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From scopophilia to *Survivor*: a brief history of voyeurism

In 1945, long before television shows such as *Temptation Island* and websites such as *Voyeurdorm.com* promised unlimited access to the activities of unsuspecting others, psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel described the case study of a middle-aged male ‘voyeur’ who rented a room in a bordello.¹ Rather than engaging in sexual contact himself, the man ‘obtained gratification’ by looking through a peephole into an adjoining room where another man and a woman had intercourse. The voyeur would begin to cry as the activities progressed, a response, according to Fenichel, to the man’s intense feelings of anxiety and his desire that the woman next door leave her partner and come to comfort him. Subsequently, the voyeur would masturbate and would then leave the bordello feeling calm and relaxed, only to return to repeat the scenario the very next day.

According to Fenichel, the man’s short-lived gratification was the result of witnessing a scene that fulfilled specific conditions:

Voyeurs are fixated on experiences that aroused their castration anxiety, either primal scenes or the sight of adult genitals. The patient attempts to deny the justification of his fright by repeating the frightening scenes with certain alterations, for the purpose of achieving a belated mastery . . . these conditions then represent either a repetition of conditions present in an important childhood experience, or more often a denial of these very conditions or of their dangerous nature. The fact that no sight can actually bring about the reassurance for which patients are striving (forces) voyeurs to look again and again, and to see more and more, with an ever increasing intensity. Ultimately they displace their interests . . . to scenes that may better serve as reassurances.²

What Fenichel saw in voyeurism was, in other words, an act of aversion. His diagnosis of the man in the bordello as a voyeur was based not solely on what the man looked at – the couple having sex in the room next door –



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but also on the unconscious conflicts that he, in looking, overlooked. 'Primal scenes', for instance, traced back to the age when the voyeur may have witnessed his parents in coital embrace, while 'castration anxiety' represented the voyeur's startled recognition of his own helplessness and exposure. These moments of terror were re-experienced when the man looked through the keyhole: thus he cried and wished the woman would comfort him. Yet according to Fenichel, the ultimate purpose of the exercise was precisely that the voyeur prove to himself that the looked-upon scene was *not* a repetition of castration, or an apperception of its 'dangerous nature'. Instead, the bordello provided a scene that erroneously appeared to be under the voyeur's mastery and control – hence the masturbation – while allowing him to avert his eyes from the real source of his inquietude. Casting aspersion on this mastery, Fenichel looked beneath the false veneer of the voyeur's content (the couple) to the vulnerability and emptiness acknowledged in his form (the compulsion to displace anxiety).

Widely accepted as psychoanalytic dogma at mid-century, the Freudian analysis of voyeurism underlying Fenichel's claims would later be called into question, and rightly debunked, for its tendency to cast the particulars of European male development as universal absolutes. Yet in this article I suggest that psychoanalysis' central insight – a suspicion of voyeurism's content as a means of uncovering its underlying tensions – has continued relevance for two sites intimately concerned with voyeurism in the present-day USA: popular entertainment culture, and psychiatry. These two discourse communities are joined in the common assumption that voyeurism is defined almost entirely by what is being looked at rather than avoided. For instance, aided by new technologies that render the perverse as quotidian, American popular culture has embraced such phenomena as 'reality'-based 'voyeurism TV' (VTV) television programmes (*Survivor*, *Big Brother*, *The Bachelor*) and twenty-four-hour streaming-video Webcam internet sites (*ucanwatch.com*, *jennicam.com*) that promise 'all access, all of the time'.³ The uninterrupted availability of women taking showers,⁴ contestants in a boot camp,⁵ or ageing suburban rock stars⁶ has led to what cultural critic Clay Calvert calls an American *Voyeur Nation*, obsessed with 'the mass-consumption of information about others' apparently real and unguarded lives'.⁷ Meanwhile, contemporary American psychiatry posits voyeurism as a mental illness in which offending parties are defined as those who look specifically at 'unsuspecting individuals, usually strangers, who are naked, in the process of disrobing, or engaging in sexual activity', to cite the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition (*DSM IV*).⁸ Psychiatric textbooks employ terms that modify the diagnosis based on the content of voyeuristic acts, such as 'pictophilic voyeurism's dependence on 'viewing obscene or pornographic pictures or video tapes'.⁹ These diagnoses are at times aided by diagnostic-imaging technologies,

such as SPECT scans, that locate defects on the brains of individual voyeurs, thereby helping psychiatrists to differentiate hard-core paraphiliacs who require specific psychological and pharmaceutical interventions from the many amateurs who simply watch VTV programmes.¹⁰

What gets lost in these layers of content is the very point that Fenichel and Freud helped illustrate: representations that fall outside of the voyeur's observant eye provide an understanding of why certain subjects may remain ignored or avoided in the first place. In spite of, and indeed because of, its many flaws, Freudian psychoanalysis provided a useful grammar for exploring the tensions between objects observed and objects avoided through its investigation of the charged nature of this displacement. By refusing to take the insatiable nature of the act of looking at face value, psychoanalysis read voyeurism's gaze not only as an assertion of power and privilege, but as an acknowledgement of anxiety as well. Psychoanalysis defined these anxieties as extensions of 'normal' – read: male¹¹ – development, inasmuch as all men were thought to have suffered through a castration crisis. And although the force of a gaze was commensurate with its level of insecurity – voyeurs looked harder because they had more to lose – psychoanalysis connected the voyeurism practised by a civilization's deviants with the acts of looking taking place among its most upright members. By this logic, the aggressive act of looking only made sense within the context of a larger culture organized around the same, Oedipal grid. Recognition of voyeurism's gender assumptions and gender problems thereby allowed for important critiques not only of deviants, but of the societies in which they lived and worked.¹²

Failing to see this connection between deviant and normal, many contemporary scholars argue that popular culture and psychiatry are concerned with distinct types of voyeurism in which voyeurs often look at two different sets of things. Studies such as Adrian Furnam's and Emmy Harrison's 'Lay theories of etiology and cure for four types of paraphilia' presuppose differences between 'lay' and 'medical' voyeurism as the basis for their analysis.¹³ Similarly, Craig Forsyth, writing in the journal *Deviant Behavior*, describes separate categories of 'normal' voyeurism – suggesting types of voyeurism performed by many people and generally considered to be 'normative rather than deviant' – and 'pathological' voyeurism – implying the voyeurism of a relatively few individuals and considered to be harmful.¹⁴ Going a step further, Calvert writes that 'psychiatric' notions of voyeurism are 'inapplicable for much of the mediated voyeurism on television news-magazines and reality based shows . . . the bulk of our broadcast voyeurism is nonsexual and has nothing to do with observing unsuspecting people in a state of nakedness'.¹⁵ Focusing on content at the expense of form, these and other examples are joined in the assumption that an a priori split exists between the voyeurism of the many and the voyeurism of the few.

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In what follows, however, I argue that the notion of two distinct categories is a late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century discursive formation that covers over the ways that current psychiatric and popular uses of the term 'voyeurism' evolved from common psychoanalytic origins in the 1950s. For instance, much like the Fenichel quote above, mid-twentieth-century psychiatric textbooks, journal articles and the *DSM I* assumed without question that voyeurs 'displace their interests . . . to scenes that may better serve as reassurances' in a wide variety of clinical and cultural settings. Taken directly from Freud, this notion of displacement, and its implicit connection to repressed early life events, also marked the term voyeurism's first appearances in popular print culture in the early 1970s, where writers often referenced a specifically developmental pathology.

Over subsequent decades, this history was effaced by the acceptance and propagation of a concept of voyeurism explicitly devoid of a connection to the unconscious. Psychiatry's growing insistence on symptoms noted by the clinician at the time of evaluation led to a *DSM IV* diagnosis of voyeurism that highlighted a voyeur's actions and observations, but paid no mind to his intentions. Meanwhile, popular culture's many websites and television programmes effortlessly promoted a narrative of normalization – 'Voyeurism for the entire family', reads a headline in the *New York Times*¹⁶ – with no recognition of voyeurism's troubling gender implications. Lost along the way was more than an understanding of the obvious connections between individual and communal notions of deviance. Also lost was the ability to understand how, in taking voyeurism at face value, the very frameworks used in psychiatric and popular discourses blocked access to wider conceptualizations of why looking at unsuspecting others was a problem.

To demonstrate this point, I briefly trace the term 'voyeurism' from 1950 to 2004 through mainstream American psychiatric textbooks and professional journals, as well as popular magazines, TV programmes and websites. At stake in my approach is in part an understanding of the ways in which categories of normative and pathological voyeurism have been discursively produced in relation to one another over time.¹⁷ Once limited to articles describing deviance and psychopathology, popular culture's voyeurism grew with every new website and reality television show – to the point where, in the year 2004, a keyword search in Google yields over 815,000 hits.¹⁸ Meanwhile, though they once frequented medical articles and case studies, psychiatry now struggles to identify a pared-down category of voyeurs sick enough to require treatment with psychotherapy and psychotropic medications – for instance, only *fourteen* articles contained the word 'voyeurism' in their titles in the nine leading American psychiatric journals between 1990 and 2004.¹⁹

Reading against the naturalization of this divide, I also mean to suggest that, in their own avoidances, the frameworks that produce categories of normative and pathological simultaneously create their own set of blind spots, even as they attempt to more precisely define voyeurism's aetiology. Critiques that presuppose these two categories fail to see, for instance, how reality television shows, twenty-four-hour Webcam internet sites, and other examples of the voyeurism popular culture has so effortlessly adopted as an autobiographical adjective often re-enact the very gender anxieties identified, and reproduced, by psychoanalysis, while blindly pathologizing threats to normative heterosexuality and heterosexual marriage. Also overlooked are the ways that cultural assumptions help to shape psychiatry's own diagnostic gaze, even though psychiatry often claims otherwise. In these instances, the transgressive and the mainstream are revealed to be products of the same system. And assuming an absolute divide between normative and pathological voyeurism negates the possibility that normal voyeurism can also be pathological, inasmuch as a voyeur nation's compulsion with the actions of others tirelessly protects against awareness of the fragility of the self.

1950 to 1979: Scopophilia and object loss

The configuration of a narrow category of pathological voyeurism, and a relatively expansive category of acceptable voyeurism, is in many ways a late twentieth-century phenomenon. It was not always thus. Through the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, voyeurism was both a topic of intense interest within psychiatry and a concept broad enough to allow the profession to comment on a host of clinical and cultural issues.²⁰ Psychiatric textbooks explained the term's aetiology in expansive detail, diagnostic manuals prominently foregrounded its clinical presentation, and leading journals were replete with research studies and case reports examining the developmental, social and even political implications of looking at unsuspecting others. For instance, as a 'sexual deviation', voyeurism received prominent placement in the *DSM I* and the *DSM II*, where it appeared under the category of 'Personality Disorders'. These diagnostic texts described a variety of behaviours with no mention of their duration, severity or intensity – including descriptions of persons whose primary means of gratification consisted of 'looking at the sexual organs or sexual activities of others', as well as whose sexual interests were directed at objects other than 'people of the opposite sex'.²¹

Following Krafft-Ebing, scholars in the 1950s and 1960s argued that the link between sexual deviations and personality disorders demonstrated the specificity of a 'psychopathic constitution' that differentiated the deviant

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from 'normal heterosexuals'.²² But many written descriptions of voyeurism suggest that the opposite was in fact the case: because of the psychoanalytic underpinnings of the diagnosis, many authors assumed that voyeurism yielded insight into many iterations of the ways that men looked, and more often than not looked at women, in mainstream culture. For example, nearly every leading psychiatric textbook defined voyeurism as a condition aetiologically rooted in 'normal' Oedipal development in general, and the castration crisis in particular. 'The sexual aims of the voyeur are identical to those of the child', Sandor Lorand and Henry Schneer wrote in the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, 'specifically in voyeurism, adult sexuality is supplanted by infantile sexuality'.²³ Citing Otto Fenichel, Paul Friedman added in the *American Handbook of Psychiatry* that

underlying voyeurism we see infantile fixations relating to primal scenes; like almost every perversion, voyeurism can be interpreted as an attempt at reassurance against castration anxiety. But because such reassurance cannot be obtained, the voyeuristic tendencies become insatiable, sadistic, and displaced to areas other than the genitals.²⁴

As these quotes again demonstrate, psychoanalytic paradigms considered voyeurism as a character pathology that resulted when 'universal' male childhood conflicts were replayed, with a difference, in adult life. In 'normal' libidinal development, pre-Oedipal children were thought to pass through a series of stages in which a plethora of actions and body parts took on sexual meanings. Oral and anal phases focused attention on particular orifices, but other actions and parts – eyes (seeing), skin (touching), ears (hearing) – carried erogenous stimulation as well.²⁵ This polymorphous perversity was then simplified in the phallic phase, when the child collapsed all erotic perceptions and 'component drives' into one central region of the body. Placing all of his eggs in one basket – what Freud described as a recognition of 'genital primacy' – the genitals then became the site of institutional memory, at once innervated with unprecedented coetaneous sensation and imbued with meanings from earlier points in time. Such integration was a double-edged sword: while the phallus focused and enhanced the child's pleasure, it also rendered him far more susceptible to the threat realized when he allegedly saw his mother undressing, or his parents enacting a primal scene, or other seminal moments in which the awareness of castration entered into unconsciousness. In this unquestioningly patriarchal system, seeing the mother's absence signified both the loss of a treasured organ and the negation of an entire body's worth of past sensations.²⁶

Entry into adulthood in the psychoanalytic model required acceptance of the possibility of castration and identification with the father who

became its symbolic practitioner. But the voyeur remained a non-believer, passing through life looking compulsively at sexual organs, activities, and other random symbols that stood in for corporeal sexual experiences while searching vainly for the (false) coherence in himself. Looking at the parts and actions of others, in other words, became a means of deflecting awareness of the emptiness in the self. Thus the voyeur was defined both by what he looked *at*, and much more important, by what he unconsciously overlooked. Fenichel's and Friedman's explanations that voyeurism and other related perversions were attempts at 'reassurance against castration anxiety' meant that voyeurs peeped through the privacy of others in order to distract attention from their own, distracted privates. And Lorand's and Schneer's reasoning that the sexual aims of the voyeur were identical to those of the child spoke to the close connection between normal and deviant modes of looking, inasmuch as every person – really every man – was assumed to have known the fear of gendered loss. Voyeurism was a point on a neurotic continuum, a line drawn back from a common adulthood to a common childhood and a set of actions that then pushed regression into deviance.

This is not to suggest that voyeurism was considered normal or acceptable. Leading journals and textbooks described a close connection between deviance and criminality, albeit with psychoanalytic overtones.²⁷ Yet this message was often subsumed by the larger point that voyeurism provided entry into many of the central problematics of normative behaviour, and was as such both a topic of interest for psychiatric research and a diagnostic category broad enough to allow psychiatrists to comment on a host of developmental, relational and social issues. For example, Renato Almansì's 'Scopophilia and object loss' – a developmental case study of Mr J., a businessman in his mid-thirties, whose principal symptoms were 'peeping through windows for hours at a time while masturbating' and a 'compulsive fascination with pornography' – led to a wider exploration of the role of 'the visual functions' in the formation of character and character pathology.²⁸ Alan Rothenberg's 'Why Nixon taped himself: infantile fantasies behind Watergate' – one of many articles that used case studies of public figures to link sexual deviations with abuses of power – explored the 'unconscious motives that may have caused the misconduct of President Nixon and his associates', concluding that 'the administration is viewed as wishing to enjoy the pleasures of intense voyeurism while clinging to the prohibitions of deep-seated photophobia'.²⁹ Voyeurism also figured prominently in W.C. Lancer's analysis of *The Mind of Adolph Hitler* in which Hitler's disavowal of castration provided a point of entry into the Führer's 'sadistic anxieties' and insight into the dynamics of totalitarianism.³⁰

To current readers these case studies seem speculative at best. Yet

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wholesale dismissal of their findings overlooks important ways that the structure of mid-nineteenth-century psychoanalytic paradigms embedded the pathology of the individual within the pathology of the culture from which he emerged. Attending to the tensions between the individual and the communal, or between the male patient and the male subject position, allowed psychiatry to comment on clinical cases and on a host of issues in which the politics of looking helped illuminate awareness of larger injustices. As Smith Spencer wrote in 'Voyeurism: a review of the literature', 'culture' as well as the individual was thus seen as voyeuristic.³¹ Case studies of men whose primary means of intimacy was achieved through peering into unsuspecting windows opened into broad explorations of the power inherent in the act of looking, and, importantly, into theoretical explorations of the context of viewing surrounding the viewer as a means of understanding the content of the viewed. The diagnosis of voyeurism required attention to the patients who presented to psychiatrists' offices, and understanding of the gender implications of a society that, according to the 1968 textbook *Fundamentals of Psychiatry*, 'has long catered to a man's desire for visual stimulation through a variety of art forms, including painting, sculpture, photographs, magazines, books, plays, movies, and impromptu or special performances in brothels'.³² Emphasizing the displaced at the expense of its replacement, this notion of voyeurism then enabled a means of critiquing the patriarchal assumptions embedded within psychiatry, and, as scholars such as Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane would later argue, provided a methodology for exploring gendered spectator positions more broadly.³³

If psychiatric definitions of voyeurism were overly broad in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, then popular uses of the term were exceedingly narrow. To be sure, 'peeping' or 'peeping Tomism' had long been considered a crime.³⁴ Yet when voyeurism began its slow entry into common parlance – the term did not appear in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* until 1979 and appeared only eight times in the *New York Times* from 1950 to 1980³⁵ – the act of observing unsuspecting others implicitly shifted from the juridical to the psychological, or from legal transgression to mental illness. Unlike peeping Tomism, popular references to 'voyeurism' connoted mental imbalance, deviance, perversion, and other inflections of the term's psychoanalytic origins. For instance, the *New York Times*' infamous lead article on 16 December 1973, 'American Psychiatric Assn. altering position on homosexuality' contrasted the de-pathologization of homosexuality with the clearly pathological categories of psychiatric illness. The article reported that while homosexuality was removed from the *DSM* ('the decision will lead many more homosexuals with problems other than homosexuality to psychiatrists when they know doctors will not necessarily try to "cure" them'), 'fetishism, voyeurism, paedophilia, and exhibitionism', terms that

were still noted for their divergence from 'normal heterosexual' practice, remained listed under the category of 'sexual deviations'.³⁶

Surprisingly, even though voyeurism's psychoanalytic genealogies were alluded to (though never named as 'voyeurism') in films such as *Rear Window*,³⁷ the term itself did not appear in popular descriptions of film and literature until the late 1970s. An early reference, J.Y. Smith's 'Private thoughts, private lives; voyeurism or the search for truth in the art of biography?' from 1978, told of historian Barbara Tuchman's argument that 'insofar as biography is used to illuminate history, voyeurism has no place in it'.³⁸ Here, as well, 'voyeurism' implied a specifically developmental pathology. Smith noted Tuchman's scorn for 'psychoanalytically minded biographers' whose Oedipally focused voyeurism caused them to attend to psychological details instead of 'historical truths' as a means of understanding their subjects: 'Do we really have to know that someone wet his pants at the age of 6 and practiced oral sex at 60 . . . or that LB Johnson felt that his mother loved him only as long as he succeeded?' Thus, while Tuchman voiced disdain for the role of psychoanalysis, she also employed the term 'voyeurism' in a correctly psychoanalytic way to reference not only psychoanalysis' gender politics, but its assumption of a field of vision encompassing both the object of a gaze (Martin Luther) and the gazer (the biographer).³⁹

1980 to 2004: A boom in the vicarious

In subsequent decades, categories of normal and pathological voyeurism appeared to shift in relation to each other. Many complex cultural, scientific and economic factors played a part in this dynamic, as did the uncountable and ultimately unquantifiable space separating Freudian psychoanalysis in the 1950s from the *DSM IV*, *Survivor* and *Jennicam* in the early twenty-first century. Perhaps definitions of pathological voyeurism were found to be too broad, and the weight of their diffuseness became unsustainable. Little means existed for differentiating normal and pathological behaviour when, for example, Kinsey's discovery that '30 percent of men preferred coitus with at least some light' and Hamilton's subsequent claim that '65 per cent of males had done actual peeping' were cited in the 'epidemiology of sexual deviations' section in the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, as if to suggest the pervasiveness of the psychopathology rather than the over-expansiveness of the diagnosis.⁴⁰ Or perhaps culture itself changed, and psychiatry along with it, in a manner whereby actions once seen as broadly pathological became acceptable and commonplace. For these and other reasons, notions of pathological and normal voyeurism grew apart even as they grew together. Divergently, psychiatric notions of voyeurism grew

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smaller and more focused while popular voyeurism expanded and blurred. Conjointly, voyeurism came to be identified not by anxieties unseen or deflected, but by objects immediately observed.

For example, beginning in the mid-1980s, psychiatry's focus on the biological and genetic aspects of mental illness narrowed significantly the notion of voyeurism as it pertained to psychopathology. Biological psychiatry privileged the denotative over the connotative or the unconscious – changes that were no doubt to the benefit of practitioners, who were better able to focus on the symptoms at hand rather than those of the civilization at large.⁴¹ Articles, diagnostic manuals and textbooks defined voyeurism through defects located on the body of the voyeur, whose illness was itself demarcated by the content of his gaze, while holding the clinician's observations as separate and self-evident. The result was an emphasis on individual rather than communal pathology.⁴² For instance, psychiatric research articles argued that voyeurism lay within the obsessive-compulsive disorder spectrum, based on symptoms observed on evaluation or by neuro-imaging technology and shown to respond to Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI) medications. Naresh Emmanuel's 'Fluoxetine treatment of voyeurism' used the case study of a man whose 'intrusive urges and compulsive voyeurism' responded to 40 mg/day of Prozac ('he would place a running video camera on the beach and focus on specific areas of a woman's anatomy') to argue that 'since fluoxetine is reported to be effective for the treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorder', and 'voyeurism and other sexual disorders may be improved by fluoxetine', that 'similarities may exist between paraphilias and obsessive-compulsive disorder'.⁴³ Likewise, the voyeur's obsessive 'interest in looking at genitals' and compulsive 'dependence on viewing obscene or pornographic pictures or video tapes' formed the basis of studies ranging from Money's description 'pictophilic' voyeurism to Rosler and Witzum's explanations of the link between voyeurism and the serotonergic system.⁴⁴

So, too, subsequent versions of the *DSM* replaced the broad term 'sexual deviations' with the specific terminology of 'paraphilias', emphasized the 'recurrent' and 'insistently and involuntarily and repetitive' nature of voyeurism,⁴⁵ and omitted references to character or personality. The *DSM IV*'s modest description of the term at the back of the 'Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders' section made no mention of gender, while adding reference to behaviours that 'cause clinically significant distress or social impairment'.⁴⁶ As Karl Hanson and Andrew Harris explain in 'Voyeurism: assessment and treatment', this change was in direct contrast to the once-assumed link between voyeurism and normative development: 'By requiring personal distress or social impairment, the *DSM-IV* definition avoids problems of defining voyeurism as a deviation from normal sexuality and avoids defining psychopathology on ethical grounds.'⁴⁷

Meanwhile, popular culture's category of voyeurism seemed to grow as wide as psychiatry's was narrow. VTV programmes such as *Survivor*, *Are You Hot?* and *Big Brother*, courtship-disordered websites such as *ucanwatch.com*, and a host of other sites and practices provided uninterrupted evidence for Clay Calvert's assertion that America had become a voyeur nation in which technology, media and lax privacy laws combined to allow any and all Americans the right to peer into the innermost details of others' lives with complete and virtual anonymity.⁴⁸ These innermost details became constitutive of individual and cultural identity, a position described by Anna Quindlen as a 'boom in the vicarious' representing 'the hallmark of a people with not enough time on their hands, people who have a to-do list instead of a life'.⁴⁹ Mary Louise Schumacher added that 'Voyeurism hooked us long ago', with 'us' implying viewers, the author included, who 'cloister ourselves away, click the remote and hunker down for a good night's ogling at the private humiliations of others on national television'.⁵⁰ In these and countless other instances, the ready availability of voyeurism marked not America's deviants, but America itself. Quindlen's notion of a perverse pleasure enjoyed by 'people who have a to-do list instead of a life' depended on a plethora of visual material broad enough to satisfy the harried mothers with a few moments of free time to watch television at the end of a day, the exhausted businessmen returning home too late for dinner, but never too late for a Webcam, and the many other persons whose participation in everyday life, and position in a demand-and-supply economy, was marked, as it were, by their voyeurism.

Who will cheat?

Of course, the expansion of the acceptable at the expense of the pathological defines a well-known dynamic of normalization in which psychiatric terms and concepts (neurosis, hysteria) take on lives of their own when appropriated by popular culture. Yet, in this particular case, something pathognomic fell out of the move from deviant to normal, and from form to content, that defined the changed definitions of voyeurism over time. Ironically overlooked was awareness of the very point that formed the core of Fenichel's psychoanalytic case history in 1945: an obsession to see is also an act of displacement, inasmuch as the compulsions of the voyeur are defined as much by what he is not looking at as by what he is. Lost, in other words, by a focus on the voyeur's direct observations was a theory for understanding the unseen, the unacknowledged, and other blind spots that fell outside of the literal content of his gaze, if not the scopic persistence of his Webcams. Moreover, these gaps were neither happenstance nor eternal,

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but instead situated the very categories of psychiatric and popular voyeurism in relation to one another.

For example, an article by psychiatrist Ahmed Abouesh appeared in the February 1999 *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* entitled 'Compulsive voyeurism and exhibitionism: a clinical response to paroxetine'. The article described the case study of Mr A., a 50-year-old, divorced white male and father of two whose voyeurism was manifest in 'reported long-standing erotic compulsions to look up women's skirts using a mirror in public places'. According to the text, Mr A. often spent several hours a day watching naked women in pornographic movies and masturbated four to seven times a day. 'He went home drunk one night and attempted to videotape his daughter in the shower . . . he also spent several hours a night on the Internet at pornographic websites', events that ultimately led to the dissolution of his marriage.⁵¹ At the time of his presentation to the doctor, Mr A. 'reported continued voyeuristic behaviour', yet Abouesh describes a rapid improvement in Mr A.'s symptoms after treatment with 20 mg of paroxetine. After several months of medication, both Abouesh and Mr A. noticed a decrease in the content of Mr A.'s voyeuristic behaviour, 'with a decrease in the frequency as well as the reduction in the intensity of his urges and thoughts'. As a result of this success, the author concluded by calling for expanded drug trials, and PET and SPECT imaging studies 'comparing the functional neuroanatomy of patients with paraphilias to normal individuals as well as to patients with OCD'.

Meanwhile, an article with no by-line appeared on the nationalinquirerer.com website on 14 February 2001 entitled '*Temptation Island* star's secret: he's married with children'.⁵² The article described the 'expulsion from the island' of participants Taheed Watson and Ytossie Patterson after it was 'discovered' that the couple had a child – 'Taheed and his onscreen partner Patterson were booted off the show midway through filming after producers found out that THEY have a child together' – and that Watson had likely 'fathered' two children with another woman as well. As explained by the site and its embedded links, *Temptation Island* was a Fox television show in which four 'committed couples' tested their loyalty to each other by remaining for two weeks on an island in Belize filled with the 'temptation of opposite-sex seducers and seductresses'.⁵³ Males and females were sent to opposite sides of the island, where they encountered a parade of unattached massage therapists, centrefolds, beauty queens, and various and sundry others whose purpose was to lure the committed contestants into uncommitted liaisons.⁵⁴ *Temptation Island*'s status as VTV programming was based on the hundreds of hidden cameras, hand-held video cams and a twenty-four-hour *live action* website, which combined to allow viewers unlimited (and seemingly unmediated) access to the action.⁵⁵ Yet the article explained that such voyeurism had its limits: 'Fox executives decided they

didn't want to be responsible for putting people at risk for violating their marriage vows, so they banned married people. They also excluded people with children so the show wouldn't be responsible for destroying a family.' Thus when producers learned of Watson's procreativity, Watson and Patterson were publicly 'banished to another island', and never appeared on screen again.⁵⁶

These two examples point to an interesting similarity in the function of voyeurism in American psychiatric and popular discourses that works to complicate the insistence on distinct categories of normal and pathological definitions of the term. In both cases, the definition of voyeurism depends on a frame surrounding a predetermined area of expertise while ignoring modes of looking that fall outside of that purview. For instance, Abouesh employs a definition of voyeurism that rejects the psychological determinates long imbricated in psychiatric definitions of the disease in favour of those characteristics observed or described at the time of presentation. This point of view allows Abouesh to effectively control for whatever developmental or cultural variables may have once been thought relevant to the case – the tensions of Mr A.'s childhood, whether he wet his pants at age 6, his relationship with his mother – and to instead focus entirely on the obsessions, compulsions and other content matter noted on the patient by the clinician or by an MRI scan and then treated with paroxetine. Rendered as artifice, meanwhile, are the conflicts that, following Freud and Fenichel, locate Mr A.'s status as a father and as a pervert in the displacement of real relationships with visual ones. By this logic, the factors that remain unexplored – Mr A.'s fixation with internet pornography or his compulsion to peer at his daughter's 'absence' in the shower – work in contradictory ways to both 'end his marriage' and to shore up the false coherence of his position within a predictably gendered economy. Psychoanalytically, in other words, Mr A.'s mastery, like that of the voyeur in the bordello, lies within the compulsive power of his misperceptions, and his misperceptions work to divert attention from what was once considered to be the crux of his problem. Yet in an ironic act of collusion, psychiatry's narrative frame and a *DSM* severed from a developmental telos allows Abouesh to ignore this connection between the man and the internet, or the individual and the communal. These tensions in the text are highlighted by their complete absence in Abouesh's formulation; and paroxetine becomes a means both of treating the patient and overlooking the larger implications of his symptoms.

Similarly, nationalinquirer.com's reading of *Temptation Island's* content-laden voyeurism depends on a viewer's ability to focus on matters presented on screen at the expense of those tensions and conflicts identified as such and then rendered invisible.⁵⁷ In so doing, its understanding of the show rests on a foundation that, according to Michael Balint's definition

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of perversion in 1956, deploys 'deceptive measures' in order to deflect attention, while providing the veneer of control over the recognition of castration anxiety.⁵⁸ According to Balint, voyeurism and other perverse acts are always followed by the 'final gratification' of masturbatory orgasm – an act that provides both a dénouement and a protectively heterosexual conclusion to the vulnerability realized while observing the unobservable. So too, in the presentation of *Temptation Island*, the potential anxiety caused by the show's charged, central problematic, Who will cheat?⁵⁹ – is, as in psychoanalytic voyeurism, closely contained by a veneer of mastery and control, and assuaged through the final gratification of a restoration in which after the five dates and the endless opportunities for infidelity, each of the three remaining couples stay together at the show's conclusion and reaffirm their intentions to 'marry'.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, pairings that cause anxiety instead of relieving it are, after being seen, relegated as taboo by their position outside of the camera's eye. Same-sex couplings are unaddressed, even though women bunk with women and men with men. Moreover, the possibility that those observed are in fact mothers and fathers – the primal scene that all voyeurs cannot bear to watch – results in the casting away of the offending participants to another island entirely.⁶¹

Thus in a psychoanalytic sense, voyeurism itself functions as voyeurism in these two case studies. In both the psychiatric journal and the popular website, voyeurism is defined by those objects seen – the symptoms present in the exam room, the pornography on the internet, the endless coverage of tempted participants – and by those objects seemingly omitted, though glaringly present. Constructing and reifying categories simultaneously by observation and exclusion, voyeurism shores up the coherence of a narrative and the illusory authority of a man's point of view. Voyeurism identifies the doctor by his compulsion to overlook what was once thought to be culture, and culture by its insatiable drive to overlook what was once identified as pathology.

By insisting on text at the expense of context, the seen at the expense of the disavowed, or the object of a gaze at the expense of the gazer, the psychiatrist and the VTV programme thereby risk minimizing the scope of why peering anonymously at unsuspecting others is a problem. To be sure, voyeurism is a mental pathology, as it is a cultural practice that has become normative. But as psychoanalysis pointed out by its insights and enacted by its blind assumptions, voyeurism is also a practice that is culturally pathological, imbued with power, gender and other types of non-chemical imbalances that let us see the voyeur as an exaggerated extension of society as well as an aberration from it.

The point here is in no way to posit that psychoanalysis uncovered timeless truths or universal absolutes. Yet, by doggedly defining voyeurism within a developmental framework, psychoanalysis provided a method

with which to diagnose the problems and problematic assumptions of both the voyeurs who came to doctors' offices and the doctors who diagnosed them. Laying bare the machinery of its own assumptions, psychoanalysis' diagnostic framework looked closely at the deviation and discovered something important about the values and anxieties of the mean.

Inasmuch as these two examples represent small parts of larger wholes, they suggest that both American popular culture and American psychiatry would benefit from rethinking the complexity of their positions in relation to each other in the ever-changing dialectic of browser and browsed. On the one hand, consideration of the overlap between psychiatric and popular definitions of voyeurism would allow American popular culture to become more critically aware of the term it has so effortlessly adopted as an autobiographical adjective. Such a perspective problematizes understanding not only of *Temptation Island*, but the many other contemporary VTV programmes and websites that bear similar marks of voyeurism's perverted past. This is not merely a repetition of content, even though the content repetition is difficult to ignore. Psychoanalysis' notion, circa 1959, that voyeurism was a state of voracious unfulfilment in which 'the real content of the instinctual gratification remains unconscious', not to mention Fenichel's description of voyeurs who 'look again and again ... with an ever increasing intensity', reappears in 2003 as a VoyeurDorm.com website that promises 'college girls, 75 cameras, 24 hours'.⁶² Meanwhile, voyeurism's foundations of 'disbelief' described by Freud, in which evidence of the 'true nature' of castration is replaced by the fantasy of mastery and disavowal, resurface in VTV shows such as *Survivor* that are both highly scripted and fervently held to be real. In the tension between looking and avoiding, for instance, came the 'revelation' on page A1 of the 6 February 2001 *USA Today* that 'America's top TV show came under fire Monday when a former contestant on *Survivor* filed suit against its producer, claiming he engineered her ouster and "orchestrated" the show's outcome'.⁶³ Similarly, Fenichel's and Friedman's explanations that voyeurism and other related perversions were illusory attempts at 'reassurance' are teleologically scripted into Fox's *Joe Millionaire*: at the moment of climax, women who learn that Joe is a construction worker with an annual salary of \$19,000 are either rewarded with heterosexual marriage or punished for an uncannily familiar form of tyranny (the illusion being that it is the women, and not the viewing audience members, whose deeper motives are ultimately exposed).⁶⁴

In these and other instances, American popular culture's enactment of the characteristics once defined by psychoanalysis also suggests a repetition of form, because strict definitions of normativity are scripted as being inevitable, while moments of tension are rendered invisible or, as is the case in *Joe Millionaire*, castigated and disciplined by countless pairs of unseen eyes. Voyeurism then grows ever closer to sadism, because the

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aggressive obsession with the fullness of the other negates recognition of the emptiness of the self.⁶⁵ Always watching all of the time, popular culture enforces the seeming silence of looking, and the hegemony of a gender ideology that (under the guise of all-access viewing) tirelessly recuperates an often-Oedipal marriage myth and marks other forms of temptation as deviance. Reinforced along the way are the very power structures that psychoanalysis both enacted and helped to expose, only now popular culture, like psychiatry, lacks a methodology to critique them.

American psychiatry, meanwhile, would better see how normative, cultural aspects of voyeurism shape its constructions of disease, its interactions in clinics and examination rooms, and its engagement with the culture of which it, too, is a part. To be sure, psychiatry's narrow definition of voyeurism allows for a level of clarity around the issue – no small matter in an era when observing unsuspecting strangers who are naked, disrobing, or engaging in sexual activity is as easy as turning on a computer. Moreover, it is beyond doubt that men who video their daughters in the shower are, at best, mentally ill. Yet limiting discussions of voyeurism to the diagnosis of these men leads to a marginalization not only of psychiatric voyeurism, but of psychiatry itself. Concerned with the few at the expense of the many, psychiatry then loses its unique opportunity, and indeed its historically earned responsibility, to explain how individual cases yield insight into the blind assumptions of everyday life. Such awareness would enhance, rather than undermine, the treatment of patients, who manifest symptoms that respond to paroxetine, and are themselves symptomatic of a larger, communal psychodynamic.

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Notes

- 1 Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1945), pp. 71–5, 198–201, 491.
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 347–8.
- 3 voyeurlounge.com.
- 4 www.voyeurdorm.com.
- 5 <http://www.3bigshows.com/bootcamp.shtml>.
- 6 <http://www.mtv.com/onair/osbournes>.
- 7 Clay Calvert, *Voyeur Nation: Media, Privacy, and Peering in Modern Culture* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), p. 2.
- 8 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th edn) (Washington, DC: APA, 1994), p. 532.
- 9 Meg Kaplan and Richard Kruger, 'Voyeurism: psychopathology and theory', in Richard Laws and William O'Donohue (eds), *Sexual Deviance: Theory, Assessment, and Treatment* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), pp. 297–310, 298.
- 10 See N.C. Raymond, E. Coleman, F. Ohlerking, G. A. Christenson and M.

- Miner, 'Psychiatric comorbidity in pedophilic sex offenders', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 156 (1999), pp. 786–8.
- 11 I mean to reference research suggesting that '90% of reported voyeurs are male' (D. Finklehor, *Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse* [Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1986], p. 4), as well as the psychoanalytic assumption of voyeurism's universal male subject position described below.
 - 12 See below: in some instances, psychiatric critiques of male spectatorship predated the interventions of Laura Mulvey and other theorists.
 - 13 Adrian Furnam and Emmy Harrison, 'Lay theories of etiology and cure for four types of paraphilia: fetishism, pedophilia, sexual sadism and voyeurism', *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 54 (1998), pp. 689–700.
 - 14 Craig Forsyth, 'The structuring of vicarious sex', *Deviant Behavior*, 17 (1996), pp. 279–95, 282.
 - 15 Calvert, *Voyeur Nation*, p. 50.
 - 16 Frank Rich, 'Voyeurism for the entire family', *New York Times*, 1 July 2000, A13.
 - 17 Of note, the notion of voyeurism pre-dates American psychiatry by centuries. The term 'voyeurism' is attributed to nineteenth-century French origins, and the 'Peeping Tom' is commonly believed to have emerged from the legend of Lady Godiva in the year 1040.
 - 18 Results of a keyword search for 'voyeurism', <http://www.google.com> on 3 January 2003.
 - 19 Results of a full-text search for the word 'voyeurism', <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/search.dtl> on 3 January 2003.
 - 20 An early version of this section was presented at the American Psychiatric Association annual meeting in May 2002, and appears in abbreviated form in the *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 12(2004), pp. 1–5.
 - 21 *DSM I: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington, DC: APA Press, 1952); *DSM II: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington, DC, APA Press, 1968).
 - 22 See R. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (New York: Physicians and Surgeons, 1922); Sandor Lorand and Henry Schneer, 'Sexual deviations', in Alfred Freedman and Harold Kaplan (eds), *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* (Baltimore, MD: Williams and Wilkins, 1967), p. 978.
 - 23 Lorand and Schneer, 'Sexual deviations', pp. 977–87.
 - 24 Paul Friedman, 'Sexual deviations', in Silvano Arieti (ed.), *American Handbook of Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), pp. 589–603.
 - 25 See Elena del Río, 'The body of voyeurism: mapping a discourse of the senses in Michael Powell's Peeping Tom', *Camera Obscura*, 15 (2000), pp. 115–49.
 - 26 Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays*, 1905, vol. vii; *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), pp. 153–5 and fn.n; Sigmund Freud, *Fetishism*, 1927, vol. xxi; *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. See also Catherine Bates, 'Castrating the castration complex', *Textual Practice*, 12 (1998), pp. 101–19.
 - 27 Irv Yalom, 'Aggression and forbiddenness in voyeurism', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 3 (1960), pp. 305–19; Larry Gupp *et al.*, 'The use of aversion-relief procedures in the treatment of a case of voyeurism', *Behavior Therapy*, 2 (1971), pp. 585–8.
 - 28 Renato Almansì, 'Scopophilia and object loss', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 48 (1979), pp. 601–19, 614. See also Renato Almansì, 'The face–breast equation', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 8 (1960), pp. 43–70, which calls on Freud's work in *Three Essays on Sexuality* to argue that voyeurism was

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- 'indissolubly linked with early visual sensitisation due to oral deprivation and object loss'.
- 29 Alan Rothenberg, 'Why Nixon taped himself: infantile fantasies behind Watergate', *Psychoanalytic Review*, 62 (1975), pp. 201–23.
 - 30 W.C. Lancer, *The Mind of Adolph Hitler: The Secret Wartime Report* (New York, 1972).
 - 31 Smith Spencer, 'Voyeurism: a review of the literature', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 5 (1976), pp. 585–608.
 - 32 Ian Gregory, *Fundamentals of Psychiatry* (Philadelphia, PA: Saunders, 1968), p. 505.
 - 33 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Mary Ann Doane, 'Woman's stake: filming the female body', *October*, 17 (1981), pp. 23–36.
 - 34 'Burglar chase nets "Peeping Toms": O. Nary and R. J. Beck arrested', *New York Times*, 27 February 1922, p. 5. See also 'Manning, Howard, shot by students for "peeping"', *New York Times*, 1 March 1914, p. 1; 'Peeping Tom – Prosecution', *New York Times*, 10 April 1946, p. 2. For interesting perspectives from the UK, see "'Peeping Toms" – nurses issued with dye guns', *London Times*, 11 June 1966, p. 9; or 'Swift, Charles – Peeping Toms', *London Times*, 27 August 1973, p. 2.
 - 35 *NY Times* historical database (<http://historynews.chadwyck.com/noframesny/search>).
 - 36 'Amer. Psychiatric Assn. altering position on homosexuality', *New York Times*, 16 December 1973, A1.
 - 37 The year 1956. Here a camera lens becomes a phallic replacement for a photojournalist (James Stewart) confined to his Greenwich Village apartment after breaking his leg. Of note, the term 'voyeurism' did not appear in any of the four reviews of the film in the *New York Times*, and the word 'voyeurism' is never spoken in the film itself ('We've become a race of peeping toms. People ought to get outside and take a look in at themselves. . . . Look out of the window, see things you shouldn't see', says Stella (Thelma Ritter), the visiting nurse looking after broken-legged Stewart).
 - 38 J.Y. Smith, 'Private thoughts, private lives; voyeurism or the search for truth in the art of biography?', *Washington Post*, 15 November 1978, D1.
 - 39 See also James P. Sterba, 'Survey shows increased nudity in US', *New York Times*, 3 September 1974, A23.
 - 40 Freedman and Kaplan, *Comprehensive Textbook*, p. 985.
 - 41 See Gerald Klerman, 'The advances of DSM-III', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 141 (1984), pp. 539–42.
 - 42 These findings suggested that without its Oedipal foundations, voyeurism was less of a psychiatric problem altogether.
 - 43 Naresh Emmanuel *et al.*, 'Fluoxetine treatment of voyeurism', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 148 (1991), p. 950. See A. Rosler and E. Witzum's 'Pharmacotherapy of paraphilias in the next millennium', *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 18 (2000), pp. 43–56 for a biological discussion of the relationship between voyeurism and OCD.
 - 44 John Money, *Lovemarks: Clinical Concepts of Sexual/Erotic Health and Pathology, Paraphilia and Gender Transposition in Childhood, Adolescence, and Maturity* (New York: Irvington, 1996); A. Rosler and E. Witzum, 'Pharmacotherapy', pp. 43–56.
 - 45 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, (3rd edition) (Washington, DC: APA Press, 1980).

- 46 *DSM IV*, 1995.
- 47 Karl Hanson and Andrew Harris, 'Voyeurism: assessment and treatment', in *Sexual Deviance: Theory, Assessment, and Treatment* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), p. 160.
- 48 Calvert, *Voyeur Nation*, p. 1.
- 49 Anna Quindlen, 'Watching the world go by: too busy to have a life of your own? There's always the vicarious voyeurism of reality TV', *Newsweek*, 26 February 2001, p. 74.
- 50 Mary Louise Schumacher, 'Voyeurism hooked us long ago', *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 23 January 2001, 4E.
- 51 Ahmed Abouesh and Anita Clayton, 'Compulsive voyeurism and exhibitionism: a clinical response to paroxetine', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 28 (1999), pp. 23–30. See also Naresh Emmanuel *et al.*, 'Fluoxetine in the treatment of voyeurism', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 148 (1991), p. 950.
- 52 'National Enquirer', 14 February 2001: 'Temptation Island stars secret – he's married with children', <http://www.nationalenquirer.com/stories/news.cfm?instanceid=9620>.
- 53 Temptation Island Fan Club, <http://www.temptationislandfanclub.com>.
- 54 http://temptation_island.tripod.com/home.htm.
- 55 <http://www.fox.com/temptation>.
- 56 This revelation was later argued to have been known all along, and edited out of earlier conversations in the show: 'E!Online 4/4/01: Taheed and Ytossie speak!', <http://www.eonline.com/News/Items/0,1,8068,00.html>.
- 57 'Voyeurism is based on the hunger for screen experiences', Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, p. 348.
- 58 Michael Balint, 'Perversions and genitality', in Sandor Lorand (ed.), *Perversions: Psychodynamics and Therapy* (New York: Random House, 1956), pp. 16–27.
- 59 'Temptation Island: who will cheat?', *US Weekly*, 12 February, 2001, p. 1.
- 60 A similar narrative plays out in *Survivor II*.
- 61 As Watson and Patterson were the Island's only African-American participants, these events have rightly been argued to have troubling racial dimensions as well. See 'Reality TV broadcasts "bad black guy" stereotype', <http://www.geocities.com/jucream/BadBlackGuy.html>.
- 62 Paul Friedman, 'Sexual deviations', p. 592; www.voyeurdorm.com.
- 63 Gary Levin, 'Ex-"survivor" claims her exit was rigged', *USA Today*, 6 February 2001, A1; see also Freud, *Fetishism*, p. 155.
- 64 In *The Next Joe Millionaire: An International Affair*, a Texas ranch hand posing as a millionaire hoodwinks European women with the same ruse, while perhaps personifying American illusions of potency in the era of George W. Bush. See <http://www.fox.com/joem/#home>.
- 65 Richard Danielson, 'Men drawn to neighborhood of voyeur site', *St. Petersburg Times*, 30 January 2001, D1: 'Police are called after two women complain about two men seeking the home where young women pose nude for a Web site. For the second time this month, a Tarpon Springs house that is set up for Internet voyeurism is drawing attention that it never wanted. First, hackers broke into the ucanwatch.com Web site and temporarily blocked subscribers from watching the young women who live in the waterfront home cavort in the nude. Last weekend, after St. Petersburg Times published stories about the house and the Web site, three pairs of curiosity seekers wandered through the surrounding neighborhood in search of the 7,000-square-foot home and its occupants . . . Sgt. Tom Hill said that Stamas and Cooper first asked the women . . . where the ucanwatch.com house was, then started calling them names. Hill

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said the women told police that Stamas 'chased' them in a white Jeep ... Ucanwatch.com is a voyeur Web site that lets subscribers look in on up to a dozen women living rent-free at a home overlooking Kreamer Bayou in Tarpon Springs. The site includes links to hard-core pornographic images and offers subscribers the opportunity to chat with the women. State Rep. Larry Crow, R-Palm Harbor, worked in his capacity as a private attorney to incorporate the company that runs ucanwatch.com.'