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## Michael Warner's "The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life": Implications for Sex and Security

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**Abstract.** This article continues a series of IBPP articles on sex and security by exploring the implications of a new book on the appropriateness of public policy that bears on sexuality.

Certain aspects of sexuality have long been viewed as vulnerabilities within intelligence and security organizations. These aspects include sexual orientation--viz., homosexuality. Sometimes, homosexuality has been considered inherently problematic in adhering to intelligence and security rules, regulations, and strictures--even if the labeling and expression of sexual orientation are social and cannot be considered without social parameters beyond some putative inherent essence. Sometimes, homosexuality has been considered problematic based on existing religious, ethical, moral, or legal proscriptions--even if the latter may be problematic for intelligence and security matters.

Opponents of public policies that embrace the problematic nature of homosexuality for intelligence and security present two main arguments. One is that sexuality is irrelevant in intelligence and security matters--an argument that belies the import of sexuality for human motive and behavior. Another is that sexuality is quite relevant, but one cannot make policy prescriptions and proscriptions about generic sexual orientations. Instead, aspects of sexual impulsiveness, compulsiveness, and effect on judgment and behavior must be considered on a case by case basis.

Even if opponents of sexuality-related public policy are correct, one might still wonder why some sexual orientations seem to be viewed most often as problematic in intelligence and security matters. In this regard, Rutgers University professor of American literature Michael Warner's recent text, *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*, poses a possible answer. According to Warner, most people have shame and disgust about their own bodies and body functions--especially those involving body secretions and discharges. To attenuate this shame and disgust, these very same emotions about one's own body are projected onto others. The others onto whom emotions are projected are chosen based on their being a statistical minority and/or on their already exhibiting (or assumed to exhibit) some other stigma. In this way, the initial bearers of shame and disgust can deny bearing these emotions towards their own bodies. And in this way public policies targeting deviancies through the tyranny of the normal are created.

There are at least two problems with Warner's thesis. First of all, must one assume that bodily shame and disgust have existed on such a large scale even during various eras of so-called sexual liberation and licentiousness? Eras of cultural narcissism? Of body development and worship as cultural icons? One might answer the above in the affirmative and attribute this answer to other psychodynamic constructs such as sublimation or overcompensation. But this merely leads to the second problem with Warner's thesis.

Psychodynamic constructs are just that: constructs. They are created because they seem to describe how life is like and to be useful through this assumption. However, psychodynamic constructs also

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assume unconscious motivation and phenomena--an assumption whose reasonableness is bolstered by the conscious face validity of such an assumption that concurrently eschews an unconscious premise.

So why are certain sexual orientations then viewed as problematic in intelligence and security matters? Access to such matters is associated with power. Constricting entry to power may be a very calculated move (varying in consciousness) in what may be a zero-sum game, not the surface manifestation of infinite unconscious conflict. And this move may be characteristic of people within and without the queer life. (See Homosexuality and the United States Military: Problems With Sex Policies and Policies on Sex. (February 5, 1999). *IBPP*, 6(5); Policy Guidelines on Sex for Security Bureaucracies. (February 27, 1998). *IBPP*, 4(8); Sussal, C.M. (1998). A Kleinian analysis of homophobia. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 68, 203-214; Wallenius, M. (1999). Personal projects in everyday places: Perceived supportiveness of the environment and psychological well-being. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 19, 131-143; Warner, M. (1999). *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. The Free Press; Whaley, A. L. (1998). Cross-cultural perspective on paranoia: A focus on the Black American experience. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 69, 325-343.) (Keywords: Intelligence, Security, Sexuality.)