Retrieved from:
The European Journal of Psychoanalysis
Nov 8, 2026
https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/just-sex-interview/

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Just Sex?: An Interview With Darian Leader and Jamieson Webster

FC: It's clear from reading your book, *Is it Ever Just Sex?*, that you've attempted among many other things to rewrite long held psychoanalytic ideas regarding sex, sexuality, and fantasy. Could you detail the difference between how you understand all of these, and how Freud and the first generations of analysts understood them?

DL: That's a complex question because obviously Freud changed his mind several times about questions of sexuality, the sexual drives and the chronology of sexual development. It changes from the early 1900s through the 1930s. And Freud's students had very differing views which they themselves changed over time. But what's clear is that certainly by the mid-1920s, a lot of Freud's students were in disagreement with what he had to say about the development of boys and girls. And by the 1930s, this had really become a key to debates at the psychoanalytic congresses and in the psychoanalytic literature. There was a huge amount of disagreement. And I think that there are at least two central prejudices which it's helpful to focus on here, and which we tend perhaps to ignore in some currents of psychoanalysis. The first prejudice involves the exaggeration of differences between male and female development, the polarization, which in a way gets rid of some of the common points that Freud had been interested in in his earliest work. And secondly, the prejudice that downplays not so much differences between the development of boys and girls, but rather differences within each set of lines of development. And this is something that Freud tended to be quite sensitive to. When he makes pronouncements about the boy and the girl, usually he sets out a range of options. The boy either does this or this or this. The girl either does this or this or this. And as time has gone by, in many different currents of analysis, we've tended to reduce those differences within male and female development, and focus more on the dichotomy, on polarizing male and female. So we lose out on the richness of difference there.

FC: Okay. Jamieson, did you want to attend to this in any way?

JW: Part of what I really appreciate about Darian's work in *Is It Ever Just Sex*, is it as a book that is a follow-up to his *Jouissance* book. The question of *jouissance* has become incredibly vague in psychoanalytic theory as he points out, and maybe so as a response to what became very difficult about the response to Freud's laying out of the "female" options and the "male" options, as if the psychoanalysts freaked out and backed away from that, with the charge that Freud was misogynistic, or caught in binary logic. So the term *jouissance* itself becomes incredibly vague about, as you're saying, the differences between sex, sexuality, fantasy, drive development at various points in time, adult sexuality versus childhood sexuality. I like returning to those distinctions now in the question of the 21st century, and I really appreciated *Is It Ever Just Sex* for the way in which it starts to mess around with these concepts, but to keep the distinctions front and center. We can see what might have been the male options and the female options traditionally, and also how the female options are available to everybody in various forms, as well as the male options, especially at this point in time. But they still bear this history. It feels like the right time for us to rethink some of this.

FC: Absolutely. Yeah, and I think Darian, your book is part of that rethinking or that coming back to see some of this, to work with some of these concepts. Overall the book is a very extensive reworking of a lot of analysis without it actually saying it. It's not written in a way that's set up to actually rework the theory with other analysts present. But yet as I'm reading it, especially towards the end where you're talking about the phallus as prop for example, you're bringing in Lacan's seminars, you're bringing in so much, but without actually naming it. And I did find that interesting. I kept on wondering what other analysts would think of this, right? When they saw some of their prized theories on sexuality being torn asunder, and then new material being put on the table from areas in which most analysts don't actually draw from. I think that's a signature of your work, Darian, is you pull from a lot of different fields, to your benefit and to the benefit of all of us. You've done that in other works as well, but I do find that part interesting. You've done this reworking of analytic theory without actually saying so, if that makes sense. So not necessarily a question in there but I think this takes us to the second question.

TM: Yes absolutely, the second question is the following: Your book draws on empirical research as well as the linguistic and cultural dimensions of sex and problematizes how sex is commonly understood. Going to the basis and therefore origins of sexuality, the text claims that "all human sexual orientations are not based on innate copulatory instincts, but on fear." Could you elaborate on this notion of sex as a matter of fear? And do you consider the issue of fear fundamentally as an ontological question?

DL: One of the surprising results of a lot of the research in the 20th century, starting in the late 1930s, early 1940s, was that as experiments and research projects continued, people who often had no interest at all in psychoanalysis began to recognize that sexual arousal and sexual excitement were largely not based on so-called positive emotions or even commonly recognized sexual motifs, but tended to be the product of what were termed negative emotions: feelings of fear, rage, anger, sadness, grief, threat, and menace. In one of the earlier studies in the 1940s, they found that out of the 77 causes of sexual arousal, only 13 were overtly sexual and all the others were linked to fear, panic, sadness, loneliness, grief, and so on. In other words, we can't really take sexual desire as being an uncomplicated, simple element of the human psyche. We have to see it as a complex product of a lot of other things. And when you start looking at it like that, you have to rethink a lot of analytic concepts and analytic theory, which has tended to suppose that there is something quite basic about sexual attraction and the gravitation towards sexual objects. So the research from outside psychoanalysis shows that desire has to be seen as a complex product. And when we recognize that, you can ask a lot of questions about the place of sexual desire, the place of excitement, what function it has for us, how it operates, and that can shed a lot of light on things that people tend to take for granted, like sexual encounters, sexual relations, different forms of sexual practice. It opens up a lot of questions about what actually is going on in those activities. What is happening when people have sex? Is it really about sex?

TM: That's very useful Darian. Your text has no shortage of examples of the ways in which sex needs to be reconceptualized precisely in the way that you're describing. For me the only example that was left out is the *rigor erectus* [laughs], the death erection, which is maybe not exactly an example of what you're pointing to in the book but it came to mind. Even in the terror of death there can be excitement of the penis. But I wanted to ask you a follow-up here and then I also want to hear from Jamieson on this point. One of the things that your text did is to cause me to rethink the way that I consider sexuality in the clinic, in the sense your book seems to invite us to think beyond the usual ways of dealing with, let's say, repression, for example, simply lifting repression in order to liberate sexuality, and to rather think of the question of sex more in terms of as a cover for something else, perhaps a more fundamental ontological question. So I'm wondering if maybe you could say a little bit more about this, namely the question of how do we deal with sex as analysts in light of what you've written about here, beyond the usual kinds of psychoanalytic tropes that we're so accustomed to, the kinds of obvious and perhaps sometimes misleading ways of addressing to sexuality in the clinic.

DL: Yeah, I mean the ontological question obviously resonates with the results of all the research I just mentioned, because the work over the 20th century on sexuality brings it all back to fundamental human situations of grief, despair, loneliness, rage, and threat. So the basic situation of, let's say a human being

deprived of their imaginary supports, the kind of situation that the existentialists obviously made so much of. Perhaps it's not so surprising to see sexual excitement as a way of dealing with that. Doing the research for the book, I kept on coming back to the question of libido, and I'd already written a book about *jouissance*. Writing this book often I'd wonder about how one would reformulate, rethink a definition of libido given the different currents in sexual theory that were being explored. And the only conclusion I could come to was that given this new way of looking at sexuality, perhaps the simplest definition of libido is the set of human operations and practices that transform pain. That's it. And that would link sexuality fairly neatly with the basic ontological question. In terms of clinical effects, which I think you alluded to at the beginning of your question, doing the research for the book, I learned a lot from people writing in sexology and sex therapy. And I remember Jamieson, you gave a talk on Zoom in London a couple of years ago, and you mentioned that in the New York Psychoanalytic back in the day, if you were presenting a clinical case, you had to have an idea what the patient's masturbation fantasy was, yeah? And one of the things that I found surprising in the research was that the people coming at this from outside analysis argue that there's actually always more than one masturbation fantasy. There tend to be at least two basic fantasies. And so as analysts, when we think we've finally struck gold, the patient has overcome their shame and told us what they're really thinking about in a terrible, embarrassing moment—actually, they haven't really told us that much because there's probably another fantasy there that they're keeping quiet about.

FC: So the first one acts like a screen then for the second one in a sense?

DL: Yeah, you can say that one fantasy is used in order to initiate and perhaps get the excitement going in the first place, and then a second fantasy is used either to sustain the arousal or in a more defensive way as the person approaches orgasm. Again, another surprising thing, if a patient talks about having sex or masturbating, I don't think any analyst would ask them if they came, because you know that's a pretty intrusive question and would perhaps be weird to ask. But the people that work in sexology and related fields who do ask that question find out that something like 30% of people who masturbate or have sex actually stop before orgasm for various reasons, which shows that this is a very complicated thing, and that as analysts we tend to buy into the male prejudice from patriarchy that sex for men and women always involves a kind of phallic progression to climax and then that's it, rather than looking at multilocal sources of pleasure, how intimacy is perhaps a much broader field than penetrative sex. I mean, there are lots and lots of things that people have spoked about here, but it shows us that that we're often quite prejudiced in the way that we think about what goes on in sex and that we need to be asking more questions or have an open mind to rethink what we hear. I'm not suggesting that every time a patient mentions that they have sex or masturbates we then immediately introduce a barrage of questions [laughs]. Do you see what I mean? [everyone laughs]

JW: I was probably encouraged at the New York Psychoanalytic to ask a barrage of questions, especially in the beginning. Did you ejaculate [laughs]? Why not [everyone laughs]?

DL: Absolutely. But the questions could get even more complex because a lot of people masturbate, for example, and they don't come or they come, they ejaculate, but maybe without having an erection with men. So if someone says, oh yes, they ejaculated, we might then ask, and did you have an erection at the time? There are a lot of examples where there's an ejaculation in situations of fear without erection, soldiers on the front line etc. This is something that's been commonly reported over the years, and sometimes we hear about it in practice. Generally we don't.

JW: Sure, going back to adolescents with nocturnal emission and those sort of wild adolescent experiences of excitement. I appreciated both the reference to childhood in your work, which some of the writing I did on masturbation fantasies tries to speak to the complex product of desire, but the reference to childhood, which is full of the helplessness and fear and anxiety around sexuality, and also the fact that defense and aggressiveness and ambivalence reappear, which were thought to be sort of arcane, classical Freudian tropes that we had sort of gotten over or something. And you can see the importance of them, especially today. I wrote something called sex panic asking why this old, old sexual panic in the form of cultural wars was

taking place again. We hadn't we overcome this? And we're right back square and center in it. And I think it is really useful to return to the negativity associated with sexuality after the age of supposed enjoyment and sexual liberation and equality between the sexes.

DL: Yeah, absolutely. And also, as you say, the emphasis on conflicting currents and ambivalence is crucial. This had been continually emphasized by Karl Abraham and his students, not only Klein but the whole tradition stemming from Abraham perhaps more than from Freud. And one of the points that many psychoanalytic traditions have got to is a kind of convergence of consumer capitalism and psychoanalytic theory, with the idea that human desire is not conflictual, that it's a single gravitational current moving towards, or in some cases away from a single point, rather than seeing it as always a double current, which is built on and consists of a movement towards and a movement away from very, very contradictory contents. Yeah? Even in the Lacanian world, we sadly don't really have a theory of conflict. If you ask a Lacanian, what about the place of conflict here? They might say, oh well, it's the conflict between the signifying chain and the object (*a*) rather than the old school Freud, Abraham position on human desire basically being built on contradictory aims. And once we factor that into the question of sexual practice, it can't be simply about, say, a return to the intimacy with the maternal body, but also a revenge against the forces at play in that intimacy. So there are always at least two things going on at the same time.

JW: It makes me think Darian, I saw this three-hour long performance piece by the artist Anne Imhof. Do you know her? She trapped us in the armory for three hours with her beautiful teenage vaping, doom-filled actors, but it's called Doom House of Hope. And it was Romeo and Juliet backwards. So they start off dying and they end falling in love and having sex [laughs].

DL: That's great.

JW: And you don't know which side is compensating for which side, which sounds very beautiful.

FC: Okay, so moving on to the next question. So we found the following passage on page 40, just for the record, quite striking. So the sentence is, "could sex just be the only avenue of violence permissible to many of us in our adult lives?" We don't question the veracity of such a statement as clinical experience would seem to support it quite thoroughly. However, in a time where outright acts and representations of cruelty and violence have become widespread, particularly in the US, right: Trump deportations of Venezuelan gang members to Salvadorian prisons, publicly shaming of trans folks, abductions of folks with visas, university students who had been protesting the war on Gaza. It's interesting because now we do have these blatant expressions of violence that are widespread. Everybody gets to see them. So in light of that, how does the passage figure actually?

DL: Yeah I mean, being exposed to social, cultural and political violence, it's not something new in most parts of the world. This is the daily situation of the majority of the population, but there's still the question of how each person's individual violence can be expressed. And there are some cultures which have careful rituals, structures in place that allow a certain channeling and expression of violence, and other cultures where those ritualized expressions are far less developed or have been abolished or changed. Think about education. The education of children and teenagers for centuries has involved what today we would see as unspeakable violence directed towards children. And today in many parts of the enlightened world, violence is removed from education. So where does it go? Perhaps one of the most obvious insights of psychoanalysis is that psychical forces can't just be canceled or negated, they tend to return in other places. And if sexual practice involves to a certain extent a replaying of infantile situations, it's worth remembering that our situation as infants always involves inequities of power dynamics, yeah? There's a more powerful and a less powerful party. And as infants get older, they often try and reverse that. And there's obviously a huge amount of give and take in those battles between children and their caregivers. But later on, when people start to engage in sexual practice, you could argue that the unequal nature of the initial link to the caregiver is being replayed, redrafted, reconfigured. So that sexual practice involves micro dramas where power relations are accentuated, inverted, challenged, reconfigured in multiple ways, and that will always

involve a certain amount of violence because of the inequality in the distribution of power. So I think the important thing is to recognize that this is central to sex and perhaps even defines it. Whether it could be something else is an open question, which I kind of end the book on.

FC: Okay so in a real way, this connects actually to the final question we had. Because the way you end the book is very interesting on many levels, but it did prompt this question for me, which is: in light of the limitations, conditions and possibilities afforded by our current political economic moment, could sex be anything other than to quote you, “a way of turning our misery and oppression into a temporary and complex source of pleasure?” Another way of phrasing it is, could sex be anything other than what it is now under capitalism?

DL: Yeah, I mean, this is a crucial question when we ask “what is sex?” And that’s changed culturally over the years, at different times and in different parts of the world. It’s often said that in the 1960s and 70s, sex was equated with a kind of performance test, a kind of exam of your sexual adequacy, your ability to perform. And there were rules and a kind of scoring system. You needed to have an orgasm, you needed to make the other person have an orgasm. You needed to make it last a certain number of minutes. As time went on, the whole scoring system and framework changed. Now the premium was less on proving your virility, proving your ability to perform, then on proving that you had nothing to prove, which is of course much more difficult. It’s even impossible. How can you prove you’re not proving anything in sex, yeah?

So the situation is far worse then for a lot of people because they couldn’t just be seen as failing to perform, let’s say orgasmic acts, but now they were in a situation where they didn’t know what they were supposed to be performing and they didn’t even know the scoring system. This change in the way in which sex is perceived by culture has being beautifully described by Bernard Apfelbaum. So what sex is has changed radically here in terms of culture. Nowadays it tends to dovetail with consumer notions of pleasure and satisfaction. Maybe a consequence of this is that more and more young people are choosing not to have sex. This has been documented in America, in France, and to a certain extent here in the UK. More and more young people are not only moving away from sex, but labeling themselves, there are a whole bunch of labels out there designating their position in terms of what they’re interested in or not interested in, which obviously accords a legitimacy to the choice to avoid sex. One of the questions that runs through the book is, given the absolutely terrifying stakes of future sexual practice for a child, how on earth does sex become possible later on? A child is often tormented by the question, how can one body enter another body? What does it mean to penetrate another person? Doesn’t it cause damage? Won’t it irreparably harm the other person? What happens afterwards? How does one survive sex? All these crucial questions of childhood somehow have to be treated to allow sexual encounters later on. And obviously what allows that is the process not only of the construction of fantasies, unconscious fantasies, but also the way that we are inscribed in social and interpersonal sexual scripts. It’s a concept from American sociology that I talk a lot about in the book. Scripts shape sexual encounters, feelings and choices, but still don’t provide the ultimate solution or repair mechanism they might promise, and maybe that’s one of the reasons why people are so relieved after sex, as if they’ve managed to survive the threat of a very severe calamity.

FC: Jamieson, did you want to speak to this?

JW: When I was talking to Darian about the book, I was telling him that it took, I don’t know, maybe I’m deaf, but it took me till the end to hear the reversal in the title. Because in the beginning you think, oh, “just sex” is usually a pejorative. Used to question the person as to whether it was just sex for them, as if the eschewal of meaning has to be interrogated, I guess. And after you’ve run through the gamut of the reversals of meaning and the excess of meaning and the attribution of meaning to the question of sexuality, and all of the negative emotions, and all of the ways in which it’s becoming more difficult rather than [laughs] less difficult to accommodate sexuality with the ways we think a life takes on meaning, really by the end of the book, you wish that it could just be sex, and you have a real feeling for the impossibility of that. And I think that this is really important, not just with respect to the negative emotions or the aggressive violent passions that have to be accounted for, and that are coming back to the surface, you know including the difficulties of

pornography. We have a situation with children that we've forgotten how terrified they are of sex, and then we've exposed them to it ad inifinitum. We've allowed them to be exposed to endless images of penetration of bodies, which must be terrifying. But how that then accrues on the level of meaning that we can't get out from under with respect to sexuality, and I just wanted to read this passage from Darian's book, it says, "it's not that there is some original sexual drive that is being curved by the parents and by society, but that sexuality is itself the contradictory, uneven space where we feel a negative judgment together with both too much and too little, meaning. A meaning that is largely created and conditioned by the sense of judgment. It's less that some bodily activity has sexual meaning, but that there is no meaning except that created by the sense of judgment." And I think the inescapability of that within the sexual domain is a lot of what is being escaped from. So it is important to say that yes, there's an escape from sexuality, but there's not an escape from the judgment and meaning that feels particularly loaded at this point in time, which is really what we long to escape. Especially with everything that I do think the internet brings to bear, and the fact that it's aggregated there. I mean, you can go tap into this excess of meaning all the time and what is a kind of violence in relation to sexuality via meaning.

FC: Yeah excellent. Thank you.

TM: Okay, so next question. Your use of the work of Gagnon and Simon's work is prominent throughout the book. You highlight the fact that learning about sexuality is learning about guilt, and that managing sexuality is essentially a mode of managing guilt. Considering the already existing psychoanalytic perspectives on guilt, what led you to adopt Gagnon and Simon's work in particular as part of your overall theorizing?

DL: Yeah, I'd read a few articles by them over the years. I hadn't yet read the 1973 book on sexual conduct, but what I was really researching was how sociology and in particular American sociology, which is so interested in the performative nature of gender and sexuality, which is a central theme in the American sociology of the late 50s and 60s. I was interested in how that was developing after Kinsey's studies in the late 40s and early 1950s. What happened after Kinsey's work was taken up by the sociologists who obviously were much more subtle and careful in many aspects of their work than Kinsey had been, although in Kinsey, there's some great stuff. And so I was looking at the Chicago School of Sociology and people influenced by them who were exploring how things that we take for granted, like sexual categories and sexual orientation, with the results of complex social processes.

I found Gagnon and Simon really quite extraordinary here in their prescience, the way that they were doing Foucault before Foucault, describing sexuality as largely an effect of discourse. There's hardly anything about biology there. And of course, their basic premise is that the actual experience of sexual excitement in the body is a product of language and the way in which parents teach children what they can and can't touch, think about or not think about, do or not do, and how pleasure in the surfaces of the body are usually quite strictly prescribed by parents. And this creates a kind of ownership of the body by the parents, which many people will spend their whole life suffering the effects of, but also an exclusion of the genitals and the zones of excitation. And so for them, it's through negative judgment that sexuality is created. You can't think about this, you can't say this, you can't touch this. You can't show this. In other words, the sexual parts of the body are linked to judgment and meaning. And again, given that early start, how does sex become possible? And it's why for many people later on in life sex is still more like a courtroom drama than an access to pleasure. People used to think that the idea that sex was dirty and wrong was a kind of vestige of the Victorian era which psychoanalysis would dispel, but you could argue that actually that's an entirely correct and reasonable evaluation.

JW: But do you Darian have a kind of post-courtroom hope or sensibility in the book? Because I think when you talk about, for example, that sex isn't rapt attention, sex isn't this seamless experience of overcoming whatever negative forces in your life, you start to point to what I always think of as Lacan's montage of the drive in the experience of sexuality. That it's like a cut and paste, that there's exciting fusions, there's strange localizations, there's blocking the rhythms that mediate what's too intense. Away, and towards, and away. I mean, there's something very beautiful about that piece of sensuality and off-rhythms that come

through for me.

DL: Yeah and I was very inspired here by the work of Judith Kestenberg, who has a lot of very, very interesting research on the relation between internal processes and edge-based processes. The way that the edges of the body are used to treat more disturbing internal unnameable, and ungraspable processes. There's a lot about that in the book, and Kestenberg argues along with some of the psychologists who've done research here, that basically rather than seeing sex as a kind of seamless experience, we should see it as a complex process, a kind of cut-and-paste process where certain sensations and states of arousal don't flow nicely from other sources of arousal, but are used to block or mute those other states in the same way that for example, alcohol or drugs can be used to mute the state of grief or tension. She argues that in sex itself, the many different bodily sources of arousal coming from many different internal and edge-based zones, work both with and against each other, blocking each other out, then shifting to another area or process in this collage-type way as Jamieson says. So there's a continual process of disconnection, connection and muting, jarring, shifting and censoring, during sex rather than it being a harmony.

JW: You say sex has to treat sex [laughs], in the book.

DL: I think I'm citing Karen Stephen there who has the beautiful formula that the only force strong enough to deal with sexuality is sexuality.

FC: Right. The overall impression I got from the book in terms of all this, is that sex is a sheer impossibility. It's miraculous that it even occurs, but then it has to at the same time. So there's these two parts to it. But I'd like to take it to adolescence a bit more, and to boys. So on page 118 of the book, you note in speaking about the mother, that boys are "socialized to separate, to disidentify from her often using cultural ideas of masculine behavior." Of course, this highlights the crucial importance of the cultural ideas that are available to boys growing up, and the enormous danger of many of the ideas and tropes that float around in the so-called manosphere. At the same time, I constantly hear from patients and even close male friends that no kind of masculinity is okay now. Granted, I'm in California, so you get the extreme of this kind of stuff, that all masculinity is toxic *prima facie*. So, this creates a real crisis for boys in that they do not feel it is okay or safe to use any cultural ideas regarding masculinity to draw a line between themselves and the mother. The result, as we know, is frightening as we've seen in the clinic, so depression, shut-ins, hikikomori, suicidality, and even homicidal intent. Could both of you speak to this?

JW: Yeah, I'm really unhappy with the toxic masculinity discourse [laughs]. We've just condemned, I don't know, 50% of the population, I guess maybe it's a little less. And it's sort of wild to watch in real time, the backlash against it that we're now living through in the United States with this celebration of masculinity. And if there's a toxic question, it's always a question of the institutions and not of people. And I don't know, I mean the deconstruction of patriarchy versus questions of gender identity. It's really complex, but the failure to separate these is wild to me. And also the long historical forces that we think we can wipe out with a judgment is incredibly dangerous. I think one of the things that I really appreciated in Darian's book was to bring back to the center a question about penetration, and to say that it's an anxiety fueled act for everybody. And I think in the *Disorganization and Sex* book, I sort of love Ferenczi for saying that it's a billion year old historical aberration that we're all contending with, just to get it out of the violence of this interpersonal way of conceiving it, in which judgment is bandied about.

DL: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that the question of what happens with boys nowadays is obviously crucial. In many parts of the world, the concept of masculinity is still very much unchallenged and unquestioned. These things that have been there for centuries can't just be wiped out in a few minutes, yeah? There are very, very complex ramifications of even trying to do that, and a lot of thought needs to go into the question of how these initiatives will develop, what kind of alternatives there might be, and what it means if people are deprived of the defense quality of the masculine role, which has been obviously quite hardwired in. These gender roles have been fused into development and culture for a hell of a long time, and so there's a question of what will happen if someone is deprived of these modes of defense. And in the case

of boys, or many of them, the defense against the terror of being penetrated is often projected onto the outside, so that the child's own concerns about anal and genital penetration becomes shifted into the idea that the boys must penetrate someone else as a way of stopping themselves being penetrated. Some of the psychology experiments in the 1970s and 80s showed that fear of being penetrated in men increases their sexual arousal towards women. So again, we have the idea that arousal is to a certain extent a derivative of fear, and very often it's the fear of being penetrated. One of the things again that we learn from child analysis and sometimes from the analysis of adults is that there are very, very archaic fears in boys of anal, abdominal, and genital penetration and that a lot of kids have dreams and fantasies where even the penis is site of a penetration. And obviously that then gets reversed, so it is used to penetrate. In Gershon Legman's remarkable study of sexual jokes through the ages, he observes that out of the thousands and thousands of jokes about the penis, nearly all of them are about the excessive length of someone's penis, and none of them are about the penis not being there or being threatened, yeah? It's the idea that an aggressive, punishing violent penis is something that parries the fear of being penetrated. So this is a fundamental feature of a lot of male sexuality that has to be explored and we tend to neglect it clinically and conceptually nowadays.

FC: Well, I think that certainly speaks to clinical experience in the sense that what I hear from adolescent boys who do not appeal to any kind of masculinity to be able to mark that separation, are at a real loss. And so that's precisely why they're shut in, why they won't leave their room. I have a patient, whose work with me started on the phone and I encouraged him to come into the office. I encouraged him, I encouraged him. He finally was able to, but only after we spoke about all the many things that could happen to him on the way to the office and how he might be hurt. What was striking in this example, and what came to mind immediately when I was reading your book was his big fantasy about taking the bus to session? He had watched a documentary about Frida Kahlo when she was on this trolley, and she was punctured by the accident on the trolley itself, and he was thinking about this as something that could happen to him on the way to my office. He said he would have no defense against that. He even asked if I would actually meet him at the house and then together we could go to my office, this kind of thing. And I found it stunning in that there was nothing he could actually grab onto to be able to make the journey. And it wasn't like once he made the journey, everything was fine, and he was thinking, oh yeah, I can continue to do this. It was an issue we had to work with for months, every single time there was something about the journey to the office and the fact that he had no defense for anything that might befall him. So yeah, but I think it's a serious thing at this point.

One of the things, I don't know how much it shows up in either the UK or New York, probably New York quite a bit, but here it's quite common for folks to essentially hole up in their flat or their apartment, and have everything delivered. They're remote workers with some sort of big tech job out here, and they never have to interact with anybody, or let alone let anybody into their home. So the groceries are left at the front step. They wait until the person leaves, then they open the door and bring everything in furtively. And I see it in that way too when these folks come into analysis.

One of the things that I also hear is a large scale dismissal of their father and their grandfather's masculinity as something they could never adhere to or actually work with. And when I asked them if they could give me memories about things that were very difficult for them that they experienced in their father or grandfather's masculinity, they can never really come up with anything except that it was oppressive just because it is masculinity, it's oppressive towards women and everybody else around them. That was the usual answer I would get.

JW: I was also thinking of the generation that hates voicemail, they'll text or they'll FaceTime, but they can't bear the voice this, I don't know, sheer exposure to the penetrative voice.

TM: To continue with the questions and as a preface, I'll want to note that by the time I reached the end of the book, I started hearing the title with new resonances. I began to read sex as a question of justice, or put differently, as a question of if sex is ever just. I wonder if you had considered this.

DL: I hadn't heard that. That's very nice.

TM: I thought perhaps you had played vis-à-vis the extensive exploration of questions concerning guilt.

DL: That's great. No, not at all. That's a wonderful hearing or reading of the title. Lovely.

TM: Well, in the book you bring up the courtroom drama, and speak to how our concerns of condemnation and judgment are being staged all of the time in and through sex, so it's as though a question of justice is being raised continuously, and that brings me to the next point. I wanted to ask you a question related to the handling of guilt. In particular your book explores several fantasies commonly described by women in which there is a staging of the denial of responsibility for bodily pleasure. You note that these fantasies are typically structured according to some form of sexual coercion. In one variation on the theme, there exists a lover who knows exactly how to please the woman without a single word of guidance from her about how to do so. And this brings me to the question. In an era characterized by the injunction to enjoy, what do you make of the impossibility of pleasure without an element of coercion?

DL: Let's go back to the Gagnon and Simon work, which defines sexuality as more or less created by effects of negative judgment and guilt, as a way of managing guilt. Now that means that there's no such thing as a direct access to pleasure. If you're going to access pleasure, you have to pay a price first and that's why for many people, you have to pay the price of pain as a license for pleasure afterwards. There's a sort of licensing agreement between pain and pleasure. And it's why, as I show in the book, given this problematic status of pleasure, the fact that you are not allowed it because sexual activity is wrong and guilt-ridden, something has to override the parental injunctions, something has to give you permission to have sex. And that's why sometimes the sex therapies are very effective, where traditional psychoanalytic therapies are not, because they give the person permission. An authority figure allows the person to override parental injunctions. Even if those injunctions are unconscious, you are able to have a body that can enjoy pleasure, that can enjoy sex. Now, at a fantasy level, there are many, many fantasies which aim to treat guilt. So if in having sex, you imagine you're someone else, it's very often someone else who has a social role of enjoying, like an erotic dancer or a prostitute, someone whose function, whose symbolic role involves sexuality. That can allow a person to engage in sexual acts where otherwise they might not be able to without this fantasy. Or think of coercion fantasies, in which responsibility is taken away from you because you are being forced to do something. That allows an access to pleasure because you are not responsible. So remember, as sexuality is created in our childhoods, it comes with negative judgments, evaluation, guilt, and an onus on that question of responsibility. You can't do this. You mustn't say this, you can't show this. You mustn't think this, you mustn't enjoy. So to make all these things possible, it's as if agency has to be removed from you. And this is something which is really a very, very common feature of female fantasy, even in the societies where patriarchy has been challenged the most, yeah? The statistics are almost the same today in privileged corners of Western Society as they were 60, 70 years ago. But you can also find them in men and adolescent boys where there has to be a certain kind of removal of agency in order to allow sexual pleasure to occur.

TM: That's very helpful, thank you.

JW: What was that Freud paper? The "Character Wrecked by Success"? That's us. That's our sexuality [everyone laughs].

DL: Yeah, nice.

FC: So there's another question. This is a bit different. I was in a bit of a delirium on a long plane flight having had no rest the night before. And so it's usually in those moments when one has a reading of something that might've escaped one previously. But I wanted to just to play with words a little bit. So on page 142, when you note how young people say that they were born in the wrong body, it struck me that this could apply as much to the body of the mother as being the wrong body, as it could the body of the subject

making the statement. So this connects to this whole part about making the separation with the mother. In other words, the dilemma is that they were born to the wrong mother, as it were. What does this odd reading provoke for either of you?

JW: I don't know, separation's tough [laughs]. It's always been tough, but there's something now with the phones and the internet where you can be everywhere, everybody, anywhere, all at once. So we are going to have to rework separation. Even what Darian was saying about edge space processes. There's something about having to locate these limits, and I think we're going to have to do it in more and more extreme fashions I'm afraid.

DL: That's a very nice reading of that sentence, "I was born in the wrong body" because there are some cases where it's exactly the difficulty in distinguishing, in separating, as Jamieson says, the subject's body from the body of the mother that creates a lot of problems for the person. And you know, when we focus on the sexual question, that's going to come even more into focus given the way in which sexual zones of the body are often perceived unconsciously as parental property, yeah? Those parts of the body in a way belong to the parent. And so to say I was born in the wrong body, obviously for some people it's going to refer to their gendered body, but as you say, it could also refer in some cases perhaps to the body of the mother where there's that question of how they can be differentiated or separated from her. And this is one of the things that Margaret Mead pointed out in the 1940s, where she said that you have to be sensitive to the potential confusion between sexual role identifications and efforts to find a counterpoint to the mother that a little kid can try to identify with, let's say a masculine figure, maybe the father, maybe someone else in the family environment. That doesn't mean that they want to necessarily be the dad. It could just be that they're desperate to find a counterpoint to the mother, in order to separate, to individuate, differentiate themselves from the maternal psyche and the maternal body. So again a very, very subtle clinical point made by Margaret Mead a long time ago that seems very relevant today.

JW: I've also, in the last couple months, maybe it's also because of the crisis in this country, but very classical family, romance fantasies have been coming up in my work, which I don't know, have the flavor of I was born in the wrong body, born in the wrong family, born in the wrong identity. I mean, just this idea of trying to create some space for oneself away from something that feels overwhelming.

FC: Okay. So that's the extent of our questions. We still have some time. We could just have a general discussion. But actually what occurs to me is: are there questions from either of you to put on the table that we could discuss together?

DL: I mean, the kind of obvious question coming from over here in London is the effects, I mean it's obviously slightly early to make any kind of assessment, but of the violence in terms of the kind of region gendering of America, the government there is engaged in.

FC: That's a biggie. It's early still, but I don't know. I need to think a little bit about this.

JW: There's something that keeps coming to mind. I always thought that I would be friends with younger people and that I was cool enough to keep up with it. And there's a certain moment in which I realized I didn't know what any of them were talking about anymore [laughs]. I didn't understand, I didn't understand their anachronisms, I didn't understand their memes. They would crack up laughing about things that I didn't understand what was remotely funny in it. And the trans question is also a real generational divide. So we were just talking about separation, and I just sat back a couple weeks ago and I thought, wow they did it. I mean, they just put something that was impossible for another generation, and structured a barrier—linguistically, meaning-wise, and within the realm of sexuality and identification. And I think we're living out a kind of violent response to that. But I also want to hear the necessity that they, it's hard to say, but, they created a next generation.

FC: Well thank you both for joining us in this, and to Darian for writing the book, I think we'll be talking about this for quite a number of years.

TM: Thank you very much Darian and Jamieson for speaking with us.

DL: Great. Thank you so much. It's been a real pleasure and lovely to see you.

JW: Bye everyone.

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Publication Date:

November 11th, 2025