



# Evolution of Human Sexuality: Biocultural History and Contemporary Transformations

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## ARTICLE INFO

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Sex and sexuality are among the most undeniable aspects of our lives. They are deeply rooted in our biology and woven through the fabric of social and cultural life. Today, we are witnessing a sexual revolution due to advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and assisted reproductive technologies. We also see a surge in sexual diversity and its recognition, and an acceptance of the interdisciplinary nature of sexuality. We, as a society including our children and youth are exposed to all these new developments. We are highly vulnerable to a major transformation in the coming days. Lest we move to an unwanted terrain, we need to talk about sex and sexuality in today's context. And for a fruitful understanding of the nature of this transformation, we need to look back and see how sex and sexuality have evolved all these years. We cannot afford to remain silent. Moreover, we now understand that sexuality is intricately linked to our health and social justice.

It is really audacious to say anything definite about how our early ancestors loved, mated, and reproduced. Unlike our body, our behavior is never fossilized. However, there are ways of interpreting various evidence collected in fields such as cultural anthropology, palaeoanthropology, evolutionary psychology, genetics, anatomy, and primatology which suggest stories about human sex and sexuality.

Sex is a mechanism for shuffling genetic material and producing species that show better adaptability. Biologists have argued that the shift from asexual to sexual reproduction helped species to evolve and adapt to changing and stressful environmental conditions<sup>[1]</sup>. Earlier, Charles Darwin introduced the concept of "Sexual Selection" to explain traits that evolve when they increase an individual's mating success<sup>[2]</sup>. Sexual dimorphism in *Homo Sapiens* is attributed to sexual selection. Human beings are unique among other primates due to the presence of important physical characteristics such as concealed ovulation that had certain evolutionary advantages<sup>[3]</sup>. *Homo Sapiens* in the earliest phase had sex, which was characterized by a lack of any regulation, preferences, or choice. Anthropologists call it the stage of promiscuity, marked by having multiple sex partners. The evidence that researchers used to suggest, this include human beings' extravagant sexual capacity well beyond reproduction, ubiquitous adultery in all cultures, rampant promiscuity in chimpanzees and bonobos (our closest relatives), and the absence of any monogamous primate living in

large social groups<sup>[4]</sup>. However, this promiscuous stage didn't help when humanity began practicing agriculture. Agriculture brought with it permanent settlement and the concept of private property, which are essentially linked to the role of paternity for property inheritance and female sexual fidelity. Strong pair bonding helped in this arrangement. Thus, a shift from promiscuity to pair bonding helped us to ensure our survival and success<sup>[5]</sup>, thereby contributing to our evolutionary journey. Sex ceased to be driven only by biological factors, rather social needs started to determine the contour of human sexual behavior. Sex became associated with male capacity for provisioning and female decision to remain faithful. We started to take *decision* about sex rather than being solely driven by sex as an instinct. In other words, we developed *sexuality*.

Sexuality can best be understood as the ways in which human beings experience and express themselves as sexual beings. It includes our identity as male, female, or any other identity as a sexual being, as well as our capacity for erotic experiences and responses. The shift that we experienced some ten thousand years ago, from sex to sexuality, traversed a long and complex path influenced by biology, culture, history, symbolism, social organization, and power structure. The emergence of the state and organized religion intensified efforts to regulate human sexuality<sup>[6]</sup>.

Scholars have stressed that human sexuality has never been universal nor static. What is considered normal in a given space and time may be considered abnormal in others. Sexuality is never frozen in biology but continuously produced through social and historical processes<sup>[7]</sup>. Foucault challenges the conventional belief that sexuality is a natural biological drive and brings many other factors to the center of analysis. He stresses that sexuality is not repressed by modern society, but it is classified, regulated, and normalized by discourses produced by various institutions. For example, modern institutions such as medicine, psychiatry, education, law, and religion have created categories such as "homosexual", "heterosexual" and "perverse". Power does not merely prohibit sexuality, but it actively creates sexual identities and truths about our bodies<sup>[7]</sup>.

Apart from the above debate on essentialism vs. social constructivism on human sexuality, there are

other very crucial developments observed. Recently, there has been substantial work on the spectrum of sexual identities. Traditional LGBTQ frameworks are now being expanded to include identities such as asexual, pansexual, demisexual and non-binary. There are also debates about the balance between inclusivity and coherence in sexual identity politics, but the question still remains "how many sexual orientations should be recognized and by whom?" Related to this question is another more pertinent debate between Queer theory vs. identity politics. Queer theory,<sup>[8]</sup> questions all fixed categories and argues for fluidity and performativity. Identity politics emphasizes shared experience of oppression and mobilizes around a stable category for rights and recognition. How to reconcile the above two?

Decriminalization of homosexuality in many countries, recognition of LGBTQ+ rights, increased acceptance of premarital sex and cohabitation, etc., can expand individual sexual autonomy. Many individuals now express sexual attraction that does not strictly fit into heterosexual or homosexual categories. Younger generations are increasingly comfortable in fluid identities. In light of the above, what kind of future are we creating? How much sexual autonomy is "right" for human society? There are also questions surrounding the issue of asexuality. Is asexuality a valid orientation? Or is it a disorder or critique of compulsory sexuality? Where to situate asexuality in the whole discussion of sexuality and evolution?

Recent advanced technologies have reshaped intimacy, sexual expression, and relationships in ways never thought before. Modern technology is separating sexuality from reproduction more completely than ever before. New forms of intimacy and sexual expressions are now possible through social networking sites, online dating apps, chatbots, AI-generated companions etc. Whether this leads to expansion of choices and autonomy or alienation and commodification? Issues of consent in digital spaces, revenge porn, deepfake pornography, and algorithmic bias in dating apps are some of the dangerous risks associated with the contemporary sexual revolution.

This issue of IJHSC brings the above questions into dialogue, asking what it means to be a sexual being today. The papers explore how various sexu-

alities are navigated in varying cultural, legal, educational and health conditions. The contributors in this issue explore issues ranging from sexual dysfunction of breast cancer patients to legal recognition and health care access for transgender persons. Some of the papers explore how sexuality today is being reshaped through digital intimacy and biomedical interventions, revealing that evolution is not only a biological process but also a technological and political one.

This issue of IJHSC opens new conversations across disciplines such as Human Biology, Sociology, Legal Studies, Psychiatry, Feminist Studies, Human Rights, and Public Health. We suggest that the evolution of sexuality did not unfold on a purely biological foundation, with social, historical, technological, and political influences added later in layers. Rather, all of these forces worked together simultaneously to produce what we observe today. It is an unfinished and ongoing process. As environments, technologies, and ethical imaginaries change, they give rise to new sexualities. Evolution also helps us to see what our future sexuality will look like. What emerges from the discussion in this issue is that human sexuality

is adaptive, creative, and ever evolving with biology and culture reconfiguring each other. Finally, this issue is an invocation to see human sexuality as a wonderful gift to live perfectly in harmony with our own nature, not in shame, guilt or stigma.

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