

The SPL Journal of Literary Hermeneutics

A Biannual International Journal of Independent Critical Thinking
Double-blind, Peer-reviewed, and Open Access Journal in English



Vol. 5 Issue 2 Monsoon Edition 2025 e-ISSN 2583-1674 Page no. 305-316

www.literaryhrm.org
www.cavemarkpublications.com



Shifting Paradigms in Sexuality: An Analysis of Homosexuality and Heterosexuality

Mohd Shamim, Mohammad Mustaqeem
ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5172-6512>

Corresponding: Mohd Shamim, Associate Professor, Department of English, Halim Muslim PG College, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India, shamimmohd2009@gmail.com

Co-author: Mohammad Mustaqeem, Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education, Halim Muslim PG College Kanpur, mmhmpg2010@gmail.com

Review Article

Keywords: Sexuality Spectrum, Heteronormativity, Queer Theory, Homosexuality, Binary Deconstruction, Social Constructivism, Fluidity.

Article History

Received:
June 10, 2025
Revised:
June 24, 2025
Accepted:
July 1, 2025



Abstract

Aims: *This analysis aims to deconstruct the traditional binary paradigm of sexuality that rigidly categorizes individuals as either homosexual or heterosexual. It explores the historical, social, and cultural forces that established this binary as a normative standard and examines contemporary perspectives that challenge its dominance.*

Methodology and Approaches: *The research employs a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology, drawing from critical social theory, queer theory, and historical analysis. It involves a systematic review of literature critiquing the hetero/homo binary, including texts from Michel Foucault and contemporary queer scholars.*

Outcomes: *The analysis reveals that the homosexual/heterosexual binary is a recent socio-historical construct, not a biological inevitability. Findings show this binary is insufficient for capturing the full complexity of human desire, practice, and identity, as seen in the experiences of bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and queer individuals. Embracing a continuum model, such as that proposed by Alfred Kinsey, provides a more inclusive framework for understanding sexuality.*

Conclusion and Suggestions: *The paradigm of sexuality is shifting from a rigid binary to a fluid spectrum. This transition challenges prejudices and fosters inclusion. Future research should explore non-Western and intersectional understandings of sexuality. Educational curricula, public policies, and clinical practices should move beyond binary frameworks to affirm diverse realities of human experience, reducing stigma and promoting well-being for all.*

*Correspondence: Mohd Shamim, Mohammad Mustaqeem, shamimmohd2009@gmail.com © (2025) All rights are reserved with the author (s) published by CaveMark Publications. This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any form or medium, provided that the original work is appropriately cited or acknowledged. This paper is available online at www.literaryhrm.org, and CaveMark Publications, India, published it.

The study of human sexuality has undergone profound transformations throughout history, with perhaps no aspect more dramatically affected than our understanding of homosexuality and heterosexuality. What Michel Foucault (1978) termed the "deployment of sexuality" has evolved from rigid binary classifications rooted in religious and medical pathology models to more nuanced, fluid conceptualizations that acknowledge the complexity and diversity of human sexual experience. The paradigm shift in sexuality represents one of the most significant social and scientific transformations of the modern era. This evolution has not merely been academic; it has fundamentally altered legal frameworks, social policies, and individual lived experiences across the globe. As Butler (1990) argues, "sexuality is not a natural given, but is discursively constructed and, therefore, can be deconstructed and reconstructed."(9)

This research paper aims to analyse the shifting paradigms in sexuality, examining how concepts of homosexuality and heterosexuality have been reconceptualised from pathological conditions to natural variations of human sexual expression. The analysis will explore the historical context, theoretical developments, empirical research, and social movements that have contributed to these paradigm shifts, ultimately demonstrating how our understanding of sexuality continues to evolve in response to new knowledge and changing social values. Before the emergence of modern sexual categories, homosexual behaviour was understood through various cultural and religious lenses rather than as defining characteristics of individual identity. Boswell (1980) notes that "the modern conception of 'sexual orientation' as a defining characteristic of human beings is essentially a creation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."(Pp.41-59)

Ancient Greek society, for instance, recognised same-sex relationships within specific social contexts, particularly the pederastic relationships between older men and younger boys, which were seen as educational and formative rather than expressions of inherent sexual orientation (Dover, 1989). Similarly, many indigenous cultures worldwide recognised multiple gender and sexual categories that do not align with contemporary Western binary classifications.

The late nineteenth century marked a crucial turning point in how sexuality was conceptualised. The emergence of sexology as a scientific

discipline, led by figures such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, and Magnus Hirschfeld, introduced medical and scientific frameworks for understanding sexual behaviour. However, this period was characterised by the pathologisation of non-heterosexual orientations. Krafft-Ebing's "Psychopathia Sexualis" (1886) classified homosexuality as a form of "contrary sexual feeling" and a manifestation of degeneracy. This medical model positioned heterosexuality as the natural and healthy norm while categorising other forms of sexual expression as pathological deviations requiring treatment or correction.

The influence of this paradigm cannot be overstated. As D'Emilio (1983) observes, "the medical model provided scientific legitimacy to moral condemnation, transforming sin into sickness."(Pp.9-22) This framework dominated professional and popular understanding of sexuality well into the twentieth century, with homosexuality remaining classified as a mental disorder in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual until 1973. Sigmund Freud's contributions to understanding sexuality represented both progress and continued pathologisation. While Freud (1905) acknowledged the universality of homosexual tendencies in his "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," (1905) arguing that "all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious,"(Pp.11-12) he still viewed exclusive homosexuality as a developmental arrest.

Freud's theory of psychosexual development suggested that homosexuality resulted from unresolved Oedipal conflicts or fixations at particular developmental stages. This perspective, while more nuanced than earlier degeneracy theories, still positioned heterosexuality as the mature, healthy outcome of normal development, thereby maintaining the pathological framework around non-heterosexual orientations.

Alfred Kinsey's groundbreaking research in the 1940s and 1950s fundamentally challenged existing paradigms about sexuality. The Kinsey Reports revealed that sexual behavior existed on a continuum rather than in discrete categories. Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) stated that "the world is not to be divided into sheep and goats... The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects."(P.639)

The famous Kinsey Scale, ranging from 0 (exclusively heterosexual) to 6 (exclusively homosexual), introduced the revolutionary concept that sexuality could be fluid and that many individuals experienced both heterosexual and homosexual attractions and behaviours. This research demonstrated that homosexual experience was far more common than previously believed, with 37% of males reporting at least one homosexual experience to orgasm between adolescence and old age. The removal of homosexuality from the DSM-II in 1973 marked a pivotal moment in the paradigm shift. This decision, influenced by both scientific research and activist pressure, represented the formal acknowledgment that homosexuality was not inherently pathological. Dr. Robert Spitzer, who played a crucial role in this decision, later stated that "a medical condition must either cause distress or disability. Homosexuality, by itself, does not meet these criteria" (cited in Bayer, 1987).

The declassification was not merely a professional decision but reflected broader changes in social attitudes and scientific understanding. The work of psychologists like Evelyn Hooker (1957), who conducted groundbreaking research demonstrating that homosexual men were psychologically indistinguishable from heterosexual men, provided crucial empirical support for this paradigm shift. The emergence of social construction theory in the 1960s and 1970s provided a new framework for understanding sexuality. Scholars like Mary McIntosh (1968) argued that homosexual identity was not a natural category but a social role that emerged under specific historical circumstances. McIntosh proposed that "the homosexual role... is a social category rather than a medical or psychiatric one." (Pp.182-183)

This perspective was further developed by Jeffrey Weeks (1977), who argued that sexual identities are historically constructed rather than biologically determined. Weeks stated that "sexuality is not a natural phenomenon but a product of social and historical forces that shape the possibilities of desire, identity, and practice." (Pp.3-13) Social construction theory challenged essentialist assumptions about sexuality, arguing instead that sexual categories, identities, and meanings are created and maintained through social processes. This framework opened new avenues for understanding how sexual paradigms could change and be changed.

The emergence of queer theory in the 1990s represented a further paradigm shift, challenging not only the pathologisation of homosexuality but also the stability and coherence of all sexual and gender categories. Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity argued that both gender and sexuality are not innate characteristics but performances that create the illusion of natural, coherent identities.

Butler's work suggested that "gender is performative insofar as it is the effect of a regulatory practice that can be said to generate the gender it claims to describe" (Pp.24-25). This perspective extended to sexuality, arguing that heterosexuality itself is not natural but a constructed and maintained norm that requires constant reinforcement. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) further developed queer theoretical approaches by examining the hetero/homosexual definition as a fundamental organizing principle of modern culture. Sedgwick argued that this binary is "not only incomplete but damaged" and that it "has the potential for representing only a minority of the actual range of sexual behaviors and identities."(Pp.9-11)

The development of intersectionality theory, originally conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), has significantly influenced contemporary understanding of sexuality. This framework recognizes that sexual identity intersects with other aspects of identity, including race, class, gender, and disability, creating unique experiences that cannot be understood through single-axis analyses. Audre Lorde (1984) powerfully articulated this perspective when she wrote, "there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not lead single-issue lives."(P.138) This recognition has led to more nuanced understandings of how sexuality is experienced differently across various communities and has challenged universal narratives about sexual identity and experience.

Contemporary biological and genetic research has contributed to paradigm shifts by providing evidence for the natural occurrence of diverse sexual orientations. Studies examining potential genetic, hormonal, and neurobiological factors in sexual orientation have challenged pathological models by demonstrating that homosexuality has biological foundations.

Research by Bailey and Pillard (1991) on twin studies suggested genetic influences on sexual orientation, while neurobiological studies by LeVay (1991) identified potential brain structure differences between homosexual and heterosexual men. While these findings remain debated, they have contributed to depathologising paradigms by suggesting biological rather than pathological explanations for sexual orientation diversity.

However, contemporary researchers increasingly emphasise the complex interplay between biological, psychological, and social factors. Diamond (2003) argues for a "biopsychosocial model" that recognizes "the dynamic interaction between genes, hormones, neurodevelopment, and social-cultural influences across the entire lifespan" (Pp.12-20). Social movements have played a crucial role in driving paradigm shifts regarding sexuality. The modern gay rights movement, catalysed by events such as the Stonewall riots of 1969, challenged dominant paradigms through activism, visibility campaigns, and political organising. The AIDS crisis of the 1980s, while devastating, paradoxically contributed to paradigm shifts by forcing mainstream society to confront the reality and humanity of gay men and their communities. As Crimp (1988) observed, "AIDS does not exist apart from the practices that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it."(P.3)

The movement's evolution from seeking tolerance to demanding full equality represents a significant paradigm shift. Early homophile organisations of the 1950s and 1960s often accepted pathological models while seeking sympathy and understanding. Contemporary LGBTQ+ movements reject pathological frameworks entirely, asserting the inherent dignity and equality of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Legal paradigm shifts have both reflected and reinforced changing social attitudes toward sexuality. The decriminalization of homosexual behaviour, beginning with Illinois in 1961 and culminating in the U.S. Supreme Court's *Lawrence v. Texas* decision in 2003, marked the formal rejection of criminal paradigms around homosexuality. Marriage equality represents perhaps the most significant legal paradigm shift. The progression from homosexual relationships being criminalised to same-sex marriage being recognized as a constitutional right demonstrates how rapidly paradigms can change when supported by social

movements, legal advocacy, and evolving public opinion. Justice Anthony Kennedy's majority opinion in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) captured this paradigm shift: "No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family... It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage."(P.28)

Paradigm shifts in sexuality have been reflected and reinforced through changes in educational curricula and professional practices. The development of LGBTQ+ studies as an academic field has institutionalized new paradigms within higher education, while anti-bullying programs and inclusive sex education have begun to change how sexuality is discussed in primary and secondary education. Professional organizations across various fields have adopted affirming approaches to sexual diversity. The American Psychological Association's (2012) "Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients" explicitly state that "same-sex sexual and romantic attractions, feelings, and behaviors are normal and positive variations of human sexuality."(Pp.10-42)

Contemporary research increasingly recognises that sexuality may be more fluid and complex than traditional binary models suggest. Lisa Diamond's (2003) longitudinal research on women's sexual identity development found significant fluidity in attractions, behaviours, and identities over time. Diamond concluded that "female sexuality appears to be characterized by considerable situational variability."(Pp.5-6)

The emergence of identities such as pansexual, demisexual, and asexual challenges traditional paradigms by expanding beyond the hetero/homosexual binary. These developments suggest ongoing paradigm shifts toward even more inclusive and nuanced understandings of human sexuality. Contemporary paradigm shifts must also account for cultural and global variations in understanding sexuality. While Western societies have experienced significant shifts toward acceptance and inclusion, many societies maintain different paradigms based on religious, cultural, or traditional frameworks.

The work of anthropologists like Gilbert Herdt (1997) has demonstrated that Western sexual categories may not be applicable across all cultures. Herdt's research on the Sambia people of Papua New Guinea revealed complex ritualized

same-sex practices that do not align with Western concepts of homosexuality or heterosexuality. This cultural variation suggests that paradigm shifts in sexuality may not follow universal patterns and that global understanding of sexuality requires attention to local contexts and meanings.

Digital technology and social media have created new contexts for sexual expression and identity formation, potentially driving new paradigm shifts. Online communities provide spaces for individuals to explore and express sexual identities that may not be visible or accepted in their offline communities. Dating apps and online platforms have also changed how people conceptualise and practice sexuality, potentially challenging traditional relationship models and sexual scripts. It is said that digital technologies are reshaping not just how we meet potential partners, but how we understand sexuality itself.

The paradigm shifts in sexuality have had profound implications for mental health and well-being. Research consistently demonstrates that acceptance and affirmation of diverse sexual orientations improve mental health outcomes, while discrimination and minority stress contribute to psychological distress. Meyer's (2003) minority stress model explains how stigma, prejudice, and discrimination create chronic stress for sexual minority individuals. This framework has been influential in developing affirmative therapeutic approaches and public health interventions aimed at reducing disparities in mental health outcomes.

Understanding paradigm shifts in sexuality has important implications for policy development and social change efforts. Research on attitude change and social movements provides insights into how paradigm shifts occur and can be facilitated. The rapid change in public opinion regarding same-sex marriage, from majority opposition to majority support in many countries within a relatively short time period, demonstrates how quickly paradigm shifts can occur when supported by effective advocacy, media representation, and interpersonal contact.

Future research on sexuality paradigms should continue to examine the intersections between sexuality and other aspects of identity and experience. Additionally, more research is needed on global and cross-cultural perspectives on sexuality, as well as the impacts of technology and social change on sexual identity and expression. Longitudinal research following individuals across their

lifespans will be particularly valuable for understanding how sexual identities develop and change over time, contributing to more nuanced paradigms that account for fluidity and complexity in human sexuality.

The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that paradigms regarding sexuality, particularly homosexuality and heterosexuality, have undergone dramatic transformations over the past century and continue to evolve. These shifts represent movements from pathological and criminal models toward affirming and inclusive frameworks that recognise the natural diversity of human sexual expression. The paradigm shifts examined here have been driven by multiple factors, including scientific research, social movements, legal changes, and cultural transformations. The work of researchers like Kinsey, Hooker, and contemporary scholars has provided empirical foundations for new understandings of sexuality, while activists and advocates have challenged discriminatory policies and social attitudes.

Contemporary paradigms increasingly recognize sexuality as complex, multifaceted, and potentially fluid, moving away from rigid binary classifications toward more nuanced understandings that account for diversity and intersectionality. These developments have significant implications for mental health, policy, education, and social inclusion. However, paradigm shifts are ongoing processes rather than completed transformations. Continued research, advocacy, and social change efforts are needed to address remaining disparities and discrimination while developing even more inclusive and comprehensive understandings of human sexuality.

As Butler (1990) observes “the deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated.”(P.17) The paradigm shifts in sexuality examined in this paper represent not merely academic or theoretical changes but fundamental transformations in how societies understand and value human diversity. The future of sexuality paradigms will likely continue to evolve in response to new research, changing social attitudes, and the lived experiences of diverse individuals and communities. Understanding these paradigm shifts provides crucial insights into how social change occurs and how more inclusive and affirming societies can be developed and sustained.

Works Cited and Consulted

- American Psychological Association. *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients*. *American Psychologist*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2012, pp. 10–42.
- Bailey, J. Michael, and Richard C. Pillard. “A Genetic Study of Male Sexual Orientation.” *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol. 48, no. 12, 1991, pp. 1089–96.
- Bayer, Ronald. *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis*. Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, no. 1, 1989, pp. 139–67.
- Crimp, Douglas. “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism.” *October*, no. 43, 1988, pp. 3–16.
- D’Emilio, John. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970*. University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Diamond, Lisa M. *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women’s Love and Desire*. Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Dover, Kenneth J. *Greek Homosexuality*. Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*. Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. *Standard Edition*, vol. 7, 1905, pp. 123–243.
- Herd, Gilbert. *Same Sex, Different Cultures: Exploring Gay and Lesbian Lives*. Westview Press, 1997.

- Hooker, Evelyn. "The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual." *Journal of Projective Techniques*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1957, pp. 18–31.
- Kinsey, Alfred C., Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. W.B. Saunders Company, 1948.
- Krafft-Ebing, Richard von. *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Ferdinand Enke, 1886.
- LeVay, Simon. "A Difference in Hypothalamic Structure between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men." *Science*, vol. 253, no. 5023, 1991, pp. 1034–37.
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press, 1984.
- McCormack, Mark, and Lewis Wignall. "Enjoyment, Exploration and Education: Understanding the Consumption of Pornography among Young Men with Non-exclusive Sexual Orientations." *Sociology*, vol. 51, no. 5, 2017, pp. 975–91.
- McIntosh, Mary. "The Homosexual Role." *Social Problems*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1968, pp. 182–92.
- Meyer, Ilan H. "Prejudice, Social Stress, and Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: Conceptual Issues and Research Evidence." *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 129, no. 5, 2003, pp. 674–97.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. University of California Press, 1990.
- Weeks, Jeffrey. *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*. Quartet Books, 1977.

Mohd Shamim

Dr. Mohd Shamim is currently serving as an Associate Professor in the Department of English, Halim Muslim P.G. College, Kanpur. His areas of specialization include Gender Studies, Transgender Literature, Fictional Theory, and Postcolonial Studies. He has successfully completed two minor research projects on transgender autobiographies, edited five books, and published forty-five research papers in reputed national and international journals. Dr. Shamim has also delivered over a hundred invited talks on the stigma, pain, and trauma experienced by transgender individuals.

Shamim, M., M. Mustaqeem

www.literaryherm.org

Mohammad Mustaqeem

Dr. Mohammad Mustaqeem is an Associate Professor in the Department of Teacher Education, Halim Muslim P.G. College, Kanpur. His academic interests and areas of specialization include Gender Studies and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. He has published more than twenty research papers in reputed national and international journals.