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## An Update on Sex and Politics

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**Abstract.** This article identifies some of the common psychological phenomena related to sexual allegations against political leaders.

Many United States (US) citizens have seemed almost mesmerized by the sordid details of the Clinton sex scandal--even as the many apparently discount its relevance to the President's leadership abilities and do not desire their President to be removed from office. This mesmerization may involve conscious and unconscious fantasies about shared sexual experiences with the President and/or his paramour, judicious cognitive overdrive about what is or isn't sex or even is, or revulsion at the breaking of a taboo--that national leaders and national sites are not supposed to be implicated in the breaking of taboos.

In all the excitement, a US citizen might be excused for not noticing that the Clinton sex scandal has some international competitors. One involves the allegations of sodomy and illegal sexual acts made against former Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim of Malaysia. The other involves allegations of sodomy, attempted sodomy, and indecent assault against the former president of Zimbabwe, Canaan Banana. The three ongoing scandals plus others less fevered--e.g., the sex abuse allegations against former Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega--afford the opportunity to contemplate the psychological phenomena accompanying them.

The world of politics too often is highly aggressive and hyper-competitive, entailing participants who present and construct more needs than there are resources to satisfy these needs. Too often, anything that gives participants an advantage will be used--including authentic or fabricated data suggesting sexual misbehavior.

Yet one might wonder why any sexual behavior can be characterized as misbehavior and then as an advantageous weapon to be wielded by others in the political environment. Some sexual behavior may qualify as misbehavior for it entails violating other laws--e.g., murdering others to attain sexual gratification or lying under oath about one's sexual activities. Some sexual behavior may qualify as sexual misbehavior because the sexual behavior itself is legally proscribed or ethically and/or morally censured. Why sexual behavior that does not otherwise violate other laws should be legally, ethically, or morally censured is often answered through rational and logical discourse--e.g., God says so, and God is God; anal sex, if too often engaged in by too many, could lead to the end of the propagation of the human species; adultery, if too often engaged in by too many, could lead to the destruction of all social contracts; various sexual behaviors should be conceived as misbehaviors because they actually afford or have afforded some sort of unfair adaptive advantage to the perpetrators as long as the behaviors are supposed to be proscribed or censured. However, often enough, related to the rational and logical discourse is an irrational and illogical resolution that things are the way they are because they are--and beyond this resolution seems to be a seething morass of the most primitive psychological components. At the very bottom, one may traverse back to the top. That is, with whatever degrees of consciousness and unconsciousness, logic and illogic, and rationality and irrationality that may apply, sexual constraints seems crucial to the development and defense of human identity--even when these constraints are masquerading as the breaking free of constraints.

With the above as a backdrop, one may quickly come to the conclusion that the supporters of political leaders accused of sexual misbehavior may be off the mark in claiming that sex and leadership are orthogonal. Through the psychology of politics, leaders on the grand stage are not only problem identifiers and solvers but are the embodiments of psychological tasks that are from the personal realm that bear on the populace's very identity. Their failure in the personal realm--once discovered or apperceived by the populace--can become transmuted and even transmogrified into the most damning of duty derelictions.

The apparent "disconnect" between Clinton's adversaries in the House of Representatives and large numbers of the US populace is most deserving of social sciences research and may suggest various hypotheses: e.g., a transient imbalance in attitude congruity, a long-term gap between the governors and the governed, a short- or long-term estrangement within the governors or governed from the essential self. (See Malaysian accuser recants sex charge. (December 8, 1998). The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>; McNeil, D.G., Jr. (December 4, 1998). Fugitive Zimbabwe ex-president has odd meeting with Mandela. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Milburn, M., & Conrad, S.D. (1996). The politics of denial. *Journal of Psychohistory*, 23, 238-251; Rubenstein, G. (1996). The authoritarian personality and its association to psychological androgyny. *Psychologia: Israel Journal of Psychology*, 5, 178-187; Schultz, C., & Pancer, M.S. (1997). Character attacks and their effects on perceptions of male and female political candidates. *Political Psychology*, 18, 93-102; Van Hiel, A., & Mervielde, I. (1996). Personality and current political beliefs. *Psychological Belgica*, 36, 221-226; Welchman, K. (1996). The personal as paradigm for the political. *Psychodynamic Counselling*, 2, 179-194.) (Keywords: Leadership, Sex.)