

POSTER

WHY COVER THE GENITALS, WHY SEX IN INTIMACY? EVOLUTIONARY AND CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERPINNINGS

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ABSTRACT

Covering one's genitals is very wide-spread in human societies; for only few of them ethnographic records show that their members were totally naked. It seems, this was more often the case for males than for females. In some societies the penis is visually accentuated by special kinds of cover. This can be related to the fact that in a number of non-human primate species males expose their erect, often brightly coloured penis as a sign of threat and dominance. This phylogenetic background explains the function of the phallos as powerful apotropaic signal. Images of the vulva/vagina as the seat of awe-inspiring female power are used in a similarly protective property. This intuitive perception of the genitals and a connected evolution of genital shame may provide an explanation for the tendency to cover them. Related to this impulse of genital modesty is the universal fact that humans (except at very rare occasions) do not have sex *coram publico* like other animals, but in intimacy. One reason for this could be the high and socially possibly disrupting arousability of humans triggered by watching others perform sexual acts. The forming of clandestine "consortships" e.g. between females and non-alpha males in chimpanzees, allowing female choice, has also been suggested as building block for our unique sexual behaviour. Evolved bio-psychic genital and sexual shame are thus seen as primary motivations to hide one's coitus and to cover one's genitals. Putting on dress would have happened later in hominization and independently of inventing genital cover.