

Sexual Diversity in Cosmopolitan Perspective

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This article surveys recent shifts in sexological understanding of sexual diversity, emphasizing how thinking in terms of the 3 sexual binaries—male/female, masculine/feminine, same sex/opposite sex—preference has receded. It correlates these shifts with greater understanding around the world of the complexities of sex and sexual behavior and with studies of prejudice that emphasize the importance of defensive group identities requiring ascetic practice in the development of intolerance for sexual diversity. Ascetic group-identity traditions within the Abrahamic monotheistic religions are compared. Finally, this article suggests a redefinition of sexual pathology in terms of the abusive quality of pathological relationships rather than in the older terms of deviancy or perversion. As an example of redefinition, pedophilia is discussed as an abusive relationship with a child involving prejudice against children (named childism).

THE GLOBALIZATION OF SEXOLOGY AND CHANGES IN ITS CATEGORIES

In the last decade or so, the concept “sexual diversity” has shifted its meaning and compass in the Euro-American world, where the scientific study of sex—called sexology—began in earnest at the end of the 19th century. For most of the 20th century, both laypeople and scientists subscribed to a model of human sexuality stipulating that human sexuality normally (and normatively) has little diversity in it. There are just two sexes, male and female; two genders, masculine and feminine, with corollary social roles; and two kinds of sexual preference, same-sex and opposite-sex. “Sexual diversity” was roughly equivalent to “sexual pathology” and that meant (above all else) “nonheterosexual preference.”

In the wake of the Euro-American second wave Feminist Movement and the Gay Liberation Movement, the scientific study of sex became much more sophisticated and much less governed by prejudices against women and against homosexuals, so both the prejudices themselves and this Noah’s ark two-of-everything paradigm of sexuality could shift. Now, among progressive people around the world, homosexuality can be considered an ordinary, nonpathological type of sexuality; in the movement’s political terms it is “different but equal.” The political situation has changed so dramatically that a 2006 petition entitled “For the Universal Decriminalization of Homosexuality” was launched in hopes of getting the United Nations to favor abrogating the antigay laws of the 75 countries in the world where homosexuality is still a crime.

In the domain of scientific study of sex, the result of the political shift and the paradigm shift has been that the biological sex binary male and female has become a continuum that includes all

kinds of intersex states between the extremes of male and female; the gender binary masculine and feminine has turned into a “social construct” to be studied comparatively and deconstructed by sex activists so that it, too, has become a continuum stretched between extremes of masculine and feminine gender identity and role; and bisexuality now encompasses heterosexuality and homosexuality as two extremes on its continuum (as Alfred Kinsey had proposed in the 1950s).

In the 1970s and 1980s much of the scientific impetus in the Euro-American world for the paradigm shift away from binarism and toward thinking in continua came from studies of gender identity and role, which revealed great diversity in womanhood and manhood around the world and across history and which then helped medical practitioners understand how to design flexible policies for addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Recently impetus for the shift has come from the addition of “transpeople” to the list of people to be studied (and people doing the studying), for their experiences disturbed all of the taken-for-granted binaries at once. At the turn of the 21st century, sexual minorities were politically grouped as not just LGB but also LBGT, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender.

But these very compactly stated scientific and political results, which I explore further later, were also the consequence of a wave of new information about human sexuality that came to Euro-American researchers from researchers and political-sexual activists all over the world. As the Euro-American sexual liberation movements rippled outward, and then as local and international groups organized to combat the worldwide AIDS epidemic, sexual minorities who had been in hiding and often were unnamed, unorganized, sequestered, or persecuted “came out.” With their visibility, a wealth of stories and data became available, and that meant, given the existence of new communications technologies, available around the world. To offer just one example, you can go to the Internet and find out from a news-gathering site like globalgayz.com that in 2003 Nepal’s first ever organization for sexual minorities was founded and that the Blue Diamond Society welcomed under its banner and to its AIDS-oriented medical clinics not just gay men, lesbians, and transgender people but also sex workers and people who engage in various types of ritual sexual practices from singing contests to transvestitism. Similar progressive political organizations in South Asia and elsewhere try not to be prescriptive about how people define themselves and are often critical of Euro-American insistence on viewing a practice as defining an identity.

In terms of the amount of persecution suffered by sexual minorities, the globalization of the reformed scientific attention to prejudice and persecution and of the liberationist political struggle has had mixed results: in some areas, persecution has diminished, in others it has increased and become more public; in some areas, there is greater tolerance, in others greater backlash. For all kinds of sexual minorities, the recent rise of fundamentalism in all the world’s imperialistic religions, which has been intensified by globalization even in states with long secularizing trends, has been horrible. However, one trend is unambiguously progressive.

After 1989, when the Human Rights Movement emerged from under the shadow of the Cold War, the struggle for civil rights conducted by the Gay Liberation Movement in America and in most western European countries transformed into a worldwide struggle for human rights conducted by groups sharing experiences of persecution motivated by a wide range of prejudices, not just sexism and homophobia. The consolidation of the period of civil rights struggle and the commencement of the human rights struggle was signaled in 1990 when the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders and in 1991 when Amnesty International included persecution on grounds of sexual orientation in its reporting

and then extended that inclusion to transpeople. The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (ILGHR) was founded (and from the start it included transgender people's human rights in its mandate).

THE GLOBALIZATION OF STUDY OF PREJUDICES AGAINST SEXUAL MINORITIES AND SEXUALITY

One of the great achievements of the recent study of sexuality has been to show that prejudice against women, sexual minorities, or both has always gone along with and promoted misinformation about sexuality. For example, when hormones were discovered in the 1920s, it was assumed that males had one kind of hormone (testosterone) and women another (estrogen) because men and women had to be very distinct beings, and no man should have any admixture of femaleness, which would make him homosexual. The extraordinary complexity of the human hormone system and the presence in all people of every type of hormone was slow to be appreciated—and still is full of mysteries. Misinformation, in turn, contributed to the petrification of the very prejudices that had produced it.

Historical and historiographical study has freed contemporary scientists to look at human sexuality and the stories that have been told about it with much greater objectivity, and it has also provided the foundations for study of prejudice itself. After prejudice against women was clearly identified in the 1960s and given a name—sexism—that designated it as a prejudice, comparable to racism or anti-Semitism, that is, as involving characteristic acts and an ideology (not just the attitude long named misogyny), researchers could raise the question, Did this prejudice originate in a particular context or contexts, psychological and sociological? Is it now global or specieswide?

Once the question of sexism's origin had been raised and explored, it became obvious that the analogous question should be raised about homophobia, a prejudice that does not exist outside of contexts where sexism is endemic, as its forms—and they are plural—are all variants of sexism. Homophobia was named and understood as a prejudice in the 1970s, but to this day there is no word for prejudice against sexual minorities other than homosexuals, either generally or specifically, and it is not yet clearly understood that prejudices against sexual minorities other than homosexuals have been built up on the foundations of homophobia. Hermaphrodites (now more commonly known as intersexuals), for example, have in some times and places been persecuted, but there is no word in any language for such a prejudice. In some societies, transpeople—males living as females, or females living as males, who may or may not be anatomically intersexual or homosexual in terms of sexual practices—are held to be a third sex and valued, or at least not stigmatized. But in other societies transpeople, particularly males living as females, are assumed (falsely) to be homosexual and are despised.

Sexual minorities persecuted from nameless motivation obviously have in common that they challenge sex-and-gender binarism conventions or stereotypes; they are nonconforming in the matters of either genital appearance or gender role or both, and they may also be nonconforming in the matter of sexual preference (as they are assumed to be). Diverse sexual minorities have become hated in contexts where conformism itself has become valued as the means for group cohesion. And a comparative historical survey can indicate further, I believe, that the most prejudicial environments are generated when groups that have achieved group cohesion

defensively, while fending off persecution and humiliation, then turn aggressive and use their group cohesion for conquest or some form of imperialism.

To use psychoanalytic terms for this aggressively maintained group cohesion, persecuted groups master their group trauma with conquest over other groups. Prejudice against sexual minorities, including homosexuals, seems strongest in groups who have achieved cohesion defensively through an ideology of active, self-punishing asceticism or body rejection. In persecuted, defended groups, sexual minorities are accused of being the reason for the group's weakness, or of being a threat to the reproductive strength that might overcome weakness, or of interfering with a vision of how to transcend persecution by asceticism in this world and by focus on life in the next world. As such groups turn aggressive themselves, seeking the this-worldly power they have been denied, they accuse their sexual minorities of being like the outsiders who are to be conquered. The hated sexual minorities are usually said to inhibit or undermine (as a kind of fifth column) the conquest project by not contributing to the regular reproduction that would reinforce the group's imperial strength.

Within some persecuted groups that subscribe to an ascetic ideology, sexual minorities are felt to challenge by their very existence, which calls attention to sexuality and to the body. The most influential example of this sort of ideological asceticism in world history has been the small, persecuted eastern Mediterranean Christian communities of the 1st century after Christ, in which anticipation of the next life and denigration of life in this world (along with apocalyptic visions of the imminent end of this world) became the norm. At the same moment in the first century, there was an ascetic strain in persecuted Jewish communities, but it was less strong and less otherworldly among the Jews, who emphasized family bonds and regular reproduction to provide for group survival. The third Abrahamic religion, Mohammedanism, the least persecuted in its originary moment, was not body rejecting or antisexual or otherworldly, and it was also, of the three religions, the least intolerant of sexual minorities.

Early in the 1st century, Saint Paul, echoing contemporary neo-Platonic and Jewish ascetic writings, railed against both male homosexuality and cross-dressing (or what would now be called male-to-female transgender behavior). The most consistently despised practice was "sodomy," named (as it was in Jewish and Islamic traditions as well) after the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which had been interpreted—contemporary scholars would say grossly misinterpreted—as a story of male homosexual activity punished directly by God.

From its imperial inception in 313 AD, the Christian Empire proclaimed by the Roman Constantine, drawing on its heritage of body rejection or antisexuality or asceticism, and perpetuating that heritage through an ascetic priesthood in its Catholic branch, has been the greatest single source in world history of prejudice against male homosexuals, male-to-female transpeople, and male transvestites. Peoples who came under its expanding sway, as did the Gothic or Visigothic peoples who vanquished the Romans, adopted its edicts. As a general rule, it can be said that the more militantly proselytizing the Christians have been, the more they have engaged in repression of male deviants—and eventually female as well, although because female homosexuality does not directly threaten patrilineal reproduction it is less politically offensive.

Among the diverse Muslim societies that were suppressed by the Christian crusaders, homosexuality had generally been condemned, with reference both to the Qu'ran, where the "people of Lot" are censured, and to the Haditha (sayings attributed to Mohammed). But at the same time the "Greek love" of older men for their beautiful protégés and courtiers was the subject of a revered genre of Arabic love poetry and homosexuality between males was, in reality,

punished only if it had been witnessed or was in some way publicly expressed. Tolerance for private acts was much greater than in the early Christian and Jewish traditions, and this was especially the case through the great 7th- and 8th-century period of Muslim rule in the Iberian peninsula, when the Umayyad Muslims subdued the debased Visigothic culture but then ruled peacefully from their capital in Cordoba, encouraging Muslim, Christian, and Jewish peoples of Andalusia to intermarry freely.

In the modern Muslim world, militant prejudice against homosexuals and other sexual minorities has gone along with militant nationalism, which can be described as the effort of diverse types of Muslims to recover from their humiliating suppression by the Christian Empire, dating from the period of the Crusades. Among modern capitalistic Christian imperialists, the British, whose educational institutions were single sex and quite puritanical, excelled at sexual suppression, particularly of their common practice, sodomy. As in the early Christian communities, an ascetic form of Islam emerged during the rise of persecuting capitalist imperialism as the form most intolerant of sexual minorities, and Wahabbism retains that distinction to this day, when it has grown progressively more imperialistic.

Recently, although the number of Muslim nations in which homosexuality is punishable by death was reduced from seven to five as the Taliban were defeated in Afghanistan and as Saddam Hussein was overthrown in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the chief seat of Wahabbism, has grown less and less tolerant and Wahabbism has been exported from it into terrorist camps across the Middle East. The 1979 ascetic fundamentalist revolution in Iran brought about an enormous wave of sexual persecution—for homosexuality but also for adultery—that has also been exemplary for fundamentalists in other Muslim nations where homosexuality is said to be a Western aberration, an import. The importation charge is also made in many African nations, Muslim and non-Muslim, where dictatorial leaders claim that their sexual minorities are products of Western influence and that there is no such thing as indigenous African homosexuality or transgenderism.

The Christian Empire's antiminority prejudices are the world's most potent example of prejudices that began in ascetic social practices turning aggressive and, in the context of developing imperialism, becoming more political—that is, becoming like planks in party platforms. The contrast is very stark between the Christian Empire's antisexual minority prejudices and the situations in parts of the world uninfluenced by it (or by Christian-influenced Islam). In ancient China, for example, during periods of both Taoist and Confucian religious practice, male homosexuality was common in the courts of the emperors. No antihomosexual legislation was created in China until Christian missionaries brought along their models, although by far the worst period of persecution was during nationalist upsurge of the Chinese Cultural Revolution led by Mao, which was a period of assault upon the corrupting Westernization of China.

TOLERANCE FOR MULTISEXUALITY IN THE GLOBALIZING WORLD

Recent scientific study of sex, more aware of this history of prejudice and reducing the amount of misinformation it has generated, has established that the human species, like all the mammalian species, has evolved as a species in which there is great diversity of sexual constitution and behavior (with behavior not in any simple way the consequence of constitution or in any simple way correlated to gender). That is, it became obvious that human sexuality is very diverse in

constitution and expression when it was understood that all human beings are mixtures of chromosomal sex (the presence or absence of X and Y chromosomes), hormonal sex (involving a mixture of many types of hormones), gonadal sex (the presence or absence of testes and ovaries), external genitals, and reproductive sexual functions (involving capacity to produce ova and lactate or to produce sperm). Hermaphroditism or intersexuality, originally referenced exclusively to the appearance of a person's genitals, is now known to be quite common and to come in varying degrees, involving different configurations of chromosomes, hormones, gonads, and genitals. Approximately 70 intersex syndromes have been described. There are more than two dozen known causes for genital ambiguity alone, and worldwide as many as 2% to 4% of newborns have ambiguous genitals, whereas many more are intersexual in ways that cannot be detected visually.

There are places in the contemporary world where certain intersex conditions are acknowledged without stigmatization. Similarly, there are societies where transgender people are not stigmatized—indeed, where they are elevated. Among many Native Americans tribes, *nadles* or “Two-Spirit People,” constituting a third sex and often entering into same-sex marriages, are honored with a special status and specific tasks, including skill transmission and wisdom teaching. What is known in sexology as sexual identity is not assumed by many Native Americans to be a developmental product, a conjunction of many factors, biological and psychological, which a person claims as an identity. Rather, sexual role or performance is a product of shamanistic dreaming; it is assigned by a dream and the dreamer chooses to welcome the assignment as a gift, a vocation.

In other traditions as well sexuality is thought to be produced by choice of practice or choice of way of being sexual, not just by inborn makeup. Sexual identity is not a distinct kind of identity but part of the microcosm that each individual is. In the ancient Taoist sexual theory, all people were thought to be born with a mixture of the cosmic male bodyspirit *yang* and the female bodyspirit *ying*, which are exchanged by adults in sexual intercourse. Right sexual practice was supposed to preserve a person's unique harmonious bodyspirit admixture; so men, for example, were cautioned against exclusive homosexual practice because it involved too much *yang-yang* mixing and would result in not enough *ying*. Bisexual practice not only served reproduction but also served *yang-ying* calibration, keeping males female enough for harmony. By contrast, in cultures like the ancient Greek or the modern Melanesian, male characteristics were thought to be enhanced by transmission of semen from an older man to a younger man, so homosexual practice was key to initiation rites or rites of manhood that are meant to keep a boy from being too female or too much of the female world of his mother.

Considering these diverse philosophies and practices, it seems to me generally accurate to say that, as defensive asceticism is the taproot of prejudice against sexual diversity, the taproot of tolerance for it or appreciation of it is a sense that sexuality is a manifestation of a bodyspirit harmony (that is, a bisexual or ambisexual or omnisexual harmony) and that how this harmony is manifested is a matter of choice or practice. To say the same thing psychodynamically, tolerance or appreciation involves not splitting (or, in theoretical terms, not embracing binarism). Not-split persons are ones who have integrated what is felt to be male/masculine and what is felt to be female/feminine in their makeup. (Among Christian fundamentalists today, “conversion therapy” is promoted for treating homosexuals, and what this means is that homosexuals who cannot split off their forbidden desire and turn into heterosexuals must become ascetic to avoid sinning. Splitting is required, instituted, in either solution.)

Combining these two generalizations, it can be said that defensive asceticism is an extreme form of splitting; that is, so drastically are masculine and feminine split (or purified into extremes) that both disappear, both become disembodied. In the Abrahamic monotheistic traditions worship is focused on a disembodied male deity who may be accompanied by some form of Holy Spirit, which retains the last vestiges of a female component without being available for reproduction in a heterosexual manner. Ascetic splitting itself is revered. By contrast, polytheistic traditions generally include in their pantheons at least a few gods who are hermaphroditic or homosexual or transgendered in some form, that is, they represent the diversity characteristic of human families or social groups. Not-splitting is revered. Within polytheistic societies—the Hindu societies of India, for example—the kind of prejudice characteristic of monotheism only appeared under colonial conditions. In Nepal—to go back to an earlier example—the ancient Hindu and Buddhist temple art depicts many sexual practices and behaviors that were forbidden under British rule.

SEXUAL PATHOLOGY IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

Scientific study of sexual behavior in the Euro-American world was for so long dominated by categories of normality and deviance in relation to the binaries male/female, masculine/feminine and same sex/opposite sex preference that all kinds of sexual pathology were fitted to that paradigm. Any pathologies that did not fit into the binary paradigm were almost completely unstudied (although not undocumented). The psychological concept of perversion and the sociological category sex offender, for examples, were both organized by the assumption that homosexuality is the key perversion and the related assumption that most sex offenders are homosexual. All other perversions were described in relation to homosexuality, and study of sex offenders hardly existed outside of forensics, where offenders were understood as homosexual, which meant, for example, that heterosexual sex offenders in domestic situations (wife batterers) or men ordered or permitted to commit rape as part of military campaigns were not identified as sex offenders.

One of the most important consequences of the paradigm shift away from binary thinking and toward thinking in terms of continua of sex, gender, and preference experiences, has been the opportunity the shift has presented to reconsider sex pathology—a reconsideration that is in course around the world. To put this reconsideration in a nutshell: especially after both the phenomenon of sexual abuse of women and the phenomenon of child abuse and neglect became subjects for scientific study in the 1960s, and the links between these phenomena emerged, pathology was no longer thought of so much in terms of sexual diversity or deviancy as in terms of abusiveness. That is, the focus is now on the quality of the relationship existing between persons engaging in sexual behaviors.

To my mind, this refocus should result in a redefinition of sex pathology as sexual behavior, usually manifesting a specific ideology or prejudice and certainly involving characteristic acts, which is nonrelational (or relationship denying). “Nonrelational,” as I am using it, means that the pathological person cannot treat another involved in his or her act as a person, an equal, or, one would say in political terms, as a human with human rights. The person’s practices involve some form of ownership and do not involve consent or respect for the other’s wishes. To use a term from the history of marriage, there is nothing companionate in a sex offender’s sexual

relationships (or nonrelationships). By this “nonrelationality” definition of perversion, homosexuality is obviously not a perversion as it does not (any more than do heterosexuality or bisexuality) involve reducing a person to less than a person or denying human rights. A transgender person is just as capable of a respectful, equal relationship as a nontransgender person.

In the world today, even though there has been progress in writing international conventions to articulate and secure human rights generally and the rights of women and children specifically (if not yet of sexual minorities), a documentable increase is occurring in perverse sexual behaviors (thus defined). This is being fueled by globalizing social and technological conditions that foster abuse of women and children, which, although such abuses are as old as patriarchy, now have novel features. For example, most of the world’s wars since 1989 have been interstate wars, and in these wars rape and child rape have come to be used instrumentally to disrupt reproduction within an enemy ethnic group contending for control of the state. An estimated 500,000 women and girls were raped during the Rwandan genocide.

The most obvious abuse type with novel features is child pornography, which can now be manufactured easily and inexpensively with digital cameras and disseminated on the Internet by individuals without the kinds of networks and organizations once required. Solicitation of sex with minors and marketing of child prostitution, too, have moved onto the Internet, although traffic in women and children for prostitution still requires the smuggling and brothels long familiar to police and border police. The rise in recent years of global trade has been accompanied by an increase in the transportation of women and children around the world for both labor and sex work; unemployment rate increases in both developed and undeveloped countries have also contributed to increases of sexual trafficking, sexual, and sexually transmitted disease. Similarly, as the number of war zones (especially intrastate ones) in the world has risen, so have the number of refugees and people without a safe home, and the consequences of this for abuse of women and children are obvious.

For many years, research into sexual abuse of women and children was hampered by lack of agreed-upon definitions and differences in definitions across states and cultures; by lack of mandatory reporting and inconsistency in reporting; and by the prejudice, which I mentioned before, about the perpetrators being deviants in the now outdated terms. Pedophilia was widely assumed to be a subspecies of homosexuality, although it is now obvious in various cultural contexts that the vast majority of pedophiles are heterosexual males who chose their victims, whether male or female, for their nonadult status and the quality of their vulnerability or powerlessness, not just for their male or female sexual characteristics. A pedophile can avoid humiliation in adult relationships—including with adults who do not want to be infantilized—and play out sexual fantasies of various types with little resistance from an uncomprehending child.

Nowhere in the world is there a concept for a prejudice, comparable to sexism, directed against children—no childism—although in the 18th century the word “misopedia” (child-hatred) was coined to acknowledge child-hatred as comparable to misogyny and misandry. In the Century of the Child, as the 20th century was hopefully named by late 19th-century child protectionists and opponents of child labor, child-hatred was to be eliminated. But we who, despite considerable reform and even the emergence of societies characterizing themselves as “child centered,” live with the obvious fact that child-hatred did not recede, still do not speak of a childist culture when considering a culture that promotes or sanctions any form of child abuse and neglect. We do not speak of groups who are childist, as child pornographers are, or child sex traffickers, or armies recruiting child soldiers.

Hopefully, as sexual minorities whose behaviors are “different but equal” come to consume less and less of the attention of both students of sexuality and people prejudiced against sexuality and sexual variation, the really problematic sexual minority—those whose sexual behaviors are abusive—will be better understood and the human rights of their victims more understandingly and effectively protected.

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