



Principles

I shall be arguing that the very mechanisms that enable the development of the conscious, cognitive, self-reflective mind in human beings which, in turn, enable us to face reality (Freud's Reality Principle) also provide the templates that achieve a denial of reality.

To begin, I want to share certain principles that underpin my approach both to psychoanalytic work and understanding individual, group and social dynamics.

The first of these principles is uncontentious but important to state. Psychoanalysis is two things; in the first place it is the scientific study of human beings both in terms of behaviour and the development of the unique human mind. The second version of psychoanalysis is a particular form of psychotherapy which I would define as an art, not a science. Thus, the science informs the psychotherapeutic work and the psychotherapeutic work, as Hanna Segal pointed out (2006 p 285), is the laboratory in which the science can be tested and improved.

Common to both these activities is the concept of a narrative. I have found this idea enormously helpful in my work particularly because the direct implication of a narrative is that it has a *beginning*. If this is born in mind, it becomes possible to check that our understanding either of the science or of a particular therapy should seek the true beginning of any material that we are studying, rather than starting at the point of its presentation. I hope to demonstrate this in what follows. At this point I want to add a feature of practising the art of therapy as I have experienced it. Following Freud's advice to the psychoanalyst to listen with evenly-suspended attention (1912e p 111), expressed by Bion as an attitude without memory or desire (1970 p 31), my own experience is that I spend most of a therapeutic session with no idea about what is going on.

I have learned, however, that if I simply wait, an idea will suddenly pop into my mind that suddenly makes sense of what I had not understood. Bion called this the selected fact (1962a p 72) in contrast to an overvalued idea which exists in the cognitive category of certainty, a state which will prove central to what follows.

This leads to two implications; once one understands the existence of an unconscious component of human experience, it is clear that any attempt to understand the 'truth' of any human behaviour or idea, *must* take account of the unconscious contribution. Secondly, the principle of a *narrative* makes it clear that truth itself is not a *thing* but a process. For example, I notice that even a short while after I have had an idea about what is going on in a therapeutic session, when I read my notes, there is always a sense of feeling that I didn't get it quite right. The consequence of time passing is that it changes the perspective, hence we are enabled to recognise that, whatever we think now is only the best we can do at the time and not an absolute fact.

The next principle is that human beings are animals; however, we are a particular type of animal in that we are a social species with a particular connection to each other, namely that *we are designed to look after the vulnerable*. This quality distinguishes us from other social animals like predator species who reject those who become vulnerable. It is interesting to notice that, at first sight, this latter strategy would seem to be more likely to create a dominant group. It is only by looking at the full story of each type of social species that we can see that caring for the vulnerable turns out to be the most successful approach. After all, it is clear that our species has become the dominant one on the planet. I hope to show that something disturbing has happened to this human quality.

In terms of the question, "why do humans hold this particular social attitude", biologists have pointed out that this is because the human infant is born prematurely compared to all other animals.



Essentially the human brain which provides the potential to develop a thinking mind, would make the infant's head too big for successful birth and so the adaptation has been to give birth to infants who are totally unable to look after themselves. From early on psychoanalysts (and other psychologists) have noted that the infant could be described as anticipating unconditional care. Indeed, many of the psychological problems that bring people into therapy have started with a very early breakdown in which the infant is not offered unconditional care.

The move to the Reality Principle

Now for a brief description of the means by which the human infant achieves the capability of facing reality where no other animal does.

One of the most important contributions Freud made to understanding the development of the human mind was drive theory.

He posited that all animal behaviour is the result of the activity of a drive. The manifestation of this is a *feeling*. It follows from this that feelings are the means by which unconscious stimulation either from outside or within the animal is made conscious; the animal is "aroused" by a feeling (1915c pp 120-121). All feelings are conscious; there can be no such thing as an unconscious feeling.

He goes on to say that the "pressure" of the feeling is deeply unpleasant, so much so that the animal is driven to act to get rid of the feeling. To put it in slightly different terms the *intensity* of the feeling is so powerful that it drives the animal into some form of *action* designed to reduce that intensity. He called this the *pleasure principle* and explained that the preferred state is one of stasis by which he meant being free from the unpleasure caused by intense arousal.

Further that, uniquely amongst animals, the human being achieves a capacity to turn to face reality however, he does not explain what is the unique quality possessed by human infants that enables such a dramatic change.

I believe that Bion *does* explain this; he adds an extra quality that applies uniquely to human beings.

Where Klein had referred to the early state of mind in terms of the infant's emotional experience of external objects, good and bad, Bion returns to drives and talks about love and hate. (1962a pp 42-43)¹

Bion's vital contribution was to add a third drive which he called K, meaning the urge to know. I prefer curiosity because, like love and hate, it refers to a feeling. He proposed that, like love and hate, K is innate which means it operates from the beginning.

Bion also describes that K works is through a mechanism that he called alpha function which turns raw emotional material (beta elements) into symbolic representations of the original feelings (alpha elements) (1962b p 308).

What follows is my own development of these ideas.

¹ drives are really made up of components that can be summarised under those headings. These are held to be innate to all animals.



To return to the pleasure principle; the intensity of the feeling is so high that there is no choice but to *act* to get rid of it. In order for the human infant to be able to do something else, to turn to face reality, it is clear that that intensity has to be reduced.

I have found it helpful to think about alpha function in more ordinary language; my view is that it operates like a computer programme requiring us constantly to explain to ourselves, what is going on here? It is clear that the answers to that question are entirely dependent on what the infant already knows, and the neonate knows very little, he has not yet picked up information from the outside world, which is why those primitive defences are the same throughout all cultures. The encounters with the 'other' are limited but they set up the first 'explanations' about relationships.

Now it becomes possible to see the primitive defences that Kleinians identified, from a new perspective, *they arise as a result of answering the question, what's going on here?*

Every single one of them exports a feeling into a space outside the infant.

For example, the use of projective identification in the face of the hunger drive locates the source of the unpleasure in an external other that Kleinians call a bad breast and I call a hunger monster. The primitive defences act as a kind of volume control on the feelings, reducing their intensity. Without some kind of volume control the human infant would be left with only action as a response to the intensity of feeling. In this context it is well to note that the explanation, I'm being attacked by a hunger monster, can be said to represent the first idea of a relationship and it is a frightening one.

Turning down the intensity is not yet enough to explain the choice to face reality. Once again we have Bion to thank for the means by which this happens. He described it in terms of the very special relationship between the carer and her baby which he called container/contained.

The baby expresses the experience of the activity of a drive by the only action he is yet capable of, which is to scream.

The carer responds to the baby's cries by trying to understand what is the cause of the upset, in other words she is activated by her innate alpha function to answer the question, "what's going on here". The good enough mother/carers has the internal resources to stay with the baby's and her own experience of distress until she is able to work out the cause. This understanding, which we might describe as an example of a selected fact, enables her to provide whatever is necessary to ameliorate or satisfy the particular drive. At this point we might imagine that the baby, also trying to explain what's going on here, will form a conception of a containing space in which a process has taken place by which the awful, intense feeling has been transformed. This conception is what we might call the baby's image of container/contained.

I think it worth noting that this is baby's second experience of a relationship.

The baby is now in possession of all he needs to make the step that Freud called turning to face reality, the step that moves the baby from pleasure principle to reality principle. He can turn down the intensity of the feeling with primitive defences and can then imagine himself inside a container playing with the thought of the mummy who makes things better.

These two processes are key to the human being's capacity to use thinking as an alternative to action in the face of the stimulation of a drive. Ironically they are also templates for mechanisms to



turn *away* from reality as I hope to show as we pursue the narrative of the development of the human mind.

Turning away from Reality, Unconscious beliefs

I want now to offer a brief description of how the activity of the curiosity drive through the mechanism of alpha function builds the human mind. Every experience, which means every stimulation either from outside or inside the individual, activates alpha function requiring us, from early infancy onwards, to explain what's going on here. I believe that Britton (1998) describes this beautifully when he talks about the continual movement from paranoid schizoid state of mind to depressive position. The depressive position is that state of mind in which reality in all its complexity and nuance can be thought about. In contrast the paranoid schizoid position is a binary state in which certainty is the organising principle, I take it as identical with Freud's description of the pleasure principle.

My understanding of this process, which Britton describes as a feature of normal living (1998 p 69), might be a way to understand the move from an explanation about a current experience to the encounter with a new experience. This requires us to tolerate the anxiety associated with the paranoid/schizoid state (unpleasure) for however long it takes for a new explanation to emerge. This will bring us back in touch with what Freud called reality and Klein called the depressive position.

I think this formulation captures not only everyday life but also that experience that the therapist must tolerate when he has no idea what is going on but is able to wait for the 'selected fact' to emerge.

What I want to do now is to describe what happens when this goes wrong. To do that I need to describe how those mechanisms that allow the development of thinking can be perverted so that thinking is replaced with certainty which means that there is no reason to alter any explanation for what is going on now in the light of experience.

The primitive defences are essential for the maintenance of the functioning mind. Container contained represents an idea of the space in which we can safely play with thoughts. However, the primitive defences can also serve as templates for creating more complicated defences designed to keep us from knowing about something which we believe would otherwise prove to be disturbing. The keyword here is "*believe*" and I shall return to that in a minute.

In the same way, we can all discover the power of the safe place as an arena within which we can go on having thoughts without having to return to the outside world. Steiner (1993) gives an example of such a phenomenon in the context of work with borderline patients; he called it a psychic retreat, a safe place in which the patient can feel free from the anxieties associated with both the P/S and D states of mind or, using Freudian terminology unpleasure and reality.

Although the psychic retreat is a particularly powerful example of the misuse of the container contained space, I believe that these arenas are created much more often. For example, the anorexic creates a world in which she *believes* that she doesn't need any external nourishment. I mention anorexia here because I intend to discuss adolescent development going wrong. For the time being it is important to notice that the word *belief* returns in the description of this kind of flight from reality.



Britton (1998) was the first to describe unconscious beliefs and I shall use his words to summarise. He begins:

"A belief in a specific impending calamity may be unconscious, so that we are anxious without knowing why. If we have an unconscious belief that someone has betrayed us we hate them without apparent cause; if we believe unconsciously that we have done them an injury we feel guilt towards them for no obvious reason. Psychopathology can, in this way, be a result of the nature of unconscious beliefs and we might describe this as neurosis." (pp 8-9)

Later he says that 'when a belief is attached to a phantasy or idea, initially it is treated as a fact'. I would add that this is often hardly noticed, the factual nature of it means that it simply fits in with the view of the world. It is only when the belief is made conscious that there is a need to do something about, which is to test it against reality. We might say that this is the task of therapy, to uncover the patient's unconscious beliefs in such a way that he can feel able to explore them.

I would want to add to this the caveat that someone's unconscious belief might not be so difficult to perceive but to attack that belief full on will inevitably lead to a hardening of the defence against knowing about it. It leads to retaliation. (The hunger monster version of relationship)

Adolescence

At the beginning, the explanations that the infant develops for what is happening to him arise from a limited knowledge base but, the more the child encounters the outside world, particularly other people, the quicker and larger his knowledge base grows. This process used to be called socialisation which I think remains a helpful conceptualisation. The knowledge that the child acquires is also linked to *beliefs* that represent attitudes within his culture. Freud's initial idea about the internal conflict that leads to neurosis was between libido, the raw, sexually based, drives from the deep unconscious which he called the id, and the demands of society which I have just defined as beliefs. As Britton pointed out, when beliefs are recognised to be beliefs, the individual knows that these can be tested against reality. (1998 p 14) The danger arises when beliefs are *not* recognised as such but carry a penumbra of fact. They evoke a comforting feeling of certainty. It could be said that the child's developing knowledge base consists of a collection of ideas that provoke curiosity and, therefore, a potential to learn from experience but, also, a collection of ideas that are *not* open to learning from experience because they are unconscious beliefs.

In processing this developing knowledge base, the child develops an identity. In the Western world this identity feels *personal* and reflects a template of, "I am loved by loving couple". Other cultures reinforce a different kind of identity which might be described as a collective identity following the formula, "we share this view of the world". I shall be arguing that *personal* identity has become the site of a massive distortion of reality. Furthermore, this distortion transforms the process of adolescence into a minefield of dangerous beliefs that appear to the adolescent to make sense of his personal identity.

Mo and Eglé Laufer (1984) defined the adolescent task as taking possession of the adult sexual body. This is one of those apparently simple definitions that, when analysed in detail, demonstrate the complex challenge that the adolescent faces. For example, "take possession" directly implies that somebody else had previously possessed the adolescent's body. It provokes the question, "who possessed my body before me?" The obvious answer is that very same loving couple who had previously been the source of my sense of identity; my parents. This realisation, not always fully conscious, provokes the well-known adolescent behaviour directed towards those parents and



represented by the cry, "I hate you". Applying what we know about the impact of drives, in this case the drive to individuate, "I hate you" can be seen as an *action* rather than a process of thought. In my view, this action has an enormous impact on the adolescent's state of mind. In disconnecting the previous "owners" of his body, he also throws out his relationship to his parents from his central concept of his identity. This leaves him utterly alone in his sense of who he is; simply "I".

At this point, the adolescent could be said to have moved, hopefully temporarily, into a borderline state. The important feature of this state has been described by writers such as Rey and Steiner as an absence of an internal skeleton. They argue that normal development provides an internal sense of identity, linked to a sense of relationship with others, that acts like a skeleton psychically, providing an internal sense of safety. The borderline individual, in contrast, has no such internal sense of identity and must seek an external skeleton or carapace which, when it involves other people, requires *merger* for it to work.

Those of us who have worked with adolescents will be familiar with the way in which the adolescent task encourages the adolescent to join groups of other adolescents within which they can seek reassurance about the extraordinary yearnings and fantasies that accompany the biological changes that triggered the move into adolescence in the first place.

It is important to hold in mind that something *biological* triggers this stage of development. We know that puberty is the point at which the child is suddenly confronted with feelings that arise from the release of the essential sexual hormones, oestrogen for girls and testosterone for boys. It is easy to underestimate the *enormous* impact that these hormones have on the adolescent experience. This is an example of feelings that arise from internal stimulation. I have argued that the experience of such feelings stimulates alpha function; the need to explain what's happening. We know from psychoanalytic work with adolescents that their experience of such feelings is that they arise as a *new urges* to do with sexuality. We also know that these urges can feel very disturbing, which is why adolescents tend to form groups that offer a sort of merger and provide a safe space (another form of container/contained) within which gradually to test out the urges and constantly, by learning from their own experience and those of others and the group, to move towards an explanation of what's going on here.

Partly because these feelings are so new but *particularly* because they are so powerful, the impact pushes the adolescent into a more paranoid schizoid state of mind in which certainty is yearned for as an escape from the massive anxiety linked to not knowing. This provokes a ubiquitous attitude to the very place from which these new feelings have been generated, namely the body. The attitude is hatred of this body, in other words body dysmorphia. *Body dysmorphia is normal*. It is also the case that this is much more powerful for girls who have so much more to deal with in terms of their physical changes.

To summarise the challenges for the child facing the adolescent task, the first is the awful sense of being alone in the face of this process. The second is the feeling that my body is attacking me (body dysmorphia). The third, triggered by the combination of a temporary borderline state and the consequent yearning to merge can be described as desperately seeking certainty.

It takes a long time, several years, to work through the challenges of adolescence. In the old days a combination of group support and gradual experimentation allowing the adolescent to learn from experience enabled most to achieve a state of adult identity (ownership of their adult sexual body).



In the past, the threats that made therapists working with adolescents most worried were of two types. The first being the adolescent who chose to resolve the belief that their problems arose from their bodies by turning against those bodies. For example, direct attacks on the body in the form of cutting moving to a classic borderline retreat in a rigid version of container/contained in which they create a belief that they can rise above the needs of their body. For example, anorexia, a state in which the adolescent believes that they can live without nourishment. The most extreme version is suicide.

The Brent adolescent Centre which was created by the Laufers and at which I was privileged to work for several years, studied adolescent suicide through psychoanalysis of those who had made serious attempts to kill themselves. What emerged from this work was that every single one of them described the decision to kill themselves as based upon the idea, *"then they will be sorry"*. In other words these adolescents believed that they would *see* the impact that their deaths had on those whom they blamed for their existence, an example of an unconscious belief that their minds, their identity, were independent of their bodies.

This proves to be crucial in understanding the impact of the Internet on children who have become adolescent during this century.

The second type of challenge was the desperate drive to find certainty. In the days before the internet, this was often provided by organisations propounding powerful beliefs. The certainty with which such organisations present themselves to adolescents is an expression of a deeper, unconscious belief and this is what is attractive to an adolescent seeking certainty. Cults provided refuge to vulnerable adolescents by telling them exactly how they should behave so that they didn't have to encounter any internal conflicts such as those that accompany *all* adolescent processes. The most extreme version of this was fundamentalists who would draw these vulnerable people into an idea that strapping on a vest of explosives would be a powerful expression of freedom.

Sadly, the Internet has provided certainties that address both challenges.

What has gone wrong for adolescence

Perhaps I can explain my answer to this question by describing my own journey towards seeing the problem. My clinical concerns became acute in 2013 as a result of two areas in which I had professional involvement; the Tavistock Clinic, where I had been Clinical Director of the Adult Department until I resigned in 2011 and a range of supervisions and consultancies with professionals working with adolescents, many in higher education.

In the second context, I had noticed that there was an extraordinary increase in the number of university students, backed by very 'active' parents, claiming that universities were damaging these young people's mental health. The outrage was massive, like a tsunami, and revealed two things that are now a recurrent pattern. The first was that, in the face of complaint, the majority of higher education institutions abandoned debate and enquiry, completely accepted the criticisms and required changes, in other words, *'actions'*. Specifically, to the *traditional teaching technique of challenging students' beliefs in order to develop capacities for thoughtful analysis*. They did this on the grounds that this approach was the cause and source of the apparent increase in mental disorder. And, more distressingly, that the students should be the arbiters of what was acceptable and what should have no platform.



In my supervision and consultancy role, it was blindingly clear to me that the experiences these young people were having had nothing to do with mental collapse, they were merely late onset adolescence. Of course this raises the question, *'what had blocked the normal process?'*

The Tavistock Clinic phenomenon that raised my concern occurred in the Gender Identity Disorder Service (GIDS). It was the extraordinary, and completely non-psychoanalytic treatment provision, to *'act'* (i.e. intervene medically starting with puberty blockers) rather than providing a safe space for thinking and enquiry. Immediately following this change there was an enormous increase in referrals of young women wanting to transition.

This revealed a disturbing pattern. In both contexts, there was a 'shrill' complaint that arose from adolescents, their parents and others who had no proper training or expertise in either mental health or human development, making the same general claim, that these children were at serious risk of catastrophic emotional/psychological trauma unless *action* was taken straight away. The action was to accept the extraordinary idea that there was a disconnect between body and mind such that the mental construct of identity could be said to be described as 'being in the wrong body'; the solution to which was to change the body!

In a very helpful article, Nick Haslam (2016) addresses this panic about psychological harm, he describes what he calls concept creep, specifically:

"Concepts that refer to the negative aspects of human experience and behavior have expanded their meanings so that they now encompass a much broader range of phenomena than before." (p 1)

More specifically for the purpose of the claim that university students were (and still are) making is Haslam's description of the concept of trauma. Until 1980 the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) defined trauma as a physical impact on the body but changed that to include emotional and psychological damage that causes post traumatic stress disorder. The type of event that would be accepted as PTSD was carefully described and as Haidt and Lukianoff (2019) summarise,

"to qualify, an event would have to "evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone" and be "outside the range of usual human experience."¹⁸ The DSM III emphasized that the event was not based on a subjective standard. It had to be something that would cause most people to have a severe reaction. War, rape, and torture were included in this category. Divorce and simple bereavement (as in the death of a spouse due to natural causes), on the other hand, were not, because they are normal parts of life, even if unexpected." (p 25)

The creep allowed the word *trauma* to be used to define any sort of emotional challenge. To my mind this is based on an unconscious belief that emotional upset is seriously damaging.

It was clear that something unique was happening to the traditional process of adolescent development. This seemed to be a combination of parental over-protection and a social provision for a premature site of individual, adult identity. Clinical and personal experience made it clear that this was located in social media on the internet.

No longer were children forming groups to help them explore the physiological changes they were experiencing, their communications with their friends had moved to social media in which ordinary conversations took the form of actions. For example, because you can see if your text has been read, any delay in reply is experienced as a communication which feels overwhelming because it is



believed to be rejection; indeed, the descriptor of this experience was an identical misuse of the term '*traumatising*' that I described earlier with regard to university students.

It was as if the vast majority of adolescents had been recruited into exactly those belief systems that were *always* a threat in the past only, now, there appeared to be an infinite number of such '*psychic retreats*'. It only required a brief review of the places that these 'traumatised' retreated to, silos provided by the internet and offering instant and constant reinforcement for whatever identity any individual adolescent identified with, to understand what was happening. Essentially initial answers to the question, "what's going on here?" found instant affirmation and, therefore, transformed what should have been merely steps en route to a gradual exploration of adult identity into certainties.

The adolescent I'm describing cannot manage the conflict between holding onto a secure sense of identity and the challenge of physiological and psychological change. The latter becomes experienced as a threat to their stability and is projected into any individual or system that would encourage enquiry along with the label, '*dangerous persecutor*'. The unconscious beliefs that hold these young people in thrall were summarised by Lukianoff and Haidt in their helpful book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, (2019) as

The Untruth of Fragility: What doesn't kill you makes you weaker.

The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: Always trust your feelings.

The Untruth of Us Versus Them: Life is a battle between good people and evil people. (p 4)

I would add a 4th unconscious belief: Enquiry is an attack on my identity.

In their analysis, they refer to Twenge's important book, '*iGen*' (2017) in which she identifies the generation who are affected by these changes both as the iGeneration and as GenZ. In short, this is the first generation to have grown up with smart phones and social media. AI ensures that your use of social media is rewarded by being offered more and more material of the particular type that you were exploring. In my view this is identical to the fundamentalist's provision of certainty to vulnerable adolescents except that a much larger percentage of generation Z were already vulnerable due to their over-protective parents.

There are two things further to be said about this 'demand feeding' of these young people, both linked to the massive anxiety about sex and sexual identity. This is the point at which it is possible to see a link between the adolescent experience that I've been describing and the wider social environment.

Unconscious beliefs building on extreme dominance of personal identity over social concern

So, what happened to break down that social parameter of '*obligation to and respect for others*? To put it another way, how did my identity rights come to trump everything else?

My observation of the path of western philosophy when it led to the post-modernist claim that nothing can be known for certain not only represents a serious cul-de-sac in philosophical thinking but has enabled individuals to believe that whatever they may *assert* to be the case has *equal validity* to something that has been tested by experiment or discussion. The problem is that it coincided with a different sort of idea, this time a sociological concept: *the rights of the individual*.



Although the American Declaration of Human Rights claimed,

"that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." (1776 para 2)

It was only when the Nuremberg trials, through the introduction of the concepts of crimes against humanity and genocide, confirmed that there really were individual rights that no state could ignore, that there was a *legal* backing to a growing social pressure in the western world for the rights of the individual.

This had already begun in the form of a particular development in capitalism, best represented by Henry Ford's stated aim to make the model T available to everyone. The development of 'Public Relations' (which was greatly influenced by Freudian ideas as understood and applied by Freud's nephew, Edward L Bernays, aided by Freud's daughter Anna) a euphemism for the modern advertising industry, pushed the belief that *everyone* could aspire to *every sort of material possession*.

All of these developments moved the notion of 'my rights' higher up the political agenda in the Western world. None the less, there were still parameters within which individual rights and ambitions were generally accepted to be constrained. One was social, the sense of a certain level of obligation to one's social group, which, reciprocally, provided support and safety. This was most profoundly and beautifully illustrated by the creation of the welfare state in the United Kingdom. The second was economic; essentially you might feel attracted to own a particular commodity, but you could face the constraining *reality* of how much money you actually earned.

However, all that was necessary for the next level of human rights, one which we might call 'primacy' was to *remove those parameters that encouraged this facing of reality*. In the economic field this was provided by Thatcher and Reagan espousing the neoliberal concept of the free market – based on completely false ideas of how human beings make decisions (amongst other things)

'Just as we can suppose that an individual acts as if he attached a definite utility to every possible event if it were to occur, so we can suppose that he acts as if he attached a definite probability to each such event. These "personal probabilities" are assumed to obey the usual laws of the mathematics of probability.' (p 82)

Milton Friedman, (2007).

This led to a sudden rush of *entitlement*, 'I am entitled to ...' It is a small step to turn that into I can be anything or anyone that I want to be.

Amongst the most pernicious 'silos' are those that address both sex and identity. It is worth spending a little time considering sex, since the task of adolescence is to take possession of the adult *sexual* body.

That part of the adolescent task causes massive anxiety because it is triggered by the new experience of the sex hormones and their manifestation in the adolescent's mind as urges towards particular actions. Each individual will have his or her own images (symbols) of those urges which are often, indeed 'usually' accompanied by confusion and shame. This level of anxiety, as we know, moves the adolescent into a state of mind (paranoid/schizoid or pleasure principle) in which certainty feels



like the only solution. The modern adolescent has the unfortunate opportunity to turn to the internet once again, this time to pornography, in which it is easy to find adults performing and supposedly enjoying an enormous range of sexual activity. Thus, it becomes possible to locate something that appears identical to one's images of sexual behaviour, which can bring instant relief.

This is the moment to apply that approach of seeking the full narrative behind pornography. I regret that I must be brief in this analysis, but others have been able to provide a fuller and deeper account, notably Victoria Smith in her book, 'Unkind: how 'be kind' entrenches sexism' (2025). She describes how pornography arises out of the unconscious belief that women are objects for men's pleasure. Feminism has been the struggle to emancipate women from this prison; it is a struggle that always generates a retaliation from men, but this retaliation operates, as everything else that is human, at an unconscious as well as conscious level. The unconscious belief that is an expression of the male retaliation to women's emancipation, frequently forms a trap that splits feminists. Specifically, the apparently feminist argument that '*sex work*' is an expression of female freedom. This requires the denial of some crucial facts, essentially that those women are struggling to find a way to deal with the misfortune either of poverty or of psychological damage, making them ideal material for the manipulation of men. Smith eloquently develops those arguments, but I must move on to draw attention to a phenomenon that has had a huge impact on modern, Western society.

I have in mind the extraordinary rise in gender debates and conflicts. The proponents of the gender identity view often identify authors like Judith Butler with the beginning of the concept of gender. Another example of not starting at the beginning. What I am claiming that 'gender' is the invention by men, for the suppression of women, assigning differences, referring to behaviour, which distract us from the true differences which are biological. Men are assigned the qualities of freedom to run society, make babies, make decisions on behalf of 'their' women and, of course, make war. Women have been assigned roles of being available to men, having an attitude of submission, 'kindness' and looking after the home. We know that the fight for female emancipation identified the way that these gendered roles have been subtly (and not so subtly) reinforced by 'socialisation'. It was clear that such distortions of the idea about self were occurring at a conscious level with impacts unconsciously in the form of generating unconscious beliefs. It is easy to see how, without noticing that these concepts are entirely the result of conscious, cognitive processes, there could arise an idea that gender is separate from and more powerful than biology. I have argued earlier that the 'perversion' of the container/contained concept of a safe place for thinking can easily become a place to triumph over biology, e.g. 'I don't need nourishment'.

I shall end by making an observation that, I hope, will demonstrate these processes. The breathtaking speed with which Western society has been held to ransom by the claim that trans women are the most marginalised and attacked 'category' of human being resists the following analysis, nevertheless there is a need to express it. Trans women are biologically men and the campaign for 'trans rights' has been fought in the arena of the biological concept of what is a woman. I described earlier my dismay at the way the GIDS service in the Tavistock clinic moved to action (the provision of medical intervention) that could be the beginning of medical 'transition' to the opposite sex. As I said, this change in approach was followed by a staggering increase in female patients wanting to transition, and although it is a statistic that is well known, there has been no serious presence in the political/social debate about trans rights and trans-phobia from the perspective of trans men. Instead, the claims about trans phobia remain entirely about the much smaller population of *men* claiming the right to be *women*, inhabit women's spaces and reduce the concept of women to 'uterus bearers' and so on. Most people have not noticed how, once again, there is a male-led assault on women's freedom to be biologically different and socially equal.



Summary

I have argued that the role of the internet and specifically social media has offered the modern adolescent a perilous short cut to the adolescent task of taking possession of their adult sexual body. Essentially, the provision of silos that offer premature certainty about adult identity displaces the concept from an image that embraces both body and mind to one which is entirely mind based. These are expressions of unconscious beliefs that hold their victims in a vice like grip of the denial of reality and the loss of the essential tool for development, the capacity for a benign enquiry.

The consequence of this is that biologically based human qualities, like looking after the vulnerable can be triumphed over by entirely conscious, cognitive 'ideas' that are supported by a social movement of individual human rights from a place of balance with obligations to society (caring for the vulnerable for example) into the supreme position in society to which I have assigned the term 'entitlement'. Although I haven't used the term political, I feel able to make the brief observation that a politician who expresses his *entitlement* to do whatever he wants *without any concern for the social consequences*, is bound to attract a huge following because he helps to wipe out any individual, nagging feeling that there is something not quite right about one's sense of entitlement.

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