

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 8, 1981

THE PROMOTION HUMAN SEXUALITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

Janet Mills Bentz, University of Oklahoma

ABSTRACT

This paper describes an experiential exercise that enables participants to identify and analyze the dynamics of human sexuality that influence interpersonal relations in organizations. Participants read a short case history in which several aspects of human sexuality emerge as issues. These include:

(1) sensuality, or the enjoyment of the physical body, (2) intimacy, or psychological/emotional closeness and interdependence, (3) identity in both biological and social dimensions, (4) sexualization, or the use of sexuality to influence the attitudes or behavior of others and (5) reproduction issues (Gochros, 1977). Participants individually rank characters in the case history in the order of least to most objectionable and then discuss their rankings, working toward a group consensus.

The overall goals of the exercise are: to promote awareness of the complexity of human sexuality as a factor of influence in the organizational setting and to provide the opportunity for participants to examine their own values and beliefs about the expression of sexuality in organizations.

INTRODUCTION

The complete exercise requires 1½ hours. Any number of people can participate, divided into groups of five to seven members. The exercise requires a room with adequate size and furnishings to accommodate all groups, preferably in circular seating.

Each participant will need: paper and pencils and two handouts, "A Definition of Human Sexuality," and the case history, "The Promotion".

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

1. Introduce the exercise and its purpose; then distribute a copy of "A Definition of Human Sexuality" to each participant. Present a short lecture in which each aspect of human sexuality is discussed, providing examples from experience or observation.
2. Divide the large group into small groups of five to seven members in any way that is convenient.
3. After the small groups are reseated comfortably, distribute a copy of "The Promotion" to each person.
4. Allow participants approximately ten minutes to read "The Promotion" and to fill Out the questionnaire at the end.
5. Announce that the task of each group is to reach consensus in ranking the five characters in the case history from "least objectionable" (1) to "most objectionable" (5) and to reach consensus on what Carol should do. Instruct participants to disclose as fully as possible their rationale for each ranking decision they made, especially in terms of the expression of human sexuality they perceived.

Alert participants that their values and beliefs are likely to underlie their decisions and encourage them to articulate these values and beliefs as clearly as possible.

6. After sufficient sharing, discussion, and consensus testing have taken place, reassemble the entire group and ask a spokesperson from each group to report their consensus (or lack thereof). Then, if time permits, encourage all participants to discuss their feelings and reactions to the entire exercise in the small groups again. If time is limited, ask for reactions and responses in the large group, encouraging short Statements from many people.

7. Conclude the exercise with a short discussion of the range of values, beliefs, choices, and rationales that emerged in the groups as participants examined the ways in which human sexuality is expressed in organizations.

APPENDIX I

A DEFINITION OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

Human sexuality as a factor of influence in organizations is a topic that has had relatively little attention in the literature on organizational behavior, human resource management, and personnel administration. There seems to be a widespread assumption that the expression of human sexuality in the workplace is inappropriate; hence, people tend to deny, excuse, ignore, or moralize those dynamics or issues involving human sexuality. The position taken here is that the expression of human sexuality (as defined by Gochros, 1977) is inevitable in organizations, and that an understanding of sexual dynamics is useful in explaining particular aspects of interpersonal and organizational behavior. The assumption that sexuality is something people can put aside at work is challenged by a growing awareness that sexual needs, attractions, intimacy, and continuing identity development are integral and inevitable aspects of interpersonal relations for men and women who work together.

Harvey Gochros points out that human sexuality is influenced by anatomical, physiological, psychological, and cultural factors, along with age, health, gender, physical condition, personality, socioeconomic reference groups, and legal restrictions. He stresses that sexual functioning must be viewed relative to the specific social environment in which it exists. Work organizations constitute one such social environment. He defines human sexuality in terms of the following five interrelated aspects:

1. Sensuality refers to the psychological and physiological enjoyment of one's body, and often a partner's body, and may or may not include genital contact and orgasmic release. Sensuality refers to the need for physical touching and stroking, the need for exchange of physical affection, and the capacity for the enjoyment of the physical senses, particularly as they spark fantasy and memory. Sensuality can be overt, as in the office affair, or covert, as in sexual fan-

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 8, 1981

tasy or unconscious approach-avoidance behavior.

2. Intimacy is defined as the capacity for and expression of openness, closeness, and interdependency with another person. Intimacy tends to reduce feelings of loneliness and anomie and is manifested behaviorally by verbal expressions of liking, appreciation, support, concern, interest, and encouragement. In organizations, intimacy frequently develops between people as a result of proximity and role relatedness. Intimacy often occurs in relationships such as mentor and protégé, boss and secretary, team members who work closely over long periods of time, and partners who venture risks together, especially risks involving interpersonal trust.

3. Sexual identity refers to (1) biological sexuality in terms of anatomical and endocrine characteristics; (2) gender identity or sexual self-image in terms of culturally prescribed attitudes and behaviors; and (3) sexual object choice, including heterosexual and homosexual preference possibilities. The issue of gender identity has become increasingly prominent due to the entry of women into many roles traditionally held only by men. For example, the female manager and her male subordinate are in reversed traditional roles; the self-image of either person might be threatened since both have likely been socialized to think, feel and behave in the other's role. Further, the concept of "androgyny" is influencing contemporary thought. Androgyny refers to the psychological and behavioral integration of the traditional masculine/feminine polarities into one person, male or female, who exhibits attitudes and behaviors with situational flexibility and without the constraints of narrowly defined femininity or masculinity.

4. Sexualization refers to the use of sexual behavior to influence the attitudes, feelings, or behaviors of other persons. Sexual activity has long been offered or withheld to barter, manipulate, dominate, humiliate, or reward a partner. In organizations, people involved in sexual liaisons may exchange important information along with sexual favors, especially when they hold positions in different departments or at different hierarchical levels. Romantic or marital relationships between people in the same department or team can also work to secure power, threaten others' positions, and introduce competitive undertones that reshape the sociometry of the work group.

5. Reproduction refers to the attitudes people hold and the behaviors they engage in to conceive and bear children or to prevent the conception or birth of children. Included are self expectations, sex role expectations, and the sanctions and taboos of religious, legal, and ethnic groups. In organizations, women between the ages of 20 and 40 are frequently questioned about the role conflict inherent in combining family and career. Likewise, men who do not marry and have families are frequently regarded with suspicion. Other issues include maternity and paternity leaves, and absenteeism related to child care.

Each of these five aspects of human sexuality may be viewed as a heuristic device for generating an awareness of the complexity, inevitability, and pervasiveness of human sexuality as a factor of influence in contemporary organizations, especially those in which women enter managerial and professional roles. Although these aspects of human sexuality are identified separately for conceptual purposes, they are dynamically interrelated in the ongoing lives of individual persons.

REFERENCES

- (1) Gochros, Harvey. Human Sexuality. Encyclopedia of Social Work. N.Y. National Association of Social Workers, Inc., 17th Ed., Vol. I, 1977.

APPENDIX II

THE PROMOTION

Carol L. is a bright, ambitious MBA, who has set her sights on a managerial career. She is eager to climb the ladder of success and willing to work very hard for her promotions. Carol realizes she works in a highly competitive organization and that she is in a field traditionally dominated by men. She observes that many men and women get stuck on various rungs of the corporate ladder and that only one woman in the company has made it into top management. Carol knows that many tests of her ability and loyalty are to come; she is eager to meet them.

One particular obstacle to Carol's career is her exclusion from some informal networks in the organization. Another obstacle Carol notices is that while many men seem to have special sponsors or mentors who teach them the ropes and provide them inside information, she has no such affiliation. Determined, Carol attends every seminar she can and lunches regularly with her peers, most of whom are men. Over time, Carol has come to trust a co-worker named Lynn T.; the two share confidences frequently and provide valuable feedback to each other on work related matters. Carol values Lynn as a trusted colleague and a friend.

Bob J., Carol's present boss, has his sights set on top management too. In his mid-forties, Bob has made many friends and a few enemies in the corporation. At the upper echelon of middle management, Bob is reexamining his goals and values due to personal crises: his wife is suing him for divorce, claiming he has neglected her and the children in his "workaholic pursuit of career. Lonely, confused, and seeking comfort for himself, Bob seeks a confidant, someone who will provide a supportive and patient listening ear. He gravitates toward Carol to fill this role. Only a year ago, Bob had felt ambivalent about hiring a woman who would likely "breed and leave." In his current depression, Bob alternately throws himself relentlessly into his work (at which time Carol's loyalty is in evidence by her overtime efforts) or dawdles away his time preoccupied with personal problems and the search for "some values of substance" (at which time Carol and Lynn tend to cover for Bob). On one such occasion when Bob returned from lunch less than sober, Carol volunteered to attend a meeting in his place.

John C., one of the company's several vice presidents, took an immediate interest in Carol when he met her at the meeting she attended in place of Bob. He saw her as both a capable middle manager and a lovely woman. Their acquaintance grew, and Carol picked up a great deal of informal knowledge about the corporation from John's casual conversations. She learned, among other things, that her boss, Bob J., had locked horns with John C. on an issue some years ago, and that the two were, for all practical purposes, unfriendly. She also learned that Bob's unsteady performance was under close scrutiny and that a parallel transfer to a regional office was imminent; he was about to be farmed out. John's advanced to

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 8, 1981

Carol continued and became romantic. No other man was in the picture for Carol, and although she would have preferred to keep her relationship with John a friendly business one, she yielded to her own sexual needs and John's steady pursuit. They became lovers.

Eventually, Carol confided in Lynn, describing both the romance and the wealth of informal knowledge she was gaining. She was not prepared for Lynn's abrupt response, "I don't know what to say. Frankly, I wish it were me." Carol was taken aback, and felt very uneasy around Lynn from then on. As the days passed, a distance seemed to grow between them.

Within a week, Bob J. called Carol into his office and confronted her with the "rumor" he had heard --that she was sleeping with at least one of the company's vice presidents. He asked her to verify the rumor or deny it. Under pressure, Carol took the stance that her private life was her own. Bob J. said that he understood that as an admission of guilt and fired Carol with one month's notice. Her appeal to his sense of fairness was of no avail; he answered that her involvement was a serious breach of loyalty that damaged her credibility entirely.

Stunned, Carol sought the support of her lover, John C., who said he was helpless to do anything on her behalf under the circumstances. Nonetheless, he promised continuing emotional support and said he hoped this wouldn't interfere with their relationship. Her former friend and confidant, Lynn, suggested she leave the company quietly and not create a public stir through Affirmative Action. Her lawyer, although willing to take on the case, advised her similarly, "The best time to find a job is while you have one." Carol's alternatives seemed bleak indeed when Joe W., director of another division in the corporation, heard about the incident and called her to his office.

Joe W. began by briefing Carol on his understanding of recent events, indicating that he was aware of her good work and that he felt her dismissal was unreasonable. He reported that Bob J.'s transfer was now fact and that his replacement had been appointed --Lynn T.-- and added that she, Carol, had been among those considered for the position before her dismissal. Joe nodded sadly and said he had been an advocate of "free sex" for years. He then told Carol that he was willing to create a position for her in his office in light of her track record, a position equivalent in rank to her present position. He suggested that a couple years of experience in his division would greatly enhance her career.

Carol left Joe W.'s office with mixed feelings. She felt a rapport with Joe and sensed they would get along, but she wasn't sure whether or not to trust his warmth and generosity. She wondered whether or not there was innuendo in his offer, whether or not she was being placated by the organization in some way, whether or not she could discern such, and whether or not it even mattered.

1. What would you do if you were Carol?
2. Please rank order the following characters from (1) least objectionable to (5) most objectionable.

- _____ Carol L. -(middle manager)
- _____ Lynn T. (colleague and friend)
- _____ Bob J. (Carol and Lynn's boss)
- _____ John G. (vp and lover)
- _____ Joe W. (division director)