

Speaker: **Peter Tatchell – Human Rights and Political Campaigner**

Start time: **00:06**

End time: **11:38**

CONTENT

0:06

What I want to do with you today is to share some ideas, some speculative ideas, about the future evolution of human sexuality. And my starting point is that as we all know in Western societies, although certainly not in many non-Western societies, there is ever greater acceptance of LGBT rights and sexuality. We've gone to a much better place in terms of understanding the human rights of dignity of LGBT people. And so what I want to ask is; if this trend continues towards ever greater acceptance of LGBT people, what will it mean for the future? Where will this lead us in the end? Because we know that human culture evolves, and that human sexuality is part of culture, and therefore it to be evolving and will evolve in the future.

1:09

My starting point I guess is that if we move towards a more post-homophobic society where human sexuality is no longer an issue - how will that transition to equality, dignity and respect, how will it affect expression of human sexuality? If we move to a sexually enlightened society where there is acceptance of diversity; what would this mean for the future expression of same-sex-identity and sexuality.

1:46

Now, we already know thanks to a host of different sex surveys that bi-sexuality is a fact of life. And that a significant and growing proportion of the population are open to both opposite sex and same sex attraction. If that is the case, then where will this lead us? If we go back in time and history, we know that Dr Alfred Kinsey in the United States in 1940's - he was the first person to give major statistical evidence that the categories of gay and straight are not water tight and mutually exclusive.

2:26

He discovered that for many people, sexuality is a continuum between people who are 100% heterosexual and those who are 100% homosexual. A lot of people he found are to varying degrees somewhere in the middle - a mixture, an amalgam of different sexual desires and attractions. Now these of course may or may not be acted upon, but in his respondents he found high levels of both opposite sex and same sex attraction in significant proportions of the many thousands of men and women that he interviewed. An observer poll here in Britain just 3 or 4 years ago found this greater trend towards sexual experimentation as homophobic attitudes declined. It found that of 16-24 year olds - 23% had had a same sex experience. Much higher than the national average and much much higher than in years and decades past.

3:36

So that would indicate to me that already a lot of young people of significant proportion of young people are recognising their capacity for both hetro and homo desire. This was something that has also been documented by anthropologists. I am a great fan of Clellan Ford and Frank Beech who wrote a book called Patterns of Sexual Behaviour - published in Britain in the 1960's. It was the result of a survey of surveys of tribal society's pre-capitalist societies -mostly in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and parts of the Middle-East. And they found that of those 76 societies that they researched or took research from - they found that homosexuality was considered normal and acceptable in 49.

4:32

That's nearly two thirds of those surveyed [societies] from the 1920's to the 1950's. They also recorded that in some aboriginal cultures such as the Caribbean and Zambia and Papua New Guinea, all young men entered into a same-sex relationship with an older unmarried warrior as part of their right to passage into manhood. The older warrior taught them the skills of hunting and other manly activities and that was by-lined with a sexual relationship. Once completed, those young men ceased to have homosexual contact and went on to marry. In other words they went through a phase or a period of homosexuality where they were sexually functional with another male - but then resumed what we might call the traditional hetro sexual marriage path for the rest of their lives.

5:32

And Clellan Ford and Frank Beech and others have concluded this would indicate that human sexuality is much more malleable than many of us acknowledge. That there is a cultural element in terms of expectations in more ways that influences the expression of human sexuality. They said that if sexual orientation was pre-programmed at birth, if it was biologically fixed, it would not be possible for people to be bi-sexual or in the case of the Papua New Guinean tribes, to switch from one sexual attraction to another with such apparent ease. So, Clellan Ford and Frank Beech concluded that heterosexuality, bisexuality and homosexuality are fundamental to the human species.

6:28

They are part of the natural spectrum of human sexual desire and attraction and that they are very substantially influenced by culture morays and expectations. So, this leaves me to conclude that if culture changes in our society, surely manifestations of sexuality will also change over time. The cross over between hetro and homo I think will become more common place.

6:58

And of course we are talking about conscious desires as we know from Psychology - many people have hidden unconscious desires that they don't acknowledge or accept - so maybe if we reached a state where it didn't matter who was gay or straight, that sexual orientation was no longer an issue, maybe those people could bring those feelings to the surface that they have hidden and repressed. So this is a picture of human sexuality with a much more complex, diverse, blurred and so on - than the traditional simplistic binary reach of hetro and homo. Which of course is not only loved by many straight moralists, but even held to by many lesbians and gay men.

7:50

My view is that if sexual orientation has at least an element that not an entire determination but an element of indeterminacy and flexibility based on culture - then surely the present forms of heterosexuality and homosexuality are conditional, that they are not likely to remain the same in perpetuity and those culture changes - so will expressions of sexuality. In a future non homophobic society, as the taboos around same sex relations recede, I suspect as the observer poll indicated that many more people are likely to have gay sex and relationships even if perhaps only temporarily or experimentally. Interestingly of course - the demise of homophobia is likely to make redundant the need to assert and affirm ones LGBT identity. In my view and my experience and my study of history; gay and lesbian identities are largely the product of homophobic prejudice and repression.

9:04

They are a self-defence mechanism against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. So, faced with the persecution that they have suffered, we have suffered, because of same sex relations, the right to defend those relations had to be defended. Hence the emergence of gay identity and the gay rights movement. But if in the future, if ones sexuality is not privileged over another, if defining one's self so particularly, if no longer necessary, then surely the need to assert that right or that freedom or that identity will decline. If no one cares who loves who or who has sex with who, the need for an LGBT identity I think will over time - decline. It won't have the social relevance and significance that it has today, and more will the need to affirm ones heterosexuality. That to will become redundant over time.

10:14

The need to assert those boundaries, those differences will demise with the demise of straight supremacism. As we evolve to a more sexually enlightened and accepting society, homosexuality and heterosexuality I think will begin to fade as separate, exclusive orientations and identities. The vast majority of people I do believe will be open to the possibility of both opposite sex and same sex desires - even if they never act upon them. It simply won't be an issue - people will no longer feel the need to label themselves as gay or straight.

10:58

Because in a future post-homophobic society, no one will really care. It won't matter. Individually, socially, culturally or politically. And therefore, love will transcend sexual orientation. That's the hope I have - the hope that one day the need for different sexual orientations and gender identities will become redundant, and that people like me will no longer have to fight for LGBT rights.

11:33

Thank you

11:38

[END]