

Warning: Do Not Tell Your Friends That You Are A Virgin

Drawing on many conversations I have had about sex in a non-academic setting, whether they be at parties or during girls night in, I have found that talking about sexual experiences are one of students' favorite past times. If there is a person in a group who is a virgin and cannot contribute to the conversation (much like Andy felt like during the poker game with the guys), there is usually awkwardness and a wondering on part of the other people. 'How could this not have happened, is it a religious thing, are you waiting for marriage, etc. are usually fired off. So the thought of a person who lives to the age of forty and has not yet had sex makes for an entertaining movie. The 40 Year Old Virgin details Andy's trials and triumphs as his co-workers try to get him laid, but he continues to hold off because he finds someone he loves along the way. Looking through my "sociological lens," I evaluate many scenes where the sexual natural attitude is reinforced and places where it is challenged. While his friends put him through various activities in the hopes that he will get some sex, many "sexual scripts" are followed via symbolic interactionism. Using components of the sexual natural attitude (also noted SNA), I will show that Andy, the virgin, and his co-workers support certain components (a binary system of sex, gender, and sexuality and gender as a axis of the system) and confront other portions (sexuality as a private and individual thing and the notion of biological drive) all the while fulfilling sexual scripts they have been enculturated to carry out.

During lecture on January 16th, 2008, Professor McGann illustrated the components of society's sexual natural attitude. As a base level, this consists of anything that we take for granted that we were taught about sexuality within our society. This includes the idea that there are only two sexes and normal is to express the gender which aligns with your sex, the idea that sex is biologically based in a natural drive, the assumption in others that they are heterosexual, and that we keep our sexuality private and to ourselves, to name a few that I will touch on.

Throughout the entire movie, a binary system of sex and gender is emphasized and made clear to the audience as being the basis for comments made by Andy's friends. During a scene with Dave, the one friend who is hung up on his ex-girlfriend, and Cal, Dave tells Cal that Andy had it right and he too is now celibate. Cal responds with, "So you're gay now?" and later on during the 'you know how I know that you're gay' exchange, adds, "You know how I know you're gay? You just told me you're not sleeping with women anymore." He does a very good job of defining what masculinity is to him. Just because Dave has decided not to sleep with women anymore, he is labeled as being not masculine and therefore homosexual. McGann also mentioned in lecture the exchange between doing (acts) and being (identity) and just because someone does or does not engage in an activity, it led to them be labeled as something simply based on that action. This can be expressed as a type of gender deviance – Dave has a penis, but is being passive about sex and is thus inverting his gender and acting unnaturally (McGann 2.4.08). Krafft-Ebing states, when talking about a girl with masculine tendencies, "most salient aspect of the invert's deviance; here the violation is of the essential sex/gender order," which is what Dave is exhibiting – celibacy equals feminine characteristic and thus a homosexual desire according to Cal (1889).

This leads into a very definitive conversation about gay characteristics among men as thought of by these two guys. The "you know how I know that you're gay" exchange explains even further how they can cite homosexual tendencies. Both of his friends are consistently trying to affirm their masculinity by calling the other guy gay based on aspects of culture. A few examples include, "You know how I know you're gay, you like Coldplay" or "you watched Rent three times" or "you are wearing light blue pants" or "you macramé a pair of shorts." All of these statements have to do with music and movie choice, fashion, and creativity. According to

these guys, the types of music, movies, and fashion they like are cornered as being not very masculine, therefore, these are not consistent with what men should like and that in turn makes them gay. Jeffery Weeks discusses the emergence of the homosexual role and how “it helps to provide a clear-cut threshold between permissible and impermissible behavior; and secondly, it helps to segregate those labeled as deviant, and thus contains and limits their behavior patterns (1979:75). Weeks applies to how Cal is reacting to Dave’s decision to be celibate and thus labeling him a gender deviant and explaining which behaviors are and are not acceptable.

Our SNA talks about patterns of consistency and the idea that if someone is a man then they are masculine and they like women. We are taught this through media and social interaction as we grow older and thus begin to follow a sexual script, or a normative pattern of behavior (Plummer 2002:23-24). People in society begin to do things (if they are a man, for example) that define them as masculine (not crossing their legs or playing violent video games as seen in the movie) as not to be mistaken as homosexual and liking non-masculine things. If they begin to do things that might be viewed by others as feminine (watching musicals or creating art), they run the risk of someone thinking that because they are exhibiting womanly traits, then they may like men.

The movie also reinforces heteronormativity and gender norms to convey “funny” points. When the movie opens up and shows his first interaction with Cal at work, the conversation is weird and seems unnatural. Later, at the poker game that night, the guys finally find out that he is a virgin, there is a huge sense of understanding and they all say, “It all makes sense, you’re a virgin.” As we heard in lecture, his sexuality really did affect all parts of this life, enough for others to notice and resolve that that is why he was so awkward (McGann 1.16.08). Upon his co-workers finding out that he has never had sex, they see it as their role as masculine friends to

find this guy some women. It is their duty as men to be active and engaging in sex all the time. Andy is bending the gender norms by being passive about his sexuality and it scares other men that he is not active in his pursuit of the 'pussy,' as they like to call it. Andy follows a sexual script of letting the guys take him to clubs and try to get him laid because he knows deep down that he should be having sex and pursuing women. Rachel Maines writes about the androcentric model of sex. The idea that there has to be male penetration for it to count as intercourse and orgasm achieved – that there has to be an active male participating (Maines 1999:5-6).

The movie, on the other hand, also challenges some of the components of the SNA. The first thing I noticed was that they do not regard sex and sexuality as a private, individual thing. The friends have already made it a point of how essential it is that he has sex. Literally everyone at his work knows that he is a virgin and, once he starts dating Trish, how many dates until he can have sex – it is that important. I can't tell you the last boss I had that knew my sexual activities because there hasn't been. At the same time, his friends are constantly giving him advice, taking him out, and trying new tactics in order to make this happen. It is the reason the movie was made, to show how important it is for a man to be having sex, and according to Jay, lots of it. It is so normal and built in to his friends' thinking that men have sex, getting Andy laid is first priority. It can be argued that Andy did not want all of the guys to know, after all, he did try to make up sex stories, but once the guys tell him that they are getting him sex, he goes along with it.

By delaying the act of having sex for 20 dates, which some people regard as a lot in the movie, Andy and Trish challenge their biological drive to be sexual. It is not like they do not try to have sex on the first date, because they do, but the interesting thing is that they do make the decision to wait. Even when they are in a fight towards the end, Trish says they can wait 50 or

100 dates, “I hope not,” she adds, as if waiting that long to have sex would be terrible. However, she is still willing to confront biological urges to save this relationship. In another scene, Trish’s teenage daughter is freaking out about not being able to have sex with her boyfriend because her mom won’t let her get birth control. Why would she wait to have sex, why wouldn’t she just use a condom and get on with it like tons of other high school girls? She decides that getting birth control is safer and thus holds off on having sex until she can get information and protection.

Interestingly enough, in the scene where Andy takes the daughter to the safe sex information session, there are other parents with their children who are getting them educated about sexual practices. The fathers of the boys in the meeting often high five and seem proud of the fact that their sons have had sex after the daughter admits that she is a virgin and the boys play it off as not being cool. Even though the fathers should be protecting their sons and making sure that they are being safe and not getting girls pregnant, the men still follow a script of being manly, being active, and being pleased that their sons are also being masculine by having had sex already. The fathers and son then begin to make jokes about how long ago they were virgins – they were active in sexual encounters way before this girl was.

In The 40-Year-Old-Virgin, there are many situations which strengthen our sexual natural attitude by upholding certain views of gender, sex, and expression of those traits within society. At the same time, the movie does a good job of breaking down some of the parts of our SNA by underscoring the privacy of sexuality and the idea that sex is purely a biological drive. Within the symbolic interactionist school of thought, it is easy to see how Andy and his friends are fulfilling sexual scripts taught to them by society and culture. By certain metaphors of sexuality interacting in their lives, we are able to see that no action relating to sex, which is arguable all of them, goes untouched by aspects of our society: locale, social position, medicine, education,

government, economics, and family to name a few. Simply by making a movie about a virgin who is forty years old and having the goal of the movie be to get him sex illustrates certain values upheld by people in our society. The importance of it is proven when he does finally have sex after he gets married and the entire cast breaks out in a musical number, reflective of the joy inside I suppose.

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