

Overview of Sexuality

This chapter will discuss the pervasive role of sex in life. It will establish the style for the remainder of the book. Specifically, human sexuality is best understood from the perspective of evolution. Additionally, many of the reasons why sex is such a powerful influence in our lives will be set forth. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an interview with Dr. David Buss, one of the greatest researchers and theorists in evolutionary sexuality. He will further elaborate on the complex role that sex and sex-related behaviors play in human interaction.

Few people are completely comfortable with their own or other people's sexuality. People's feelings about their sexuality, sexual anatomy, and sexual behavior are typically coupled with cognitive turmoil. Shame, doubt, guilt, and resentment are among the emotions that are often seen by the clinician when sex is discussed. For example, when a woman is asked about details of her sexual history, it is typical to see examples of one or more of the aforementioned emotions. One can safely assume that no facet of human existence engenders as much shame or guilt as sex. Some argue (e.g., Goldenberg, Cox, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2002) that exploration of our sexuality forces us to accept that our behavior and our very nature are similar to those of other animals, including their excretory acts and mortality—a theory that is explored in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3. Many religions have their deities born without intercourse, and holy people are revered when they abstain from sex. By all accounts, humans are the only animals that are anguished by acknowledging their interest in and performance of sexual acts.

When people are sexually receptive, sexual talk, images, or acts become arousing or compelling. However, when a person is not feeling receptive, the same images or acts are offensive, embarrassing, and even funny. Children in many cultures respond to depictions of sex with great humor. English literature teachers may have to admonish students about their reactions to the sexual innuendos that are rife in Shakespearean plays. The same is true for biblical or other historical readings taught to adolescents.

Sexuality has not been openly discussed and researched throughout human history. In fact, it was more often repressed than researched. Even if sex was addressed in some form, it tended to concern broad generalizations and often included euphemisms for sex (Weeks, 2010). Today, research on sex is mainstream, although researchers continue to debate the motivations, aberrations, and preferences driving sexuality. For over a century, however, there has been a consistent theme in sex research—that sexuality is heavily influenced by underlying *evolutionary processes*.

Like many evolved processes, sexual behavior is often inscrutable and at odds with social mores and norms. A large portion of human behavior evolved in epochs that challenged our ancestors with vastly different survival challenges. Consequently, our sexual behavior seems out of place in today's milieu. This phenomenon often leads to a dichotomy between our actual sexuality and that presented to the world. The following case is one such example.

This book begins with what might seem to be an unusual case study, *except* that from a clinician's perspective, it is not particularly notable. One of the greatest deceptions in all our social lives is that there is a "normal" sexuality. In fact, it is variation in sexual behavior that is the norm. However, the shame associated with assumed non-normative sexual behavior forces most to hide or even lie about the details of their sexual lives.

The Case of Elena and Arthur

Elena was a professor of anthropology at a small Christian university. She was well-liked and actively involved with her students but generally kept a social distance from other members of the community. The students knew that Elena was married to a man named Arthur, but she had strict boundaries about disclosing personal information. Few knew that Elena had a long-term paramour who owned a successful graphic design business.

One of the unusual characteristics of Elena and Arthur's marriage is that they had engaged in intercourse only a few times. Early into the marriage, Arthur informed Elena that he had chosen to abstain from sex with women—including her. Prior to this, it was not unusual for the couple to invite male friends over, and Arthur would quietly observe the sexual interactions between Elena and their guests from across the room. For a few years Arthur would participate in these liaisons, and if the man was bisexual, Arthur would typically engage in fellatio with their guest.

Elena was also bisexual, having had numerous affairs with women. She expressed ambivalence toward men. She found them sexually attractive, but with the exception of Arthur, disliked them as human beings. However, Elena enjoyed engaging in sadomasochism with men. Arthur commented that Elena found pain hilarious. As of last contact, Elena and Arthur have a loving, stable, suburban relationship, and it is highly probably that no neighbor has ever guessed that they are the least bit unusual.

DEFINING SEX

The first step in studying any phenomenon is defining it and differentiating it from related processes. Sex, after all, is just one of many survival behaviors. However, it is argued throughout this book that many other behaviors are in the direct service of sex. Because of the complex interactions between survival and sexual strategies, sex researchers face the problem of where to draw the research line. For the purposes of this book, sex will be defined as *any action, thought (conscious or unconscious), or perception that produces the arousal or pleasures that evolved to guide or encourage reproductive behaviors.*

Importantly, these thoughts and behaviors can be remote and disconnected from the specific acts of reproduction. For example, the woman coloring her hair to maintain the appearance of youth, the man injecting testosterone to maintain sexual function and appear more appealing to women, the woman gossiping about perceived female competitors, the older man driving a high-powered sports car, or the transgender woman injecting estradiol can *all* be regarded as acts of sex. These abstract and often subtle manifestations of sexuality are the major differentiators between the sex of humans and the sex that occurs among other animal species.

Since human sexuality evolved from and alongside the sexuality of other animals, much can be learned from animal behaviors. However, human sexuality exists within complex social mores and pressures that have played a powerful role in shaping our sexual behavior. In fact, as will be presented later in this book, human sexuality seems to be far more developmentally plastic than the sexuality of other animals. For example, developmental trauma will play a role in the expression of human sexuality. A chick, if frequently attacked by its maternal hen, will often have difficulty mating, although there is no evidence that it will seek out mates who will recapitulate this violent behavior. However, this repetition occurs in humans who have been attacked by parents during maturation, as they seek to reenact the humiliation inflicted by their parent. The offspring of a particularly aggressive alpha gorilla will not become abusive toward the females in his harem. However, a man's behavior (violent or otherwise) toward women will often be shaped to varying degrees by the behavior he observed in his father or other male role models. Unlike other animals, humans retain a kind of behavioral imprint resulting from their life experiences.

Nonetheless, humans share certain pervasive sexual behaviors with animals. The act of copulation itself is similar, along with the rituals that are associated with courtship and mating. Males strive for female attention, exhibit sexual jealousy, and engage in sexual competition that can lead to violence, while females tend to be more selective in their sexual choices. In many species, females are more sexually receptive to males who are able to provide such costly resources as a mating (e.g., heavy plumage) or nuptial gift (e.g., diamond engagement ring).

Remarkably, a male's overtures to elicit sex with females are unnervingly similar across many species, including humans. Seeing themselves reflected in other animals can be off-putting to people. Recognizing similarities to other animals is a harsh reminder that humans may not be as unique as we would like to believe. Therefore, humans choose to view themselves as fundamentally different from the other sexual beings, and unlike other animals, do not have intercourse in places where their peers can observe it. There are few cultures that permit sexual acts in public.

THE MAKING OF SEXUALITY

While our primary sexual characteristics convey our reproductive capability, they do not define our sex roles. This paradox is a function of the ambiguous concept of gender. On the surface, it may seem simple—one has male genitals and therefore is of male gender, or one has female genitals and is of female gender. However, reality is considerably more complicated than this. First, there are a number of individuals who have anatomically ambiguous sexualities. These people may have incomplete genitals of one sex or complete genitals of both. They may have well-formed genitals of one sex but have secondary sexual characteristics of another. Alternatively, they may present as robust physical specimens of one sex but have the mindset and desires of the other. There are many combinations and degrees of gender and phenotypic sex. This finding leads to the conclusion that gender is not composed of a simple dichotomy: male and female. Rather, it is composed of permutations of physical, emotional, and personality traits as well as sexual desires.

This ambiguity can be vexing given the important role of gender in human relations. What in the course of human interactions, at least in part, does not derive in some degree from our gender? We dress in accordance to our gender. We pick vocations that are perceived as gender-appropriate. We express our emotions in ways that are consistent with our gender roles. Moreover, if we refuse to do so, we risk facing society's rebuke. How do we reconcile the complex attitudes and expressions of sex among humans with the essential drive (shared with all species) to reproduce? The answer is, *through an evolutionary perspective that incorporates the nuanced differences and similarities observed between animals and humans.*

Almost every exploration of phenomena in both psychology and biology has been completed with the underlying question, "How does this feature aid the organism in its ability to reproduce?" Concepts like natural selection, inclusive fitness, reciprocal altruism, the Zahavian paradox, epigenetics, and the like (see Chapter 2) can be reduced to this essential question. Taking an evolutionary perspective of sexuality tacitly elevates the significance of sex in all aspects of life as

it makes it fundamental to our existence (via reproduction). The sine qua non, or an indispensable element, of natural selection and evolution is reproduction. There can be no mutations passed on to offspring if no offspring are produced. Further, there can be no evolution if organisms do not give birth to new generations that differ from them in advantageous ways. We will see, however, that there are indirect means of ensuring one's genetic legacy that do not require reproduction.

Whether or not a person has made an overt decision to have a child, the motivation that drives all sexual behaviors is directed to that end. Reproduction is a vector that guides a great portion of social behavior, from the laudable to the reprehensible. Those who see sex everywhere are not vulgar or deluded; it *is* everywhere because sexual reproduction is the basis of our existence—the result of eons of natural selection.

Although natural selection has made almost every action distillable to a sexual motive, it is also adaptive for sexual impulses and actions to be situationally adjusted. Natural selection is a self-regulating process. Males will diminish their quest to reproduce when the danger of the act offsets the adaptive advantage of engaging in it. For example, if an aggressive alpha male stands at the ready or a predator waits hungrily, a libidinous male will be wise to defer acting on his urges. On the other hand, a female who copulates with every ready male risks losing the potential to mate with the male who will produce more viable and reproductively successful offspring.

The psychoanalytic writers who have suggested that the sex drive in one manifestation or another is the essential source of motivation were fundamentally right. Although the complexities of psychoanalytic theory are not supported by current research, the notion that our sexuality underlies much of our daily activities is well supported by research. Our sexuality interferes with all of our senses at times. The appearance and scent of other people, the taste of food when with them, the texture of their bodies, and the sound of their voices are filtered through our sexuality. Our senses can become overwhelmed at times, causing us to act impulsively.

The influential television minister who engaged a prostitute to pose while he masturbated, the governor who had sex at highway truck stops, another governor who frequented prostitutes, the talented law student who delighted in torture and murder are all confirmations that the sex drive can be at odds with human agency. This behavior can be perplexing when we recall that our sexual behavior evolved to optimize and maximize our reproductive ability. The preceding examples surely compromised each individual's social, political, economic, and likely sexual status when they engaged in these actions. When there is a significant plurality of people whose sexual conduct not only fails to be optimal for reproduction but also serves to dismantle their ability to function socially, can we really consider sexuality evolution's tool? As paradoxical as it might seem, the answer is yes.

Just as natural selection has no biases or morality, the study of sexual behavior must put aside mores and norms. In adhering to this topic, this book will present both historical and current research. And it will thereby explore the science and data of sexuality as examined by those who have dedicated years, often entire careers, in its study and exploration.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS BOOK

Like most studies in human behavior, sexuality has a history of competing, often mutually exclusive, theories. These theories need to be understood in their historical context, as understanding the social milieu, moral pressures, and biological knowledge of an era will often demonstrate how they arose. It will also explain why many of the most unscientific hypotheses remain insinuated into many modern perspectives. After all, we share many of the explanations that were employed by our ancestors. In debunking or praising the quality and methods of research, we need to examine or critique the formulation of early theories and the process of the research.

Since feelings about sexuality, like no other component of our biology, can distort our judgments, sexuality research must employ the scientific method. Much in the history of sexuality was based on personal experience or carefully selected case studies. Religious thinking led many to deny expressions of sex, such as homosexuality, which was seen as an immoral choice, and gender (with its expected roles and behaviors) was seen as ordained by a deity. Psychiatry for much of its tenure in medicine adopted this quasi-religious point of view. Homosexuals, transgender individuals, and people with sexualities that did not fit into a traditional category were labeled as pathological. The treatment for this presumed pathological behavior was typically psychodynamic, seeking to set free a repressed libido.

Even the most recent and evidence-based models of sexual behavior need to be carefully evaluated as well. The dichotomies of normal versus abnormal and pathological versus healthy must be assessed. To do so, the life paths of people with sexual variations need to be explored in order to best understand how their differences become sufficiently severe so as to qualify for one or more of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) or *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD) sexual disorders. The psychiatrist Thomas Szasz (1974) strongly cautioned against diagnosticians framing their social judgments in the form of medical diagnoses. This is an important caution when labeling a sexual act as aberrant or sick. As powerful as sex is, so too is its power to evoke hostility toward those who express their sexuality in ways we find offensive.

The following chapters will present all major approaches to the origins or treatment of sexual disorders, along with the supporting and contrary research concerning

their efficacy and outcomes. Accordingly, this book will strongly emphasize empirical approaches to understanding human sexuality. Above all, everything presented here will apply Darwinian concepts when appropriate, because no other model in the life sciences explains more biological phenomena or exposes the commonalities of all life functions as completely as evolution through natural selection.

INTERVIEWS WITH PREEMINENT RESEARCHERS ON SEXUALITY

This Darwinian position is currently the foundation of many researchers studying sexual behavior. To best express this focus, this book includes interviews with some of the foremost researchers who have studied and continue to study sexuality. These discussions will present the issues, consequent research, and working conclusions of these individuals. Importantly, the interviews will be embedded in chapters that best relate to their content, but they will often cover topics relevant to other sections of the book. The experts and scientists who have contributed to this book were not given a script. Consequently, the resulting narratives were open-ended and often covered a wide range of related topics. Thus readers will not only get a sense of the point of view of the interviewees and the impact they have made in the field, but also their personalities. Because of the informal nature of the interviews, they are presented as they were recorded. They provide rare insights into the motivations and deductions of these researchers who have contributed decades of focused work.

As this book follows an evolutionary path to understanding sexuality, the first of the interviews is with an instrumental originator of evolutionary sexuality, David Buss. The views of this scientist will set the tone for much of the book. Buss, in addition to being one of the founders of evolutionary psychology, also studied it as it relates to human sexual behavior and associated aggression. He was among the earliest psychologists to support premise that people have innate and universal mate selection strategies. He provides evidence that many behaviors deemed as socially undesirable in most cultures are actually adaptive behaviors. These include infidelity, violence, and deception.

In this interview, Buss discusses his research in evolutionary sexuality and its path to becoming a dominant force in modern psychology. He asserts males and females often have divergent goals in sexual behavior, commonly competing for relationship resources. He points out that prior to the evolutionary approach, social and economic models were unsuccessfully used to explain sexual and romantic behavior. However, with the advent of evolutionary psychology and biology, a more persuasive model of human sexual behavior began to develop. Dr. Buss has identified no fewer than 115 acts of romantic love, and all of these can be shown to

have some adaptive role. Buss, like many evolutionary theorists, requires us to put aside the social values of a complex society to best understand the historical environments that have shaped human behavior. Indeed, humans had many hundreds of thousands of years to evolve innate behaviors compared to the mere thousands of years of socialization.

Interview With Dr. David Buss



Portrait of David M. Buss. Illustration by Emrazina I. Prithwa © 2015.

David M. Buss (1953–) is a professor of psychology at the University of Texas and one of the founders of evolutionary psychology. Dr. Buss is well-known for his research on the evaluation of sexuality and aggression, as well as human mating behavior, mate selection, and the foundations of interpersonal attraction. His work on infidelity and jealousy and consequential aggression and homicide has been widely cited and is considered to be widely influential in several of the social sciences. In addition, he is an author of scores of academic publications and a number of widely read books, such as *The Evolution of Desire*, *The Dangerous Passion*, and *The Murderer Next Door*.

You are generally considered the top figure in sexuality and evolutionary theory; what in your work do you feel has led to this status?

Dr. Buss: Well, that's a tall order. I guess as it pertains to human sexuality, the largest would include sexual strategy theory, which I think provided an advance on understanding human sexuality and mating strategies. It was significantly more advanced than previous ideas addressing these behaviors in both the evolutionary and nonevolutionary fields.

Well, before that, there were primarily psychodynamic, behavioral, and social theories.

Dr. Buss: Yeah, there were psychodynamic theories and there were also mainstream social psychology theories that were pretty simplistic. None of these prior theories incorporated an explanation, much less a cogent evolutionary explanation, of why humans would be motivated in those directions. None of the prior theories talked about sex differences or gender differences at all. So exactly the same principles were presumed to be equally applicable to men and women. So there were no predictions within those theories about sex differences. Moreover, the theories were what I'd call "context-blind" in the sense that they presumed that the same underlying psychology is driving sexual strategies oblivious to contexts such as short-term versus long-term mating, sex ratio of the mating pool, or the differing "mate value" of the individuals seeking mates or sex partners.

And context is one of the crucial points in your theory?

Dr. Buss: One of the things that sexual strategies theory did is it brought in the temporal context. That is, people desire somewhat different qualities when seeking a long-term mate versus a short-term or casual sex partner, and consequently use somewhat different strategies to attract those partners. It also brought in biological sex as critical to sexual strategies, since men and women, although similar in some respects, differ profoundly in their sexual strategies. These were entirely lacking in prior theories.

So a woman seeking somebody for a short-term relationship will have different criteria in effect than someone looking for a long-term mate?

Dr. Buss: Yes, different criteria. And that even the underlying psychology that drives short-term mating differs from the underlying psychology that drives long-term mating. So bringing in an evolutionary perspective, bringing in the gender differences, bringing in context, and providing a rationale for why people would be motivated in the ways that they are motivated in the mating and sexual domains—all those things were, I think, important advances.

I think my coauthor on sexual strategies theory, David Schmitt, and I didn't view our 1993 *Psychological Review* article as the final word. In fact, in the discussion we talked about a number of future directions for theoretical development, such as an understanding of individual differences within each sex and a richer understanding of contextual influences on mating strategies. So sexual strategies theory was a landmark paper. And of course, the 37-culture study of mate preferences, published in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, was a large one.

One answer to your question about size of contributions relies on scientific citation counts. Both the sexual strategies theory article and the 37-culture study have become citation classics, with more than 3,000 scientific citations each. They showed that, yes, there were some cultural differences. But some mate selection criteria are also universal or nearly universal. And some are universally sex-differentiated, such as the premium placed on youth, attractiveness, financial resources, and status. No one had predicted or documented these universals of mating before.

And I guess a third contribution, again judging from citation counts, would be the jealousy work. It provided a richer and deeper understanding of sexual jealousy. There were a couple precursors in Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, as well as Donald Symons, but almost all of the prior work on sexual jealousy had treated it as a pathology, a character defect, a sign of neurosis, or an immature emotion that should be curtailed or eliminated.

Clinical psychology still tends to be traditional and doesn't really rely on evolutionary theories. Do you think that clinical or practicing psychologists apply the evolutionary ideas that you set forth in dealing with issues like jealousy, aggression, and nominal pathologies that you posit are evolutionarily adaptive?

Dr. Buss: That's a good question, and I don't have a whole lot to say about that because I'm not a clinical psychologist, so I haven't really focused on those aspects of it. There's a fairly large contingent of evolutionary psychiatrists; Randy Nesse is a key figure in that domain. But the sense that I have is that evolutionary thinking hasn't penetrated that as deeply or richly as it probably should or will in the future. But I think just with respect to my own work, what I would say is that my book, *The Dangerous Passion*, is the one place where I discuss a lot about clinical cases.

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And there's a fairly large clinical literature and psychiatric literature on delusional jealousy, pathological jealousy, conjugal paranoia, the Othello syndrome, etc. And one of the remarkable things when you read these case studies is just how many people who have been diagnosed as having delusional jealousy or pathological jealousy turn out to have partners who'd have cheated on them!

Your work offers a fresh perspective on these conditions.

Dr. Buss: I think that, yes, there are sometimes delusional aspects of it. There are clearly some cases where people are imagining things that don't exist. But I guess what I would say is that I think that clinicians and psychiatrists, if they had a deeper understanding of the adaptive logic of sexual jealousy, it would at least inform their treatment. They might recognize that people, even though they're doing things that seem pathological, may not be pathological. Sexual jealousy is an emotion that responds not just to clear and present threats of infidelity or partner defection, but also to threats that lurk on the horizon of a relationship, such as a partner with higher mate value who is thinking about leaving the relationship.

In effect, some people who are labeled with pathological jealousy are reacting to real but sometimes subtle threats. For example, the average man who has a uniquely beautiful lover may appear irrationally jealous when he is implicitly assessing the great risk of losing his lover to a more attractive or higher-status suitor.

Dr. Buss: People sometimes pick up on things that are either real or potentially real. I mean, one of the things about infidelity is that it's concealed in great secrecy. And so you have a signal detection problem. You have a mate who may or may not be cheating. You're confronted with a chaos of probabilistic cues. Rarely is a single cue definitive evidence of infidelity. But people start forming the hypothesis that their partners are cheating on them. Sometimes, they're wrong and sometimes they're right. And sometimes the partner might not be cheating on them, but the partner might be thinking about cheating on them or contemplating leaving the relationship. So cues can trigger jealousy even if no actual infidelity or declaration of departure has yet occurred.

So the unfaithful partner is implicitly being detected—a type of innate cheating detector.

Dr. Buss: In some cases, it becomes intense jealousy; jealousy is a powerful and dangerous emotion, but it's also an adaptive emotion.

As I understand, in your model, cheating on the female part is the search for better genes while keeping the resources offered by a long-term partner.

Dr. Buss: Yeah, that's part of it. And then also I think women use infidelity as a mate-switching device. Women who are unhappy with the primary relationship sexually and emotionally—these are key predictors of infidelity. And so women sometimes use infidelity as a strategy of either ending a bad relationship or trading up to a better partner. Or sometimes they are testing the waters to see whether there might be a better mate out there for them. So female infidelity is not

just about securing good genes, although that's likely part of the adaptive function, but I think the mate-switching function is really an underlooked function of infidelity in the evolutionary literature.

Mate-switching and mating behavior itself have an important correlate, which is romantic love. You know I interviewed Helen Fisher who offered her model of love. What is your view of romantic love?

Dr. Buss: Well yeah, I haven't written a whole lot about it, written a couple of chapters, but I have argued along with Robert Frank the economist that love is a commitment device. And that it evolves in the context of long-term committed mating relationships. And so that's where the temporal dimension comes in again. Love does not typically get activated in short-term casual sexual encounters, but it does in long-term relationships. And in my studies of love, I found 115 "love acts," and almost all of them involved commitment of one sort or another. So when people fall in love, they make sacrifices for their loved one, they commit psychological resources, economic resources, they start talking about having kids together, family together, making commitments to each other, form a marriage or other kinds of public commitments to each other. And so I think that love is an emotion that evolved in the context of long-term committed mating relationships.

I think that Helen Fisher has some good insights into it and especially the distinction between the early phases: the infatuation and later stages of secure attachment. Early on, people idealize the loved one, can't get the loved one out of their minds, sometimes can't concentrate on work or other life tasks. And then after six months or so, the emotion of infatuated love settles down. You have to actually get work done and solve other adaptive problems. But nonetheless, often this kind of warmer commitment and attachment kicks in, which helps to promote a bond over the long term. And so I think that she's probably on target with the temporal progression of things.

So love can be understood as an evolutionary trait that serves to maintain relationships for a period of time. Now going to a different range of adaptation. There are some papers on evolutionary psychiatry stating that all pathologies are adaptations existing in the wrong time setting or epoch. John Money, who wrote a great deal on sexual paraphilias, fetishes, and disorders, implied that they are adaptive under certain circumstances. Do you think that fetishes, paraphilias, sexual disorders, even things like pedophilia can be adaptations in some settings, but in the wrong time?

Dr. Buss: I think that my guess is that most of these occur in men. And there's even some animal work on this such that the male system is designed to pick up on almost any cue in a classical conditioning sense; that it picks up on any cues that are specifically correlated with probability of sexual orgasm or sex. And so in my department, Mike Domjan showed this in Japanese quail. He can sexually condition males to go into full-blown courtship and sexual arousal just by showing a plastic mold of a piece of the neck of a female quail. It is very bizarre.

And so I asked him "Why don't you study female quails?" He said, well, "Because you can't sexually condition female quails that way." And I think a similar kind of sex difference goes with humans. Males are designed to be classically conditioned to cues correlated with sex. But my sense is that an evolutionary explanation will be at that level. I don't see pedophilia or paraphilias as adaptive per se.

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Interestingly and concordantly with your theories and gathered facts is that almost all paraphilias center around aggression or submission (which is also something that Money stated), and if we look at those as being adverse signs of the same trait, then we get back to aggression underlying sex, which you've mentioned before. And then there are jealousy and pathology, and they are all related. Given that they're adaptive traits, do you think that psychological treatment can play a significant role in helping people who have jealousy or aggressive disorders?

Dr. Buss: Well, I guess my hunch is yes, but it's just a hunch.

So let me just tell you a very brief story about the reaction of a reader of my book, *The Evolution of Desire*. And it was after he read my book, and what he said is that maybe some people worry that men's desire for sexual variety will give men an excuse for cheating.

But what this guy e-mailed me after he read my book, he really felt that it helped him to stay faithful to his partner. Because what happened was that he would find himself sexually attracted to other women, and before he read my book, he interpreted those attractions as indications that maybe he didn't love his wife any more. But after reading my book, he realized, "Oh, that's my evolved desire for sexual variety; it *doesn't* mean that I don't love my wife." To an evolutionary psychologist, his reactions make perfect sense—they involve the operation of two different psychological adaptations, one for love and one for lust, so to speak.

It was a heartwarming story, and I think that these are two separate evolved systems. We become attracted to other people even if we're in a loving mating relationship and fully in love with our partner. And so I think that there is just some value to people's understanding our evolved sexual psychology.

It's possible, of course, that deep understanding may not always help. Sexual jealousy, I think, is a really powerful emotion. It is very difficult to override the emotion of intense jealousy with cool rational understanding. Does understanding that sexual jealousy is an evolved psychological adaptation that functions to alert someone to the possibility that a partner might be cheating or thinking about leaving? Will that cause the jealousy mechanism to somehow say, "Okay, now that I understand that, I'm going to turn my jealousy off"? Well, I don't know. That's why I titled my jealousy book *The Dangerous Passion*. Once activated, jealousy can be psychologically corrosive and lead to physical and psychological violence. Sometimes these emotions are so powerful that it's very difficult to override them.

To a different type of behavior, there is tremendous press recently about nonreproductive or other less viably reproductive variations of sexuality, such as homosexuality or transgenderism. Do you see any adaptation to homosexuality or anything in LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] that you would link to some of your studies in evolutionarily related sexual behavior?

Dr. Buss: The short answer is, I don't. I reviewed all of the theories—evolutionary and nonevolutionary theories—on this. I think that despite the attention that they have gotten, they're still relatively low base rate. What's puzzling from an evolutionary perspective would be exclusive homosexual orientation.

I don't have a satisfactory answer to the question, but there are some evolutionary hypotheses that have been more or less falsified. The kin altruism hypothesis—the idea that homosexuality serves the

adaptive function of promoting investment in close genetic relatives such as nephews and nieces—has pretty definitively been disconfirmed. Gay guys don't invest in kin any more than heterosexual guys.

What about the Sexy Sister hypothesis, that a gay man tends to have sisters who are highly fecund and have a lot of offspring? This is also known as sexually antagonistic selection—one gene can cause homosexuality in men, and at the same time, increase women's inclusive fitness.

Dr. Buss: Right. That's a somewhat different hypothesis, and there is a little bit of evidence for that one. But I think even there, that sort of thing is only going to account for a small fraction of the variance in sexual orientation. There are other factors, like birth order, that seem to influence sexual orientation. So the probability of male homosexuality increases as a function of the number of older brothers. And then there's a little bit of evidence having to do with stress while the mother is pregnant. My guess is it's one of these things where there is no single large causal variable that will explain the origins of sexual orientation. To complicate matters, there are many different phenomena. For example, I think lesbianism and male homosexuality are different phenomena, and theories that might explain one will not necessarily explain the other.

You wrote about the "intersexual deception" in mating and reproduction. What are the sex differences when it comes to this type of behavior?

Dr. Buss: I guess I would subclassify that as a sort of deception on the mating market versus deception within the context of a mating relationship. So on the mating market, basically you get male deception of feigning long-term interest, long-term commitment, exaggerating the depths of the feeling, etc., to gain short-term sexual access. And that on women's part on the mating market, sort of deceiving about giving off cues to sexual access or potential sexual access in order to get favors or resources and then not following through on the cues to that sexual access. So that's on the mating market. And within mating relationships, deception can take the form of sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity, or even financial infidelity, all of which tend to be concealed from one's regular mate.

So deception is adaptive because it either gives access to a partner and/or his resources, or within a relationship, it can provide exit strategy (as discussed before), or help some other interests.

Dr. Buss: I guess I just would clarify that by saying I wouldn't use the term *adaptive*. Rather, these forms of deception are products of adaptations. Whether they are currently adaptive in the sense of leading to greater relative reproductive success is an open question. Deception may or may not be currently adaptive.

Source: Abrams, M. (2015, June 30). Personal interview with David M. Buss.

David Buss summarized a good portion of the field of sexuality in this interview. Sex is the fundamental motivation behind virtually every human endeavor. According to Buss and like-minded evolutionary psychologists, our proximate

motivations have the ultimate motivation of passing along our genes. Those beings without these inclinations would have been less likely to act on them, and therefore would have become extinct eons ago. Love, sex, deception, and violence are all part of the invariable competition we engage in for a good portion of our lives. Even those of us who do not reproduce will unvaryingly possess behavioral inclinations that evolved to maximize a genetic legacy. For example, we will attempt to be seen by others as worthwhile or attractive. We will feel jealous of those who seek the attention of those we desire, and we will have violent feelings toward those who present acute risks to our social—and therefore reproductive—standing.

In the following chapters, the most salient aspects of sexuality will be explored. This exploration will provide a persuasive explanation of why sex exists and why it exists in its current form. Issues like the role of gender and the origin of both the physical and psychological bases of sexual disorders will be investigated. Oft-avoided issues like gender differences, cultural, and racial differences will be discussed. Despite our similarities as humans, evolution bestowed different attributes on each individual. We will see that males and females are dissimilar in sexual behavior and motivation. Additionally, as evolution has shaped physical differences among different populations around the world, it will be evident that evolution came to shape a wide range of sexual behaviors and attributes.