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SEX EDUCATION IN CHILDREN AND CHILDREN'S FANTASY ABOUT SEXUALITY

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Abstract

Sex education is provided in Japan from early childhood. This article presents the psychoanalytical considerations on the supposed discrepancies between children's fantasies about sexuality and the information given in sex education. On one hand, such education has to provide preschoolers with biologically and anatomically correct knowledge. On the other hand, this sort of 'scientific' education must not restrain the preschooler from thinking creatively about his or her own sexuality. From a psychoanalytical viewpoint, the preschooler's thoughts regarding sexuality during the oedipal phase contributes largely to the preschooler's subsequent gender development. Their fantasies, which are triggered by questions regarding his or her own existence and sex, constitute the answers to the aforementioned questions. It is emphasized here that the child's fantasies should be respected and incorporated into his or her education. In the following article, a number of picture books are analyzed as educational tools that respect the child's fantasies about sexuality. And also the "Schreber case", a case of a psychotic, whose autobiography has been largely analyzed by many psychoanalysts, is discussed as a consequence of restriction of his childhood fantasies on sexuality and existence.

Key Words: sex education, questions, fantasies, sexuality and Existence

Sex education reconsidered

In Japan, as in western developed countries, sex education is provided for children at an extremely low age. This educational enlightenment which provides children with a variety of themes such as the "reproduction act", "sexual difference", "gender roles", "delivery" etc. Seems to exert strong influences upon children even at kindergartens. There are a variety of reasons for this educational policy. The most influential one is probably the fact that the age at which young people are experiencing sexual intercourse has become lower than ever. In addition, many junior high and high school students have become involved in varying forms of prostitution, which spreads sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, among young people. Sexuality and its risks are much closer to young people than ever before.

Generally, the purpose of sex education is to make pupils responsible for their own

sexual behaviors. Educators are supposed to teach them the “correct and accurate” knowledge and fair attitude toward sexuality. It is “scientific knowledge” that is needed for children to achieve the educational goal. Scientifically accurate information is indispensable in sex education, but sex education that is free from scientific basis must also be allowed for young children. This is not because children are too innocent to think about sexuality, but because at the age of about three to five, they themselves begin to spontaneously ask about gender difference and the origin of babies by building fantasies on them. Although their thoughts on sexuality may be filled with wild and preposterous ideas, they deeply affect later mental development. Freud wrote about sex education in *Analysis Terminable and Interminable* (1937):

I am far from maintaining that this is a harmful or unnecessary thing to do, but it is clear that the prophylactic effect of this liberal measure has been greatly over-estimated. After such enlightenment, children know something they did not know before, but they make no use of the new knowledge that has been presented to them. We come to see that they are not even in so great a hurry to sacrifice for this new knowledge the sexual theories which might be described as a natural growth and which they have constructed in harmony with, and dependence on, their imperfect libidinal organization—theories about the part played by the stork, about the nature of sexual intercourse and about the way in which babies are made. For a long time after they have been given sexual enlightenment they behave like primitive races that have had Christianity thrust upon them and who continue to worship their old idols in secret (233-234).

As discussed above, children are unable to discard common myths such as storks bringing babies and so on. From the viewpoint of psychoanalysis, this shows that it is *absolutely necessary* for them to have the opportunity to think about sexuality, examine it, and fantasize about it. If children are deprived of this chance, we can assume that his or her gender identity or cognition of sex and sense of being will be distorted. For example, when they are personally confronted with questions like “What does it mean to become a father, not merely being a man?” or “What is a woman?” they have problems with fulfilling these new roles, since they had not attained the identity of sexually typed beings in the early childhood.

Therefore, educators engaging in sex education should respect children’s creation of fantasies. In order for us to respect children’s fantasies, it is necessary to know their content and structure.

Fantasies as answers to the enigma of existence

According to Freud (1905), the origin of knowledge in infancy is the question of sexuality; “...we have learnt from psycho-analysis that the instinct for knowledge in children is attracted unexpectedly early and intensively to sexual problems and is in fact possibly first aroused by them.” (*Three Essay on Sexuality*, p.194) The earliest and central question of children in this regard is where babies come from (Freud, 1905, p.195). It is easily recognized that the sexual question and the ontological question are expressed in one

form. It means that for children these two questions share the same nature.

Freud's theories are strongly criticized by many psychologists because they seem to lack empirical methodology. It is not my purpose to protect Freud's theory against this criticism. However, I will try to give a concrete form to the discussion developed here that is based on empirical and clinical facts.

Let us first take some examples of sexual and ontological questions posed by children. In *Juvenile language* (1987), the following conversation is reported.

Boy (three-year-old) : Mommy, if only I could have a baby !

Mom : So how are you gonna have a baby ?

Boy : If I eat lots of cooked rice, my tummy will get big (p.41).

The curious theory proposed by this boy is not so unique. It is often observed that many children who think "people get babies by eating some particular thing (as they do in fairy tales) and babies are born through the bowel like a discharge of feces." (Freud, 1905, p.196) This kind of idea sometimes reappears in neurotic fantasies as reported by clinical psychologists. Feces in dreams or fantasies turn out to mean "child", "giving" and "money" in the unconscious. Conversely, this distorted expression used by neurotics is premised on childhood fantasies.

Another question related to the above mentioned one concerns the penis. What does it mean when children are very sensitive to whether he or she has a penis or not? Let us consider this point using other examples from the same book.

Girl (three-year-old) : Why does my older brother have a penis? Will mine come out when I grow up?

Boy (two-year-old) : Don't you have a penis?

Mother : Mom does not have one, dear.

Boy : Why don't we go buy a penis?

The child of the first case is said to have the same sex theory as the Hans' theory, analyzed by Freud in his *Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy* (1909).

Hans (about three-year-old) : Mummy, have you got a widdler [penis] too? (Freud, 1909, p.7)

(In seeing seven-day-old little sister being given a bath. Hans was three and a half years old) Hans : But her widdler's still quite small. . . When she grows up it'll get bigger all right." (Freud, 1909, p.11)

These children's curious ideas concerning the penis are based on the assumption that everyone has a penis. According to Freud, girls think that their penis was taken away by someone. This is a well-known notion of the "penis envy" theory, criticized by many psychologists and psychoanalysts. The reliability of this notion cannot be discussed in this

article, but we have to bear in mind that the idea is one of the possible fantasies built by children. In this sense, it is not so important for us to criticize it. Instead, the purpose here is to figure out what is at issue in the fantasies about the penis and penis envy.

In the course of the exploration concerning the existence of a penis, children try to explain why he or she has/doesn't have a penis. Shingu (1995, p.284-287) pointed out when faced with the enigma of presence or absence of a penis, infants do not think that it happened to be or not to be there by sheer "chance". After finding a penis, they try to examine the ground or inevitability of the presence-absence of a penis in a logical and ethical way. The process of their thoughts is regarded as follows.

Children explore the problem not only about the penis but also about the origin of his or her being. According to Shingu, "children solve this critical problem as follows: there is someone who can attach a penis on one child and not on another...This person must give me the reason, as an inevitable reason, of this way of being as I am, and not that way." (1995, p.287) In other words, children ponder sexual problems and ontological problems to eventually conclude that there is someone who can choose other people's sexual difference and being with discretionary powers. On this point, let us take an example analyzed by Melanie Klein (1921).

Fritz, four-year-old boy, asked his mother the following questions:

"Where was I before I was born?"

"How is a person made?"

"Mamma, please, how did you come into the world?"

To these questions, his mother "answered absolutely truthfully and, when necessary, on a scientific basis suited to this understanding, but as briefly as possible" (p.3). On the other side, his nurse and his elder brother said to him that "the stork brought the babies and God made people" (p.4). Fritz was not content with these answers.

In spite of his mother's "right" answers, he did not stop asking about the existence of human beings and things in the world. He asked, "Does God know for certain how long he will let it rain?" To this question, his mother answered that God did not exist and the rain came from the clouds (p.6). It is very likely that the question is philosophical in nature. He did not ask for scientific explanation, but for ground or inevitability of his existence. That is why he could not stop asking questions in spite of the many answers he had received. It can be regarded as a philosophical question. Here the term "philosophical" is not an exaggeration. What is at work in the thought process of children is the logic that resorts to things that already exist in order to infer the cause of existence. This method is the same as the "*demonstratio quia*", which is used by St. Thomas in his proof of the existence of God. Relying on this method, children fantasize that a penis or a child's existence is something, which may not exist, i.e. *possibilia et esse et non esse*. A final ground of this *possibilia et esse et non esse* is God, which is *per se necessarium*, which means, "what in itself inevitably exist". Children's engaging the question of sexuality and existence in the end reaches the same sort of conclusion, as Shingu said. The following is another example, which metaphorically expressed this process of thought.

"Mamma, you make kakis [feces] too, don't you?' When she agreed, he remarked, 'Because if you didn't make kakis nobody in the world would make them, would they?'" (Klein, 1921, p.10). Fritz noticed the fact that he was the creator of his own

feces, as his mother bore him. The utterances made by Fritz are based on the idea that something must be made by someone. By way of the investigation of his feces, he tried to understand the origin of himself or the inevitability of his own being. In this sense, his process of thought contributed to solving his existential angst aroused by those questions.

On the contrary, as has been mentioned above, what kind of consequences are expected if these fantasies are restricted in infancy? I hypothesize that if a child does not have a chance to deal with the question by him/herself, he or she will be distressed by the same question later on. Let me explain in detail.

Our sense of sexuality and existence is sometimes challenged by a crisis in life, such as the birth of a son, abortion, the death of parents, or impotency. In the face of these traumatic events, we are forced to “re-question” our sexuality and our existence in some way or another. This process is a re-considering of questions that have been already asked and answered in childhood. Sometimes we “re-question” via symptoms, like hysteria. Sometimes we “re-question” in dreams, using symbolic language, in which “feces” represents “gifts” and “child” for example. In contrast, if one has not had a chance to question and make fantasies in childhood, he or she has to *form these questions in adulthood*. The case of Schreber illustrates this point.

The Question about Sexuality and Existence in the Case of Schreber

Daniel Paul Schreber (1842~1911), a German lawyer, wrote the book titled *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903), in which he discussed his experiences caused by his mental disease. His purpose in writing the book was first to tell his wife about his experience of “religious truth”, but later he decided to publish it in order to let people after him scrutinize his experience. Once it was published, every exemplar was bought by members of his family. Freud analyzed Schreber’s psychopathology in *Psycho-Analytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*.

Schreber’s father, Daniel Gottlieb Moritz Schreber, was a famous doctor and educator. Freud wrote about him as follows:

“ Now the father of Senatspräsident Dr. Schreber was no insignificant person. He was the Dr. Daniel Gottlob Moritz Schreber whose memory is kept green to this day by the numerous Schreber Associations, which flourish especially in Saxony ; and, moreover, he was a *physician*. His activities in favor of promoting the harmonious upbringing of the young, of securing co-ordination between education in the home and in the school, of introducing physical culture and manual work with a view to raising the standards of health—all this exerted a lasting influence upon his contemporaries. ” (p.51)

It is conceivable that his father educated his children commensurate with his ideal of education. For example, the father “innovated” the prescription to stop a child’s spermatorrhea. It is reasonable to suppose that Daniel Schreber received some of these prescriptions in his childhood. The following passage shows that the father tried to exclude sexuality from education.

When the time draws near for the boy's approach to manhood it is the unavoidable duty of the parents or guardians to cut off the many dangers of chance or casual acquaintanceship with sexual relationships...Experience proves that by far the largest number of those who have succumbed in one way or another to *lust*, have sunk to this state by dint of their original ignorance of the dangers... (1858, p.251, cited from Ishibashi, 1986, p.66)

Schreber's father obviously was unaware of the fundamentality of questions on sexuality children are faced with. Schreber confessed in his *Memoirs* as "Few people have been brought up according to such strict moral principles as I, and have throughout life practiced such moderation especially in matters of sex, as I venture to claim myself." (Ishibashi, p.66-67) Up until the onset of his psychosis, his attitude toward sexuality can be characterized not only as "moderate" but also as "unattainable"

According to Lacan, Schreber's wife had aborted several times. His mental illness began after his wife's repeated abortions. It is likely that his wife's miscarriages led him to questions such as "where the baby comes from" or "what is the role of the father in bearing a baby" which had never been asked until the onset of his mental disease. We should transform these questions into a more sophisticated form: "what it is to be a father in the sense of procreation" which Lacan (Lacan, 1993, p.292-293) formulated in his analysis of Schreber's illness. In short, we suppose that his psychosis started with the onset of his questioning about sexuality and existence. The appearance of the questions in adulthood unveiled the ungrounded nature of his sex, existence and the world around him. We can see this in the following delusive confession in his book:

My delusions of loss of intellectual power are so strong and the degree of the impression of my dumbness so high that it appears doubtful anew day by day whether I still know the persons near me, or whether I still have a grasp of the usual natural phenomena, works of art, tools, other occurrences. It appears even doubtful whether I still know who I am or who I used to be (Schreber, 1903, p.179).

Schreber's theorizing should not be regarded as the incomprehensible delusions of a psychotic. Close reading of the book shows that its main theme is the question of sexuality and existence. Let us confirm this point. In the preface and the first chapter of the book, Schreber examines the origin of the universe. He questioned whether the universe originated without God, or in creation by God. To this question, he gave an answer as follows; "The full truth maybe lies (in the way the fourth dimension does) in a diagonal of both directions of imagination that is not graspable by human beings" (Schreber, 1903, p.6).

However, his way of answering the fundamental question of existence and sexuality could not be conclusive, as the God of his religious theory was not capable of understanding living men. Freud stated that by characterizing God as ignorant of living men, Schreber accused his father of ignorance of him (p.322).

For us, Schreber's characterization of God represents a lack of the transcendental other

as a *per se necessarium* which sustains the inevitability of his existence in his delusive theory.

In addition to the crisis of his existence, his sense of sexuality was also distorted. In delusion, his sex became female. Whereas Freud analyzed that this represents Schreber's wish, "if I was a female, I can bear a child", we follow Lacan in interpreting Schreber's feminization to be an incomplete answer to the question of "what it is to be a father in the sense of procreation", which is a reformed question of children.

The case of Schreber illustrates that children's questions on sexuality cannot be satisfied by scientific knowledge alone as they are existential and ontological in nature.

I have thus far discussed the importance of the questions of sex and existence in childhood. What needs to be emphasized at this juncture is that education is sometimes authorized only by science, as in the case of Schreber's father. If an authorized person stops a child's questioning by giving him or her the supposed "aptitude treatment", the child cannot engage in establishing sex-typed-consciousness and certainty of his existence in the world, that is, the innermost self-consciousness.

But, how should we remedy the dilemma of having to teach scientifically correct knowledge to children and at the same respecting their spontaneous questioning? In order to provide children with acceptable answers on sexuality we have to assist them in their creation of fantasies before a scientifically based education can set in.

Children's fantasy and picture books about sexuality

Before showing how we can help children to create fantasies, it is important to point out the basic ideas of sex education today. Kitazawa (1981), a prominent figure in early sex education in Japan, stated her ideal and teaching guideline in *Opened Sex Education for 1-3-year-olds to 9-year-olds*. Let us examine her opinion. First, as to the period of sex education, she argues that it is suitable for us to start depending on the child's developmental phase of cerebral growth. What she calls "the phase of creation" stands for the phase past age three. In this stage children ask "the question about the creation of his or her life", as well as questions like "where do babies come from" and "Who made me?" According to Kitazawa, the beginning of the thirst for knowledge is rooted in "the growing complexity of the connection of brain cells". In this sense, this stage of development is called 'the phase of creation'. Whereas I recognize the importance of cerebral maturation for human beings to begin their questionings, it seems to me that the question about sex and existence posed by children at that age should be viewed in relation to infants' mentality rather than their brains.

As to the dilemma between science and children's fantasies, Kitazawa resorts to a kind of balanced sense. "In the case of little children, it is important for us to plow ahead with education not only scientifically, but also emotionally, like a wheel"(p52). However, I doubt that her educational idea is really based on this balanced sense, as it is not reflected her recommendation of picture books. In valuing three picture books on the birth of babies, she states, "The Japanese picture book is liable to ignore scientific grounds and float in emotion. Contrary to this, the Danish book (Knudsen, 1971, *This Is How to Make a Baby*) is thoroughly scientific and anatomical. As to the English one, it shows wealth of wit and the scientific nature mists over in them", and "I value the Danish

book highest among the three. The author of this book put his heart and soul into giving scientifically sound explanations, keeping sentences and illustrations plain and excluding an unnecessary plot and embellishments.”(p.92) In my understanding, science has a priority over “emotion” in her selecting of picture books. As far as picture books are concerned, it seems to me that it is neither “emotion” nor “science” that is most important. Based on our analysis, we value books that express infantile fantasies on birth and sexuality in direct or indirect ways. Let me take some examples.

“*Where are Your Navels, Little Frog?*” (Sakura, Shiota, 1988) is the tale in which the frog brothers are struck by lightning. On finding them, a pig exclaims, “your navels are gone!” It is a common Japanese superstition that navels are taken away by a thunderstorm-demon. In the course of the frogs’ search for navels they find that the other animals all have navels and the frogs envy them. The value of this picture book lies in the fact that it allows for many interpretations by children. The frogs’ lack of a navel may be interpreted as an expression of the question about the origin of their existence. It is thought that the lost navels are simultaneously connected with the fantasies about the penis. It is also impressive that on the cover of the picture book, the Japanese Oni, a demon, looks down on the frog brothers, who anxiously think they are deprived of their navels by the Oni. In addition, this Oni may be corresponding to “the being who does or does not attach phallus to children”, about whom a small child dreams. Therefore, this book will stimulate children to make imaginations and fantasies about their existence in the unconscious. It is suitable for us to share these fantasies together with children by reading books like this one.

Other books, “*Where did I come from?*” (Peter Mayle, 1973) and “*Mommy Laid an Egg!*” (Babette Cole, 1993) give much opportunity for children to develop fantasies about sexuality and birth before giving them appropriate knowledge. In these books, there are fantasies that even children cannot think about. If a fantasy is stimulated positively, children’s capability of sympathy can be raised. Furthermore, by giving a clear expression to fantasies held only vaguely by children, it is possible for them to express their fantasies which otherwise would be repressed in their mind. With the latter picture-book, the setup is especially interesting. This “conversed” tale starts from the place where parents try to teach their son and daughter “how babies can be made”. But what parents teach them are fabrications of the kind, which are supposed to be held by children who are completely ignorant about sex. The Children heard their parents’ story only to be amazed. Then the children who have comparatively right knowledge about reproduction educate their parents. With this picture-book, the idea that “adults are not necessarily right” is given to readers. Moreover, this book humorously tells children that adults themselves have conflicts about sex education.

It is true that books like these are relatively few compared to those that focus on scientific knowledge. Surely, in order to accept the request of the educational side, the picture book written in a scientific light is more acceptable for educators in the end. But from a psychoanalytic point of view, it is reasonable to suppose that, picture books that respect children’s questions and fantasies should be introduced before giving them scientific knowledge. Introducing these books in sex education may deter the transfer of scientific knowledge for a certain period. However, it must not be forgotten that small children are

not “small adults” but human beings who hold their own thoughts. Moreover, as the quotation of Freud about the results of sex education and Klein’s observation on Fritz mentioned previously showed, for children any scientific explanation is no more than one story among the many they create in their fantasies.

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