

Free essay on voyeurism: examining a paraphilia

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Voyeurism is part of the family of disorders that are known in psychology as “paraphilias.” A paraphilia, in psychological terms, is a person’s intense sexual interest in some kind of object or situation which is not normally associated with sexual arousal (Spitzer, 2000). Paraphilias can range from the relatively harmless-- sexual interest in non-human objects, for example-- to downright dangerous and destructive, as the pedophile’s sexual interest in a child is (Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders, 2010).

Voyeurism itself is the act of spying or watching an unsuspecting or unaware individual or individuals who are participating in “intimate behavior” (Spitzer, 2000). This behavior may be something innocuous, like changing clothes, or it may be more intimate behavior, like engaging in sexual activity. The voyeur is sexually aroused by watching these individuals engaged in this type of activity-- usually, the voyeur prefers that the object of his or her observation is not aware that he or she is being watched (Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders, 2010).

It should be noted that not all voyeurism is pathological. Some people engage in “voyeurism” with the full consent of the individuals who are being watched; this does not warrant a diagnosis of voyeurism under the criteria set forth by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-TR) used by psychologists and psychiatrists to define mental pathologies (Spitzer, 2000). According to the DSM-IV-TR, an individual has pathological voyeurism only if the individual has the desire to look at “unsuspecting individuals, usually strangers, who are naked, in the process of disrobing, or engaging in sexual activity” and this desire interferes with the individual’s ability to lead a normal, uninterrupted life outside of the desire (Spitzer, 2000).

The voyeur may use a variety of different techniques to capture his or her victims' actions while the victim is engaged in the activity that interests the voyeur. Some voyeurs may look into windows-- the quintessential " Peeping Tom"-- but the availability of recording devices and other technologically-advanced tools have given the voyeur a veritable arsenal of tools for observing potential victims (Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders, 2010).

Voyeurs may use cameras, mirrors, or other recording devices placed in locations where they can record the intimate moments that they desire to watch; some of these devices even transmit in real time, allowing them a more risk-free way to engage in the type of voyeuristic behavior that is considered pathological.

The problem with voyeurism of the pathological type is that it can be closely linked with other dangerous pathological behavior, such as stalking. When a voyeur becomes obsessed with one of his or her victims, this can easily lead to stalking behavior, behavior which is illegal and potentially dangerous for the victim (Gaupp, 1971). Stalking behavior itself has been tentatively linked with sexual violence and aggression, although a conclusive link has not been made (Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders, 2010).

There are few treatment options for those who suffer from the paraphilia itself. Many different approaches have historically been tried, but with little success; The Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders (2010) cites research that suggests that the use of pornography may reduce instances of voyeuristic behavior, because countries that have banned pornography have much higher rates of voyeuristic behavior in the population (Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders, 2010). However, there may also be sociological reasons for

this correlation; without further research, it is difficult to assert that pornography may help voyeurs avoid the pathological type of voyeuristic behavior.

Pathological voyeuristic behavior may not be able to be cured, but it is a very dangerous paraphilia, and must be addressed with the help of a psychological professional. These professionals can help the individual with the paraphilia manage it more effectively so that it does not become a long-term problem or evolve into a proclivity for sexual violence.

References

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