

Cybersex, Human Sexuality and Degeneration

Raniel Sta. Maria Reyes

In this paper, the author will explicate the complex phenomenon of cybersex. As one of the innovations of contemporary man, the emergence of cybersex has radically transformed our existential eyeglasses in perceiving reality. More importantly, it poses revolutionary challenges to subjectivity, human sexuality, and social responsibility. Firstly, the nature of cybersex will be discussed. As a virtual engagement between persons, the cyber language processed, and anonymity and gender-play practiced in the cyberspace, engender sexual gratification and transcendence from socio-moral norms. Secondly, critical issues on cybersex involving the human person such as debasement of the person and degeneration of values, will be explained. Lastly, an ethical evaluation of cybersex will be elucidated. In line with this, the author will exemplify that cybersex, in rendering the totalization of the person, obstructs his/her self-fulfillment and authentic relations hence obliterating the very essence of community formation.

Keywords: *Cybersex, anonymity, sexual gratification, fragmentation, human sexuality, degeneration of values*

Cyber technology is a contemporary phenomenon that has dramatically revolutionized our perspective in grasping the meaning of life. It has transformed past fictions into realities. However, it also offers a space loaded with perplexities, such as revolution in human sexuality and its concomitant implications to personal and social development.

One of the most peculiar features of the world today is cybersex. It is the interfusion of sex and technology spawned from a famished curiosity to explore

and broaden the domain of sex by mechanical technique and possess machines in a sexually gratifying way.¹

Cybersex requires the reformulation of the existing conceptions of human sexuality and embodied subjectivity. In the cyberspace, moral frames are placed into oblivion. Conversations processed through the erotic exchanges of words elicit the cybersex procedure. Inconceivable sexual fantasies are manifested via nifty verbal exchanges. In a broad sense, cybersex involves many sexual activities akin to computer technology; while in a narrow sense, it is computer-mediated interpersonal interaction whereby the participants are seeking sexual gratification.² In the said engagement, at least two persons are required to undergo *real* time text-based or live-camera conversations. In other words, this brand of ground-breaking advancement is a rather sexual encounter and not only a mere dialogue pertaining to sex.

Text-based sexual exchanges can be expressed in various ways like by erotic illustrations of each participant's alleged activities and enunciations of new modes of consensual discourse by the formulations of myriad of sexual fantasies. These are the critical issues involving cybersex:

Anonymity and Gender-Play. People coat themselves with multifaceted identities and they want to feel to be a gender-free individual (as greatly manifested using text-based mechanism). This is a decisive factor in transforming our understanding of our mind, body, self, and machine. However, it results in a disquieting panorama on social issues that may vitiate the continuing descent of gender constitution. In the cyberspace, social mask is converted into virtual mask exemplified through typing.³ Since many women are apprehensive of becoming objects of sexual harassments in the ubiquitous patriarchal architecture of our society (i.e. in cyberspace), they resort to veiling their identities for emancipation. Thus, traditional gender demonstrations are placed outside the *dark room* discourse.

Sexual Gratification. Firstly, sexual preferences deemed as social taboos are given opportunities in cybersex. Secondly, production and dissemination of pornographic materials can immensely be actualized

¹ Marshall, McLuhan, *Young-Goddess Assembly Line*, in *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 94.

² Carlos Ronquillo, *The Ethical Challenge of Cybersex*, eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr008/ronquillo.html.

³ Steven Jones, *Cybersociety: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), 129.

due to its accessibility. Thirdly, it can provide a source of employment to others. Lastly, cybersex activity purportedly shuns health problems that maybe derived from sexual explorations with others like HIV AIDS and STDs.

Fragmentation as Debasement. The cybertranscendence concocted in the web is culpable for inducing critical issues relating to person's body-self relation and inter-personal communication. In a cyberspace encounter, the mere focus is on the erotic-genital feature of the person, conceived as an item of commodity, and not on the holistic dialogue with the person. Upon the person's objectification, his/her sexuality is manipulated by the capitalist industry for fetishization purposes.⁴

Cybersexual activity debases the value of the person. It perniciously violates the integrity of the human body and assails man's embodied subjectivity. The person derives pleasure by erotically imagining the body of his/her partner. In this vein, the thrust and perception of the body as constitutive of higher values is not anymore given significance.

Degeneration of Personal and Social Values. An authentic notion of community comprises of inter-subjective relation, of shared responsibility, which plays an essential role for the achievement of the person's potentialities. Essentially, vigorous human sexuality necessitates a personal relationship to be actualized.

Cybersexual activities, when performed outside the parameters of moderation, detach the person from the social milieu. Furthermore, the user's sexual self becomes technically extended, whereby its activation solely depends on the computer's presence. Outside the virtual, it encourages a society of isolation which is in fact detrimental to the psycho-social and sexual growth of the person. Our social contract of building intimate bonds with others is bracketed, since the person squanders majority of his/her time in front of the computer. The essence of community living is therefore corrupted.

The sexually-gratifying and anonymous characters of cybersex bestow the user with a certain form of optimism in transcending social strictures while engaging in a simulated relationship, resulting in a sense of protection and ambiguous freedom out of the anonymity being enjoyed. From the debasement

⁴ Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1991), 108.

of the person, to repugnance to authentic relation, and miseducation of interpersonal skills, cybersex becomes the blatant cause of personal and social degeneration of values.

Human sexuality is a significant way of epitomizing the philosophical themes of *man-as-being-in-the-world* and *man-as-being-with-others*. It is a compelling factor in typifying the human person, from being egoistic to proactive. Being its essential core, the person's obligation is to foster a space for the realization of the harmonious integration of the person's totality.⁵ Human potentialities can attain affirmation through relationships, because fluid associations with others are a universal principle of humanity. The person's nature is not the single subject of human sexuality, but also his/her actions in relation to others. In cybersex, there is a misappropriation of the reproductive faculty in achieving erotic pleasure. However, the misuse of reproductive faculty argument is already limited in apprehending the whole person's sexuality viz. totality, and untimely in analyzing the cybersex phenomenon.

As a unique individual, the human person is characterized by an intrinsic quality of openness to new existential possibilities. He/she is immanently constituted on a perpetual process of becoming like the process of maturity. In the maturation process, sexuality plays a significant position in rendering foundations for our propensity in cultivating love. Essentially, sexuality depicts the individual human person's incompleteness unless love is given to others. Thus, it is via sexuality that human societal finitude can be complemented by other's coexistence. Values privileging human dignity must be championed, and must be inculcated in the individual and community.

Human sexuality must be reformulated in a way that it would really be of enormous contribution to the person's maturity, otherwise, corruption of personhood would rise into life. Corruption would also emerge when sexuality is subjected to individuation, that is, when the person's sexuality is totalized and immobilized in engaging, genuine relationships. The human person has a non-utilitarian character and a distinctive capacity for processing moral and emotional intimacy with others.⁶ Underneath the person is the inviolable core of human dignity that must be nourished.

⁵ Anne Sabangan, *In the Chat Rooms: A Look into the Minds of Cyber Addicts*, The Manila Times (14 October 2003): 1.

⁶ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willets (New York: Girouz Inc., 1981), 122.

It is only by community engagement, can the person be liberated from the individuating frame of sexuality. Repugnance to dialogic association is tantamount to the non-fulfilment of the person. If an activity amplifies the non-integration of sexuality and if it thwarts the person from the exercise of intersubjectivity, it is called a destructive sexuality. Instead of genuinely connecting people, cybersex pushes them to their narcissistic worlds through the illusory reality it provides. Although seemingly gratifying, cybersex is only premised on superficial communication, where love and responsibility, or the user's socio-moral consciousness cannot be fashioned. Cybersex espouses ambiguous freedom and anonymity dealing with unrestrained alterations of identities. Certainly, a sexual relationship must include self-expression where honesty is a significant pillar. In cybersex, the very foundation of the social contract is fervidly uprooted, for users perceive that they cannot trust anyone.

When a person's love partner is presently pursuing a cyber affair, he/she should be alarmed because of its debilitating effects to his/her physico-emotional health, and more importantly, to the capacity for consensus-building.⁷ Human sexuality viz. sexual relationship can be life-enhancing, when each person becomes proactive in cultivating web-like relationships amid differences, and in equipping each one the integrative virtue of love. Love, which cybersex is deficient of, promotes the central *telos* of human existence. Conversely, its deficiency nullifies this.

The creative play of signs and values constituted in cybersex appears convincingly aberrant. Virtual persons in the cyberspace are unfaltering to the specifics of the self it projects, while concomitantly becoming so undedicated to its continuity. It is effortless to relinquish your simulated identity anytime. Along this line of reasoning, community continuity suffers.

If we are really after the establishment of a cyber community, we need first to expose and analyze the existing contradictions immanent in cybertechnology, to be concerned on crafting innovative and meaningful connections with others, on showing reverence for life, and to convert the cyberlandscape into a space aggrandizing values contributory to the total development of the person. The most rudimentary act that we should do is to assume Zarathustra's perspective – to conceive our body as a differential and phenomenological totality and to resolutely affirm the world amidst its finitude. ■

⁷ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (England: Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 89.