



WHAT IS NORMAL

THE YOUNG MAN sat still for a moment, drawing deeply on a cigarette and exhaling with slow deliberation. Looking me quickly in the eye, he asked: "Am I normal?"

It was the anticipated response to my question, and once more I had to parry it:

"What do you mean by normal?"

We were discussing his sex life, concluding an interview for the Institute for Sex Research, and I had posed my final query: What question about sex may I answer for you? This had been my very last question in over 7000 interviews about people's sex lives during the past 20 years, and the young man's response was typical. Frequently the response was merely a variation on the same theme:

"Is masturbation normal?"

"Is homosexuality normal?"

"Is mouth-genital contact normal?"

Each of these responses points to one of the serious concerns of a great many people in society today: What constitutes normal sexual behavior? And because the ages have not withered nor customs staled the variety of human sexual behavior, it is impossible to answer directly the question of what constitutes normal sexual behavior.

Whether you are normal or not, or whether you classify certain kinds of sexual behavior as normal or not, depends on how you define normal—and it is one of the most casually and blatantly misused words in the English language. The semantic approach to a definition via the ever-convenient dictionary is not a sure or satisfying way out, since standard reference dictionaries list up to nine definitions for normal. The pitfalls that lurk along the semantic path may be illustrated by a single example from the combined one-volume *Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language and the Britannica World Language Dictionary*, page 863 (international edition): "normal, *adj.* In accordance with an established law or principle; conforming to a type or standard; regular; natural. . . . Synonyms: common, natural, ordinary, regular, typical, usual. That which is natural is according to nature; that which is normal is according to the standard or rule which is observed or claimed to prevail in nature . . . the normal color of the crow is black, while the normal color of the sparrow is gray, but one is as natural as the other."

In giving its general definition, *Webster's New International Dictionary* illuminates the picture not one whit more: That which is normal is "according to, constituting, or not deviating from, an established norm, rule, or prin-

ciple; conformed to a type . . . not abnormal; regular; natural; analogical." For all the dictionaries reveal, they might as well say that what's normal is what's normal.

Approaching a definition of normal by way of its antonyms is just as confusing, since, while one might suppose that sexual behavior that is not normal would be termed abnormal, in common usage other words are employed without regard to finer distinctions (even in the jungles of psychologic and psychiatric jargon) to denote sexual behavior that is "not normal." "Pervert," "deviate" and "degenerate" are descriptive nouns interchangeably used in locker rooms and lecture halls alike in reference to the not normal, and, like all such emotionally loaded words, they carry pejorative, punitive and, hence, judgmental connotations. Furthermore, you have to be "perverted" *away from* something, "deviate" *from* something and "degenerate" *from* something—and that something must be what is normal.

But if our casual misuse of the terms normal and abnormal and their synonyms don't yield any clues to precisely what kind of sexual behavior is normal, the judgmental connotations we impute to these words speak volumes about sexual attitudes: Normal sexual behavior is behavior that is considered "right" or "acceptable," and abnormal sexual behavior is behavior that is considered "wrong" or "unacceptable." The next logical question is: What is right or wrong according to whom?—and in attempting an answer, we are confronted with countless battles—some of which have raged for thousands of years—for authority over the minds, bodies and souls of men. For every definition of "normal" in contemporary dictionaries there are thousands of moralists, legislators, religious zealots, doctors, reformers, politicians, philosophers, artists and just plain laymen—propagandists all, each for his own cause—who are more than willing to tell us what's right and what's wrong and, hence, what's normal and what's abnormal. And with quite possibly no exceptions, each and every one of us has evolved his own tacit judgments of right and wrong (normal and abnormal) concerning the next fellow's behavior, according to our own formative mores and our subsequent experiences and insights.

However, since we are also prone to lump our judgments into broad categories, such as "what's moral" and "what's legal," applying such concepts to our definition, we can rephrase the question *(continued on page 174)*

article **By WARDELL B. POMEROY** *a kinsey colleague examines the chaotic criteria by which layman and lawman pass judgment on the sexual behavior of human beings*

WHAT IS NORMAL? (continued from page 97)

to: What's normal sexual behavior according to our laws? or, What's normal sexual behavior according to our prevailing morals? and so on. And now, paradoxically, our tendency to generalize helps us pinpoint working definitions of normality and abnormality by which we may classify particular types of sexual behavior.

There are at least five major criteria according to which sexual behavior may be defined as normal or abnormal: statistics, phylogenetics, prevailing morals, law and dominant social attitudes. The statistical concept we use so often in daily life that we're often not aware of it: Whenever we say something like "The guy next door is of normal height," or when we refer to the "abnormal height" of some basketball-playing seven-footer, our standard of comparison is the general height of the population—most of our citizens are nowhere near seven feet tall,

and the guy next door could be discerned in a crowd only if he were wearing a Homburg while the rest wore fedoras.

From a statistical point of view, then, how do we behave sexually? It's easy enough to say that if most married couples have sexual intercourse, sexual intercourse must be normal among married couples. But this nice circular argument leaves unanswered the extremely important question of *how* commonplace a given type of behavior must be before we can call it *statistically* normal. What percentage of our married couples have to engage in sexual intercourse before we can say it's normal? Three quarters of the married population? Half? One quarter?

For the sake of argument, we'll say 50 percent will suffice for any sort of sexual behavior: By our arbitrary limit, if half or more of the population performs a

particular type of sexual activity, we will call that activity statistically normal. It's obvious right away that marital intercourse is normal by this definition, but how about some of our other sexual behavior?

Masturbation, for instance: 95 percent of human males and about 65 percent of human females masturbate; more than 50 percent of *married* males and nearly as many married females masturbate. By our definition, masturbation is statistically normal for all but married females.

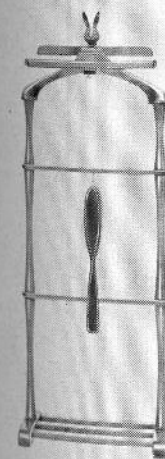
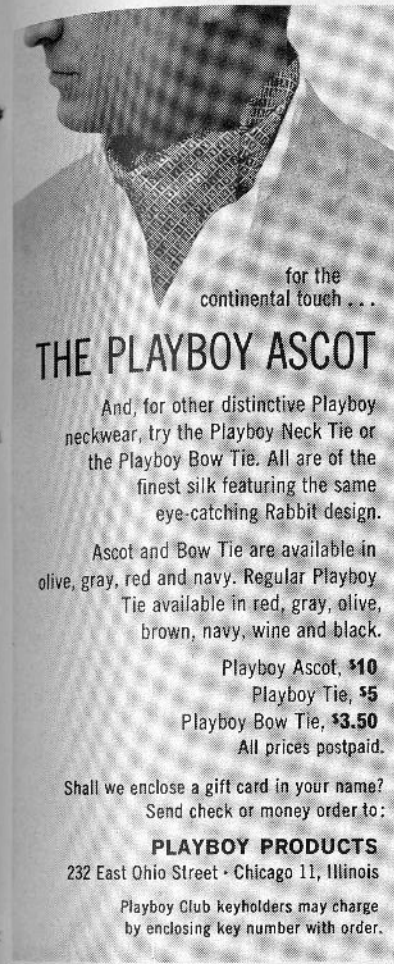
How about homosexuality? While only about a third of human males and a sixth of human females engage in *overt* homosexual activity, about half of the males have either had overt homosexual relations or have been sexually aroused by males. For males, then, homosexuality is statistically almost normal; for females, it is not.

Since sexual behavior is influenced by educational levels, we might expect that some types of sexual behavior would show up as statistically normal for one part of the population but statistically abnormal for other parts. And they do. Mouth-genital activity furnishes a case in point: Among the better educated, this activity is common for more than 50 percent of the group, and is therefore normal by definition. But among the less educated, where taboos remain stronger, fewer than 50 percent of the group engage in mouth-genital activity, and, for them, it is abnormal. Abnormal also—for *all* segments of the population—are adult relations with children (pedophilia) and real rape (as distinguished from statutory rape), which are the sexual predilections of much less than half our citizenry. Finally, how do we perform sexually out of wedlock? Statistically speaking, well over 85 percent of us indulge in one form or another of nonmarital intercourse—premarital, extramarital or postmarital.

What is normal sexual behavior? Almost anything, according to statistics, except pedophilia and rape. Normal is as normal does.

Let's try another approach toward a definition of sexual normality. From grade school on, we have it persistently drummed into our heads that human beings are a species of animal—specifically, mammals—and during the rest of our lives certain aphorisms ("Man is a rational animal") are tossed at us whenever we act as though we have forgotten the fact. Since we are mammals, we can ask ourselves how our sexual behavior compares with that of other mammals: How is our behavior like theirs, and how does it differ? This is the phylogenetic definition of sexual normality: Sexual behavior natural to mammals is sexual behavior we're likely to be engaged in.

Among mammals other than the human variety, monogamy is the equiva-



lent of marital status (we alone have benefit of law or clergy), and in this respect, as mammals, we are distinctly *abnormal* and *unnatural*. Most mammals do not cleave to one mate for a long period of time.

On the other hand, masturbation, homosexuality and mouth-genital activity are common to almost all species of mammals; even sexual relations between mammals of different species and between mammals and inanimate objects are more common than popularly believed. Do other mammals rape, have sexual relations with their young, engage in sadistic behavior? Yes, some do. So by phylogenetic definition, there's almost nothing that humans do sexually that isn't part of their mammalian nature and heritage.

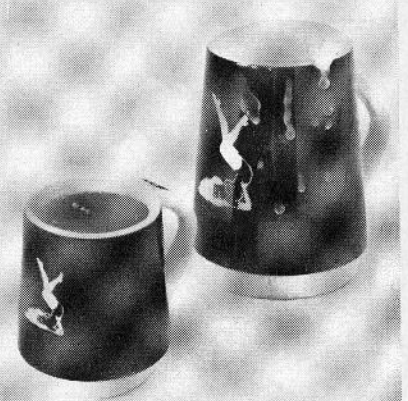
For one reason or another, we humans are generally reluctant to recognize how close our sexual behavior is to that of our mammalian forebears, and one of the arguments most frequently employed to put distance between ourselves and the primates is that though we are mammals, we are a very special kind endowed with unique and highly developed abilities to love and to think and to communicate. Proponents of this thesis of man's exclusivity also argue that we're the only mammals that practice intercourse face to face. None of these arguments is entirely true. Other mammals *do* have the ability to love, they *do* communicate with one another, and they *do* have some sort of thinking ability—and some primates do, on occasion, have intercourse face to face. The difference between humans and other mammals, therefore, is one of degree and not of kind.

Since the other three definitions of normal sexual behavior—the moral, legal and social—depend to varying degrees on the Judaeo-Christian code of ethics and the bodies of law that have been built upon it, it will repay us to briefly note its origins, which have been treated extensively in *The Playboy Philosophy*. The history of the Judaeo-Christian ethic goes back many centuries before Christ, to the nomadic Jewish tribes of western Asia, whose code of sexual behavior was typical of tribes in that part of the world: Homosexuality was permitted provided no master-servant or superior-subordinate relationship existed between the two parties; intercourse with certain animals was condoned, while it was condemned with certain others, depending upon the species; prostitution was part of the religious ceremony in temples of worship; and polygyny was practiced. It was a sexual code considerably freer than that which the Jews developed upon their return from the Babylonian exile, by which time nationalistic fervor had led them to draw sharp distinctions between themselves and their neighbors. The latter Assyri-

Bottoms Up!

With . . .

PLAYBOY MUGS



PLAYBOY's frolicking Femlin kicks up her heels on these custom ceramic mugs. Coffee Mug holds up to 10 oz. of your favorite hot beverage. Beer Mug fills the cup with 22 oz. of ale or beer.

Playboy Coffee Mug, \$2.50, ppd.
Playboy Beer Mug, \$5, ppd.

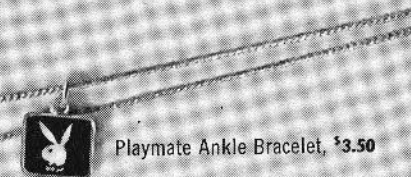
Shall we enclose a gift card in your name?
Send check or money order to: **PLAYBOY PRODUCTS**
232 East Ohio Street • Chicago, Illinois 60611
Playboy Club keyholders may charge by enclosing key no.

for playmates only

PLAYMATE JEWELRY TRIO

Three popular pieces from the original Playmate Jewelry collection. Black enamel on rhodium.

Playmate Necklace, \$3.50



Playmate Pin, \$2.50

All prices ppd.

Shall we enclose a gift card in your name?
Send check or money order to:
PLAYBOY PRODUCTS
232 East Ohio Street • Chicago 11, Illinois
Playboy Club keyholders may charge by enclosing key number with order.



"... Forgive me, Miss Brant—I meant to say,
"Do you put out to sea very often . . . ?"

ans, Hittites and Chaldeans, among others, did not believe in Jehovah and were therefore considered pagan by the Jews. Exile and nationalism radically changed the Jews' attitudes toward sexual behavior: Any sexual act that was not directly conducive to procreation was severely condemned; tribal survival and growth became paramount. Masturbation was punishable by death; males were forbidden to touch their genitals on the grounds that they might accidentally arouse themselves; nudity, homosexuality, sexual relations with animals and mouth-genital contacts were all condemned. In a word, any thought that sex could be for pleasure rather than procreation was denied and, hence, any imaginative precoital sex play or variations of position in intercourse were prohibited. Many of these proscriptions found their way into the Old Testament, frequently in allegorical form. As allegory, they were subject to widely divergent interpretation—as is evident from the writings of Christian clerics of a later and more antisexual era.

Because most early Christians were converted Jews, the early Christian movement was strongly influenced by the rigorous Jewish sexual code, and it was only much later in history that the Christian Church relented and sanctioned elaborations of precoital sex play, variations of position in intercourse and mouth-genital activity—on the firmly understood condition, however, that the final sexual act was intercourse. This remains the official position of the Catholic Church today. While many Protestant churches hold that sexual behavior in marriage is not sinful even if no intercourse is involved, they do condemn sexual behavior outside of marriage; very recently some Protestant denominations undertook to consider further liberaliza-

tion of their sex codes, and it may well be that in the foreseeable future they will relax their rigid distinctions between sexual behavior in marriage and out of marriage.

This brings us to the present, and the question of what is normal sexual behavior as defined by our Judaeo-Christian morals: Masturbation, homosexuality, nonmarital intercourse, rape and pedophilia are all abnormal ("wrong"). Marital intercourse is normal ("right")—in which a degree of latitude is given to precoital sex play, variations of position during intercourse and mouth-genital contacts.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition influenced more than just our moral sex codes; it was also the basis of ecclesiastic law, upon which English common law is based, and from which, in turn, our own sex laws are derived. One might think, therefore, that in defining normal sexual behavior as "what is legal" (normal) and "what is illegal" (abnormal) one would discover the same strictures and the same permissions found in our moral code. But this is not the case. Masturbation is one exception; it is not against the law to masturbate, as long as it is done in private—although there are two states among our 50 in which inducing another person to masturbate is classified as sodomy, according to law. But whereas masturbation is morally abnormal but legally normal, mouth-genital activity is morally normal but legally abnormal; in fact, mouth-genital activity is a felony—even between husband and wife—in all states except Illinois.

"Except Illinois" is a significant qualification—it is proof positive that where you live can determine the legal normality of specific sex behavior. What you can legally do in one state may be illegal in the next, another way of saying

that—from the legal standpoint—the distinction between normal and abnormal depends on geography. All of our states have laws against extramarital intercourse (adultery), and about half of them have laws against premarital and postmarital intercourse (fornication). Ask what's normal sexual behavior according to the law, and the answer is another question: Where do you live?

What is normal sexual behavior according to a social definition? Defined by this standard, sexual behavior that does no harm to society or its members is normal, whereas sexual behavior that does harm is abnormal. On this basis, our sex laws should protect all members of society from forced sexual relations (rape), and should protect children from sexual relations with adults (pedophilia)—the two sexual activities in which more than the two parties involved are affected. The underlying argument runs that our laws are made to protect persons and property and are not designed to perpetuate or eliminate—or punish—any particular sexual customs. By this social definition, then, masturbation and adult consensual homosexuality, nonmarital intercourse and mouth-genital contacts are normal, since each person determines for himself just what sexual activity is desirable in his own life; rape and pedophilia would definitely be abnormal. The American Law Institute, in proposing a Model Penal Code, has taken essentially this definition of normal sexuality as the basis for its recommendations.

"Am I normal?"

"What do you mean by normal?" Statistically, phylogenetically, morally, legally and socially we have sought a definition of normal sexual behavior. (For what we found, see the chart on the left.)

"Am I normal?" It would be easier to banish "normal" from our vocabulary than to answer the question. And to do so might well make more sense; after all, from the standpoint of individual psychic and physical health, what we do sexually is not nearly as important as how we feel about what we do. I—like many other objective observers—have seen cases where marital intercourse was a hostile and destructive act, and other cases where a homosexual relationship was loving and constructive. Our concern should be with individual well-being rather than with the irrelevant, illogical and psychologically damaging labeling of sexual behavior as normal or abnormal. And we might bear in mind this bit of wisdom from the Stoic philosopher Epictetus:

Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of them.

CRITERIA	Masturbation	Homosexuality	Nonmarital Sex	Mouth-Genital	Pedophilia	Rape
1. Statistical	Normal	?	Normal	Normal	Abnormal	Abnormal
2. Phylogenetic	Normal	Normal	Normal	Normal	?	?
3. Moral	Abnormal	Abnormal	Abnormal	Normal	Abnormal	Abnormal
4. Legal	Normal	Abnormal	?	Abnormal	Abnormal	Abnormal
5. Social	Normal	Normal	Normal	Normal	Abnormal	Abnormal

Reading vertically, we see that masturbation is abnormal only by moral definition, which simply means that anyone condemned for masturbation is being judged from a moralistic viewpoint (even Freud's labeling of masturbation as "immaturity" stemmed from the Judaeo-Christian proscription of it, which was much stronger in Freud's 19th Century Europe than it is here today); we see that homosexuality is by statistical definition normal for some, by phylogenetic and social definitions normal, and by moral and legal definitions (except in Illinois) abnormal; we see that by moral definition nonmarital intercourse is abnormal, that by statistical, phylogenetic and social definitions it is normal, and that by legal definition it depends on where you are; we see that mouth-genital activity is normal by all but the legal definition—although we must remember that mouth-genital activity outside of marriage is considered morally abnormal, because essentially any sexual activity outside of marriage is abnormal by moral definition; and, finally, we see that rape and pedophilia are abnormal by all definitions, with the possible exception of the phylogenetic, which we can't be sure of, because we don't yet know enough about variations in behavior among different species.

