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Sexual Scandals and Subtexts: The Next Wave is the Last Wave

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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Title: Sexual Scandals and Subtexts: The Next Wave is the Last Wave

Author: Editor

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Abstract. This article identifies some possible implications of two recent sex scandals with political and politico-military overtones.

In the wake of sex scandals involving the United States (U.S.) president, the former president of Nicaragua, the former president of Zimbabwe, and the former deputy prime minister of Malaysia come yet two further events on the intersection of prurient and political interests.

In one, a U.S. general officer has admitted to engaging in adulterous conduct with four wives of his subordinates and then lying about whether the events occurred. Substantive law has been violated, because both the adultery and the lying contravene proscriptions of the code of military justice that govern the behavior of the general. There is also a moral violation in that monogamy is a positively-valued social and religious norm in the United States--even if the norm is not always followed. Discourses concerning the general's behavior and contingent fate include notions that (1) all military personnel--regardless of rank--should be subject to the same proscriptions and punishments; (2) violating a marital oath renders an individual more likely to violate patriotic and national oaths including those professing willingness to act and die for one's country; (3) lying about sex renders one more likely to lie about military strategy, tactics, policy, and management; (4) adultery suggests an impulse control problem that is unacceptably likely to generalize to nonsexual areas; and (5) engaging in sex with the wives of one's subordinates ineluctably leads to morale problems within the military organization.

In the other case, a videotape of the general prosecutor of Russia naked and in bed with two young woman neither his wife was broadcast on a Government television station. The videotape seems to suggest a violation of substantive law in that the two women have been assumed to be prostitutes and that prostitution is proscribed by various Russian laws. As well, there is a suggestion of moral violation, in that monogamy is a positively valued social and religious norm in much of Russia--even if this norm is not always followed. Discourses include notions that (1) cavorting with more than one woman at a time does not suggest the moral standing necessary to be involved as an official in the criminal justice system--as President Yeltsin and Prime Minister Primakov have advocated in a jointly Issued statement, "only morally untainted people can combat crime"--and (2) engaging in adulterous behavior suggests one might be more likely to violate other oaths like those to uphold the criminal justice system

One might surmise that the discourses in both cases are suspect as being at the core of what makes certain sexual behaviors scandalous. For all these discourses must be at least qualified in specific cases, if empiricism and rationalism are set as epistemological and ethical arbiters. One might, in turn, posit that an individual who is implicated in sexual behavior that is socially conceptualized as sexual misbehavior must suffer the rage of others who have held themselves back or refrained from such behavior, as well as those who are enraged as a vehicle of expiation or even cover for their own transgressions. Or one might posit that sexual behavior as misbehavior becomes no more than a convenient attack point from political adversaries--with political being employed in the broadest sense of a competition for finite resources in a world of infinite need. Yet again, neither of these two

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alternatives bores in on the uniqueness of sexual behavior as misbehavior that envelops an individual in scandal and that transcends many if not all cultures and societies.

So what is so special about sexual behavior as sexual misbehavior that becomes scandal? An evolutionary psychologist might posit that--with survival and reproduction as keys to behavioral telos--engaging in socially proscribed sexual behavior becomes the ultimate competitive advantage in matters of life and death. The subtext of sexual scandal--even if viewed derisively--becomes deadly serious business. (See Bohlen, C. (March 18, 1999). Scandal over top Russian prosecutor deepens new crisis. *The New York Times*, p. A3; Buss, D.M., & Shackelford, T.K. (1997). Human aggression in evolutionary psychological perspective. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 17, 605-619; DeLamater, J.D., & Hyde, J.S. (1998). Essentialism vs. social constructionism in the study of human sexuality. *Journal of Sex Research*, 35, 10-18; DeSteno, D.A., & Salovey, P. (1996). Evolutionary origins of sex differences in jealousy? Questioning the "fitness" of the model. *Psychological Science*, 7, 367-372; Gangestad, S.W., & Thornhill, R. (1997). The evolutionary psychology of extrapair sex: The role of fluctuating asymmetry. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 18, 69-88; The adulterous general. (March 19, 1999). *The New York Times*, p. A20.) (Keywords: Politics, Scandal, Sex.)