

**AFTERTHOUGHTS:
COMMENTS AND REACTIONS TO THE
N.I.P. 15TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE:
SHAME AND SEXUALITY**

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At the N.I.P. 15th Annual Conference, entitled “Shame and Sexuality,” Dr. Jody Davies presented her ideas about love, passion, and sexuality in her paper “The Times We Sizzle, and The Times We Sigh: The Multiple Erotics of Arousal Anticipation and Pleasure.” Speaking in the sanctuary of The New York Theological Seminary chapel, Davies posed some fascinating questions. What is meant by the sexual, the erotic, and the romantic? Are there two kinds of sex, one of romantic attachment and another of erotic passion? What place does aggression and, specifically, perversity have in our sexuality: one of shame? disgust? passion?

Drawing on Fairbairn’s theory of endopsychic structure, Davies proposed that there are two generalizable, universal, sexual self-state systems. Good object sexuality is characteristic of romantic love and “clean” loving sexuality. Bad or exciting object sexuality is characterized by “dark,” stimulating, hot sex. Each self-state exists dissociated from the other. Each self-state has its own characteristic sets of ideas, affects, and body experiences. The capacity to bridge these dissociated systems of self organization allows them, as Davies put it, to coexist, to modulate to contain each other. It represents a developmental achievement that makes possible a mature sexual response that is neither prudish nor sadistic. This bridging of contrary organizations of sexual motivation is itself dependent upon the ability to tolerate sexual excitement without being overwhelmed by rage or

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shut down by a restrictive compliance. Thus, in Davies' estimation, the ability to sustain frustration is derived from a capacity to sustain pleasurable anticipation. From a developmental perspective, Davies observed that if a child has sufficiently reliable and comforting primary objects, then the child has faith that eventual satisfaction will be forthcoming. This, in turn, provides the psychic space to enjoy pleasure.

The integration of the divergent erotic systems, the good and tender with the "bad" and erotic is based on an increased tolerance of challenging experiences, which then leads to the emergence of an erotic fantasy life. This fantasy life is the self-regulatory connection between arousal and yearning, and satisfaction and release. Fantasy is essential for providing the space to hold multiple irreconcilable dimensions of erotic experience.

Davies further contended that our multiple sexual selves, at turns good and bad, arise from different developmental phases, each with specific complex desires and needs. Consequently, erotic attachments are comprised of ongoing shifting levels of passion and love which by nature are unstable, filled with tension, and requiring different kinds of relating and uses of the other. Any one sexual experience will call forth at least one of our sexual selves. This experience may be potentially satisfying and exciting, but the human condition is such that there arises inevitable disappointment for the potential not realized, for the dimensions of sexual experience that go unexpressed.

Davies presented especially vivid case material drawn from her treatment of Rose, a charming 75-year-old widow, grandmother, and retired professor of English who, shortly before entering treatment, had the first orgasm of her life. Her sexual relationship with a man called Sam was a central focus of the treatment. Davies told us that Rose's mother was depressed, cold, and unavailable. As a result of the lack of maternal caring, it was Rose who had to bring up her younger siblings. Rose's father, on the other hand, was warmly engaged with Rose, although estranged from her mother. Rose learned in childhood that her father was having an affair. This knowledge aroused intense feelings in her, and at one point she stole and kept a photo of her father's lover. These experiences were reflected in her adult relationships with her husband, Bob, and then with Sam, as well as in the transferences with Davies.

Unlike many traumatized patients who enter therapy in a deadened state, Rose was feeling perhaps a little too alive for her own comfort. She did not know who she was anymore: this sexual being that had been awakened in her amorous adventures with Sam seemed far too dirty, hot, and steamy to fit within the confines of her accrued definitions of self. Together Rose and Davies try to make sense of how this good woman married to a