority, whereas in *perverse* sexual activities it is vice-versa: non-sexual functions take priority, whereas sexual drive satisfaction is submitted to this priority. Perverse sexual activities may be performed by individuals of every possible adult sexual organization. In psychoanalytic situations, a psychogenetic understanding of perverse fantasies

and behaviors is often possible and their treatment successful, in contrast to adult sexual organizations.

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Annotations

- 1 Many thanks to Monika Gsell and Markus Zürcher for their support and concrete help revising this paper and to Dagmar Herzog and Sophinette Becker for many useful comments and suggestions.
- 2 This article is published as a supplement to the *Journal für Psychoanalyse* 57 (2016). It is a continuation of a former article (Binswanger, 2011) abstracted in a recent issue of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (Teusch, 2013). The original paper focused mainly on the theory of neuroses. Considerations on perversions were only outlined as a consequence of the new interpretation of Freud's statement "neurosis is, as it were, the negative of perversion". The aim of the present paper is to develop this outline further, while repeating some considerations on the theory of neurosis, as far as necessary for the understanding of the present paper.
- 3 There are multiple efforts to define perversion and to deal with this difficulty. For recent examples cf. Stein (2005), Good (2006), Tuch (2010), Carveth (2010) and Meyer (2011).
- 4 Kernberg (2006 [1997]) addresses this problem and proposes an approach to it.
- 5 Berner (2011, S. 51) and Falardeau (2001, S. 268) also write about "pedophile orientation" or "orientation directed to children". Others suggest: "According to today's understanding, fetishism is, in the realm of sexual orientation, not per se a mental disorder" (http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexueller_Fetischismus); "In reality fetishism is just a[n] orientation on to dead objects (...)" (<http://eng.studentsofboots.com/science2.html>), (both state of 2014.01.24).
- 6 The case examples in section 7 and 8 may give clues to some criteria allowing to distinguish perverse from non-perverse sexual activities.
- 7 As I restrict the term perversion to manifest adult sexual activity, I will not consider expressions like "perverse family climate" etc. For this reason, I also exclude "female perversions" (Welldon, 1988; Kaplan, 1991), as far as they do not regard manifest sexual activity, as e.g. anorexia and bulimia nervosa – in contrast to some forms of kleptomania coming along with sexual excitement or even orgasm.

8 As is the case with terms such as *sexual aberration* or *sexual deviation*, the term *sexual preference* avoids stigmatization but suggests a free and conscious choice that most human beings do not have. *Paraphilic sexual orientation* implies the pathologic attributes inherent in the psychiatric system DSM or of analogous terms in the ICD. Sigusch (2005) proposes *sexual obsession* or *neosexuality* to define non-pathological sexual conditions hitherto called perversions. However, these conditions are too old and well-known to be called *neosexualities*, and various sexual obsessions and “neosexual” activities are most often performed by individuals presenting an adult hetero- or homosexual organization.

9 Freud (1923a [1922]) defined desexualization as the “abandonment of the special sexual aims” (p. 257). I understand this as a continual process: In the beginning, desexualization is related to early aims of infantile sexuality, at a later stage of the development, it applies to sexual aims of a more mature sort. If satisfactory (partial) drives are concerned, their desexualization can be equated with sublimation; if (partial) drives arousing “unpleasurable feelings” are concerned, the “abandonment of the special sexual aims” frees them of their aversive quality.

10 Some of the persistent attitudes in politicized lesbian circles could, to a certain degree, be regarded as an expression of such heterophobia.

11 For more details, cf. (Binswanger, 2011).

12 In the German original, Freud’s use of the term “*Sexualorganisation*” in this particular case is identical to his use of it in the *Three Essays* and other examples.

13 Cf. my basic remarks regarding this problem, inserted in the case-presentation of section 7.

14 For an epigenetic model, cf. Rice, W.R. et al.2012.

15 This restricted use of the terms *perverse* and *perversion* may contrast with certain currents in progressive sexual politics. There are activists who intend to destigmatize sexual activities by using the terms *perverse* and *perversions* in a proactive manner, focusing on their creative potential (c.f. e.g. Saketopoulou, 2014). “Perverse” strategies are also advocated as means either to compensate difficulties in love life, or to enhance joy of life and open-heartedness, or to add something new and unfamiliar to long-lasting intimate relationships in order to spur desire. I share these destigmatizing and depathologizing intentions, and I am in line with their aims, despite the fact that I do not to consider such activities to be perverse. I will try to resolve this denomination problem by putting “perverse” or “perversion” in quotation marks whenever I believe that these terms do not mean perverse from my point of view.

16 There may be other situations where non-sexual motives voluntarily lead sexual activities. A general example: A partner is granted sexual activity in terms of reassuring care and comfort rather than for the satisfaction of one’s sexual drives. Of course, such motives need not to be considered perverse.

17 I am conscious of the fact that colleagues who do not accept the proposed conceptual shift will not find the first example convincing and will look for alternative hypotheses that could explain the psychogenesis of the patient’s pedophile adult sexual organization. However, during the long analyses with the former analyst and with me, many of the possible hypotheses have been scrutinized and turned out to be inappropriate.

18 Parts of this example were already used in (Binswanger, 2011).

19 A tradition going back to Stoller (1975), cf. e.g. Kernberg (2006 [1997]), Tuch (2008, 2010).

20 Abstracted in The Psychoanalytic Quarterly by Teusch (2013).

21 The unconscious fantasy of penis robbery is not new and is mentioned e.g. by Coen (1996).

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