

# AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIETY AND SEXUALITY

**A BEGINNER'S GUIDE** BY STEVEN ANDERSON

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## FOREWORD

Sexuality is an integral part of human nature. This pamphlet seeks to introduce academic sociological concepts to eager readers regarding the position of sexuality in everyday life. By introducing basic definitions, historical societal norms, theological responses and scientific research on sexuality, I hope to invite readers to consider the impact of sexuality on society and vice versa. By examining studies that have been done focusing on sexuality as a method of social control we can see how multiple interpretations of sexuality thrive today even when pitted against traditional outlooks on acceptable expressions of gender, sexual preference, and expression. Below I break down some of the main paths that have been used to control human sexuality, illustrate their intersections and propose a new path for society.

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## GENDER, EXPRESSION, AND INTERCOURSE

Historically gender and sex have been intrinsically linked by notions of biological gender binaries. There was male and female, and the act of sexual intercourse had only one purpose, procreation. In order to procreate, like other animals, humans need to have sex with a partner of the opposite gender. As in the animal kingdom, men and women have developed various expressive traits, also known as gender expression or performance traits, to differentiate one another as potential mates.<sup>1</sup> While these descriptions may seem simple they are also at the core of what sexuality has been to humanity since our beginnings. The truth of these facts has allowed the human race to thrive and adapt to our current state.

## SEX AS POWER AND UTILITY

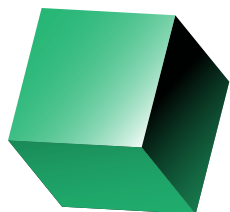
The control of sex, regardless of moral and theological implications (which will be touched upon later), begins as sexual utility and complementarity (the ability to produce offspring/ subjects). When humanity began to organize and create more complex communities (back to the first tribal societies), human sexuality evolved as well by way of what William Cavanaugh expresses as "The State". The State is where power lies in society regardless of geographical or ideological boundaries.<sup>2</sup> Initially, the state was most concerned with the order of nature and the survival of people but, over time developed a network of control methods to increase its power, especially over bodies and even more specifically; sexuality.<sup>3</sup> Sexual practices

of the people became watched over, researched and standardized initially by religious and secular authorities but also by the later scientists and psychoanalysts.<sup>4</sup> This codified sex, as a mechanism for control, ensured reproduction of the population (manpower / economic power) and stressed uniformity among its citizens (social order).

The rules were generally simple and follow similar heteronormative guidelines. Sometimes written as law and sometimes passed down through oral tradition; there are two genders; male and female (following biology/anatomy), and that sex should only be between a man and a woman in order to produce offspring.<sup>5</sup> Other forms of sexual expression such as for pleasure, concubines, and prostitution were also heavily regulated for the sake of social order.<sup>6</sup>

While alternative expressions of sexuality aside from the heteronormative, such as polygamy/polyamory, homosexuality, and various forms of transgenderism or otherwise queer sexualities have been shown to be socially prevalent such as the Ethiopian eunuch noted in the New Testament, the Bissu of the Indonesian Bugis people, or via practices such as homosexual prostitution in ancient Rome they have always been a social minority compared to regulated heterosexuality.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>8, 9</sup>



## RELIGIOUS NORMS FOR SEXUALITY

Another major component of societal views on sexuality, aside from governmental stability and social uniformity, is religious beliefs and practices. Various forms of Judaism and Christianity and Islam, as some of the most prevalent religions in history, have made large contributions to the sexual mores and politics of global society.<sup>10</sup> Since organized religion is one of the oldest forms of community organization it shares power dynamics, and therefore many cultural practices, taboos, and laws, with secular governments mainly focused on social utility. Not only that, historically the authority of religion has coexisted simultaneously as governmental/political authority.<sup>11</sup> This created widespread implications for the enforcement and popularity of sexual norms.<sup>12</sup>

The core of Christianity as a religion is faith. Faith is the spiritual connection to the authority of the divine, which unlike human-made governmental systems with only human authority, is infallible. Therefore personal dedication to spiritual teachings is generally absolute and inflexible. Biblical rules regarding sexuality, gender roles, and expression, are seen unquestionably as morally charged and incontrovertible. However biblical rules regulating sexual norms, seen through the eyes of a political scientist may shed light on sex being regulated as a matter of social utility as well. For example, the symbology of the circumcision of male jews, rules for the number of allowable wives/husbands/-sexual partners and sexual expectations for the representations of gender that play a part in sexual expression, as a commitment to the divine can also be

seen as practical secular guidelines for the success of the Abrahamic covenant (the ensurement of many generations of offspring).<sup>13, 14</sup>

Any acts of sexual expression outside of the prescribed norms were therefore forbidden in order to protect divine authority (not only economic power). They also incurred the most severe punishments, not only the threat of physical death but spiritual death as well.<sup>15, 16, 17</sup> To uphold divine law there are examples of how things were designed to be according to the divine. For example, through the creation of two, gendered beings, man and woman, in the book of Genesis. Also to stamp out the sins of "sexual immorality" and any representation of sexuality outside of the image of creation, the Laws of Moses, and various Levitical laws were given as examples of righteousness as well as guidelines for their enforcement.<sup>18, 19</sup> Examples of sex and divine judgment as well as the misuse of scripture are prevalent throughout the Old Testament and include the sins of Onan in Genesis 38, the Sodom and Gomorrah narratives in Genesis 19, and the story of King David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel.<sup>20</sup> These narratives, in particular, set the tone for thousands of years of sexual oppression at the authority of the divine while the church and secular forms of government walked hand-in-hand controlling bodies for power.

## SEXUAL EVOLUTION IN SOCIETY

While the uses and representations for sex have been heavily regulated, they are also perhaps the world's worst kept secrets.<sup>21</sup> Efforts to repress human sexuality through governmental and religious authorities to fit neatly into the prescribed boxes of; one man and one woman, sex only within consecrated marriage and the practice of intercourse only as a means to produce offspring; have at once been wildly successful in maintaining heteronormative standards and also woefully unsuccessful at containing the abundance of examples of alternative human sexualities. People throughout history have regularly expressed their sexuality outside of the officially proscribed behaviors to mention defied traditional gender roles. Examples of gender role reversals and the implications of gender roles cast upon men who secretly engaged in homosexual intercourse are prevalent in social commentaries on homosexuality from modernity to antiquity.<sup>22, 23</sup> While there have been punishments both byway of governmental ordinances and religious laws against "sin" in order to protect the wellbeing of social order, the mainstay of sexual behaviors deemed unorthodox and even "unnatural" have continued in prevalence and shows no signs of going away.

As far as social utility is concerned, as society urbanizes and relies more heavily on technological advancements as a measure of strength rather than sheer body count, the level of importance with which it sees non-standard sexual expressions for the leveraging of power diminishes.<sup>24</sup> While populations

continue to increase and metropolitan areas flourish the focus on population production shifts toward the ability to sustain the economy. As such, focus on enforcing sexual norms such as anti-fornication and anti-homosexuality laws becomes harder to enforce and other forms of sexual expressions aside from the heteronormative begin to normalize, or rather goes from a private space to a more public space.<sup>25</sup> Also, considering that people who identify as non-cisgender or prefer non-heteronormative sexual relationships generally make up less than 10% of the overall population, their freedom to express themselves becomes less of a threat to the overall economic stability of society (as not bearing children) so long their vocational efforts support the economy instead.<sup>26, 27</sup> Not only that, the inclusion of non-heteronormative sexual expression within society even adds measurable value to socioeconomic power (Lee Badgett, Park, Flores, 2018).<sup>28</sup>

## RELIGIOUS SEXUAL EVOLUTION

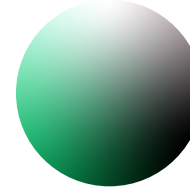
When it comes to Christian dominated societies where issues to do with sex are morally charged, enforcement of sexual expression was still not cut and dry. The examples of Kings David and Solomon both with numerous wives and concubines (sexual partners) fit outside the prescriptions of traditional Christianity's modern standards. Not only that, there are also examples of women in positions of authority such as Deborah in the book of Judges and numerous encounters of Jesus that point to the divine acceptance of faith without regard to those who had not lived according to the law; including women with multiple sex

partners and even homosexual relationships.<sup>29, 30, 31</sup>

It would seem that religion can offer a double-standard when it comes to sexuality and the regulation of bodies. It can be seen as ironic when with examples like these that show multiple examples of sexual expression being revered, that we have allowed for sexual oppression to take place under the guise of religious authority. While it is noteworthy that Kings David and Solomon were both punished by God for their sins and transgressions according to scripture, they were both men of great faith, given authority and blessed by God.<sup>32, 33</sup> Not only that, but they were also respected by men and continue to be positive examples by which millions live out their faith. As such the regulation of sexuality based on biblical examples and religious laws has continued to be a hot subject for centuries causing multiple divisions including the Anglican split from Catholicism in 1534 and recent campaigns for the recognition of gay marriage and LGBTQ+ inclusion of clergy in the Methodist Church.<sup>34</sup>

## STUDYING SEXUALITY AS A MEANS FOR REFORM

Interestingly enough, it is the modern era when society expressly began to study sexuality from scientific perspectives with a willingness to understand what was then seen as "deviances" from heteronormative standards, that we began to see how integral sexuality is to our being. Michel Foucault points to Sigmund Freud's work expressly denying sexual repression and exclaiming that we know more than we let on.<sup>35</sup>



When we began looking at the mental state of those "afflicted" in fine detail shone a light on our inability to separate our sexuality from our humanity. Even though priests and doctors stumbled over prognoses for certain behaviors and often wrongly attributed them to demons, or conditions that would later be proven false it became clear that sex could not be made to go away instead it has been an eternal subject for conversation and debate.<sup>36</sup>

As such strong-willed people have continued to live their lives with their sexuality in mind, proudly displaying their sexual identities. Over time with much activism for representation, inclusion and civil rights based on science and a changing power dynamic current views on the acceptability of intercourse outside of marriage as well as identifying as LGBTQ+ and for broad rights such as the legalization of gay marriage has publicly broadened.<sup>37, 38</sup> Our understandings of preference/orientation have shifted as well. Being queer, gay, intersex or transgender is not a clinical perversion or taboo but are legitimate and natural representations of humanity with their places in society.<sup>39</sup>

## MOVING TOWARD RELIGIOUS REFORMATION

Where the standard view of apologetics in the religious sense it to defend doctrine through reason and argument, I suggest that much Christian doctrine in reference to sexuality can be undone through new scholarly analysis, the study of ancient social practices and reflection on modern understandings on the purpose of human sexuality. As an integral aspect of human identity our

sexuality cannot be taken lightly, nor can our commitments toward being productive citizens in our respective communities, especially our faith communities. With regards to the personal expression of your sexuality, the decision to be open with your preferences or to condemn others for theirs can have repercussions in both religious and secular society in regards to the personal safety and livelihood of others so it is important to be informed and make decisions for yourself.

Christianity is a matter of personal faith and conviction. Christianity's true focus is to preach the gospel to bring communion with God to all people and allow God to transform them. If this is our true conviction then it may be time to reassess exclusionary rules that we have set up for ourselves to protect the power of the church in order to truly grow in community with Christ. Jesus, as the Christian example of inclusion through His rejection of oppressive social norms, including those concerning sexual expression and economic power should be our model for creating an equitable society.

As a Christian, if those convictions are formed by the pursuit of an all-loving God who challenges humanity through the rejection of social norms and power dynamics that place a priority on economic success in favor of individual communion with God, we can create a richer and diverse kingdom of believers.

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