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CHAPTER VII:

DISCUSSION

Martijn A. Schenkel

Evolution of sex determination mechanisms

In this thesis, I investigated the evolutionary genetics and dynamics of transitions in sex determination. Despite representing an essential component of the development of sexually reproducing organisms, the regulation of sex determination (SD) itself is highly labile from an evolutionary perspective. Control over the SD process can be achieved in myriad ways and different cues, both genetic and environmental, can impinge on this process (Bachtrog et al., 2014; Beukeboom & Perrin, 2014). The result is an astounding variation between species, and in some cases within species, in the mechanisms regulating sexual differentiation, as well as the genes involved. This variation may arise through adaptive evolution when selection favours the spread of novel SD systems (i.e. genes, chromosomes, or mechanisms). Previous work on evolutionary transitions in SD has sought to uncover the selective pressures acting on SD and the conditions under which SD transitions may take place (reviewed in (van Doorn, 2014)). Transitions in SD may be driven by selective pressures arising from phenomena such as parent-offspring conflict (e.g. Kozielska *et al.*, 2006; Kuijper & Pen, 2014), sex ratio distortion (reviewed in (Uller et al., 2007)), and linkage to nearby sexually antagonistic genes (van Doorn & Kirkpatrick, 2007, 2010; Muralidhar & Veller, 2018).

Previous work on the evolution of SD mechanisms has resulted in a solid theoretical framework of how variation in SD may arise and how this incites further evolution. These models generally assume that SD is (1) a stand-alone and straightforward process where sex is a monogenic trait encoding a simple phenotype, rather than being a complex process involving many genes that is integrated into the overall developmental programme of an organism, or (2) a simplistic discrete switch which can be set to either a male and female state, rather than assuming the underlying regulation is more continuous and can be affected by many factors. A drawback of such simplistic models is that they do not adequately represent the complexity of SD. SD systems may involve a mixture of environmental (ESD) and genetic (GSD) cues, which is particularly evident in the skink *Niveoscincus ocellatus* (Pen et al., 2010) in which highland populations have GSD but lowland populations have ESD. Other complex SD systems may involve mixtures of different GSD mechanisms, such as in the European common frog *Rana temporaria* (Ma et al., 2016) which features an XY male heterogamety system in northern European

populations and a yet uncharacterized XY male heterogamety system in southern populations. Research on SD continues to find diversity, such as in Dipteran insects where we know of four different genes that can lead to male development (Hall et al., 2015; Krzywinska et al., 2016; Sharma et al., 2017; Meccariello et al., 2019). The current theoretical framework for the evolution of SD is largely incapable of explaining polymorphic SD, where multiple genes may control sex, let alone predicting when they occur. Polymorphic SD is generally considered a transitory state between two different monomorphic systems (Rice, 1986), despite polymorphic SD persisting over extended periods of time in some species (e.g. (Kozielska et al., 2008; Ma et al., 2016)). This is because in most existing models of SD evolution, transitions in SD are generally complete, so that only a single SD gene will remain after sufficient time has passed. Stable polymorphic SD is only observed under a restricted range of parameter values in the limited cases where it is observed at all (e.g. van Doorn & Kirkpatrick, 2007). There is thus an urgent need for models on the evolution of SD that account for the underlying complexity and the further biology of the organism. SD genes manifest their effect through interactions with many other genes that effectuate sexual differentiation. The link between the SD gene and the function for which it is selected (i.e. determining the sex phenotype) is more complex than currently considered.

In this thesis, I have modelled several complex scenarios of SD evolution. In Chapter 4, evolution of the genes targeted by an SD gene can contribute substantially to the evolution of novel SD mechanisms. Here, environmental influences on the target gene cause it to supersede the ancestral SD gene. Interactions that do not strictly involve SD may also affect the evolution of SD. In Chapter 3 I have shown that epistatic interactions between an autosomal gene and a gene linked to a (novel) SD gene affect fitness. Epistasis modifies the selection acting on the linked gene, which leads to altered selection of the co-adapted gene complex that is formed by the interacting non-SD gene and the SD gene. This affects the stability or invasibility of respectively ancestral and novel SD genes, and thereby can both promote or inhibit transitions between SD systems. Taken together, it is apparent that SD genes evolve in the context of a genomic architecture of a multitude of other genes spread across different chromosomes.

Sex determination and sexual function

Although principally defined by the capacity to produce different types of gametes (Parker et al., 1972), males and females differ in more aspects. That is because anisogamy comprises the basis that will give rise to further sexual dimorphism, which eventually leads to behavioural, morphological, physiological and even genetic (sex chromosomal) differences between males and females. Sexual identity, however, remains rooted in anisogamy, and what it entails ought to be considered first and foremost in this context. As outlined in Chapter 2, sexual dimorphism may arise in response to differences in reproductive capacity and the social context in terms of which compatible mates are available and with which individuals one must compete. These differences result in a divergence of selective pressures acting on males and females, and adaptive evolution can then give rise to sexual dimorphism as males and females both evolve in response to the selective pressures experienced by them.

Given that SD allows for further sexual dimorphism to evolve (beyond the difference in gamete size), sexual selection has played a large role in the evolution of SD (van Doorn, 2014). Indeed, SD does not comprise a simple binary switch between gamete types, but rather a complicated developmental program that affects many aspects of individual biology (e.g. (Aryan et al., 2020)). This consideration has been used to explain the evolution of the *Drosophila* SD pathway (Pomiankowski et al., 2004). There, the SD cascade is postulated to evolve to provide sexually dimorphic expression of SD genes, whose action differently affects fitness in males and females. Maleness, for example, is not solely defined by the production of the smaller gametes, but rather by a capacity to reproduce, and hence gain fitness, through these reduced gametes. Canalization of the SD process ensures that the expression of genes involved in sexual differentiation is uniformly set, which promotes specialization of an individual's reproductive capacity as either a male or a female.

When considering SD as a complex developmental program rather than a simple binary switch, it becomes apparent that many genes may be involved in its execution. SD mechanisms are often represented as a regulatory cascade in which a single upstream gene regulates one or more downstream components, which in turn also regulate one or more components even further downstream, and so forth. The result is that in moving down the cascade, an increasing number of genes

becomes involved in regulating sexual differentiation. The entirety of sex-specific development is subject to regulation by a single regulatory network which is spearheaded by the master SD gene at the top of the cascade. However, in some species not all sex-specific functions are necessarily under direct control of the master SD gene (a term that is therefore effectively obsolete, but which I will continue to use for the sake of simplicity). For example, Y-chromosomes generally contain many genes that have functions in male-specific processes such as spermatogenesis (Lahn & Page, 1997; Skaletsky et al., 2003), and in species like *Drosophila melanogaster* the Y-chromosome is not required for maleness in the broad sense, but contains genes conferring essential male-related functions (Bridges, 1916a; b). Individuals carrying a Y-chromosome with a non-functional mutant master SD gene may still exhibit some male-specific functions, and similarly misexpression of the perceived male-determining gene in (e.g. via transgenesis in non-Y-bearing individuals) may not be sufficient to achieve full male function (Aryan et al., 2020). Therefore, instead of SD being a simple developmental program controlled by a single gene, SD consists of several modules, each of which may be regulated a specific gene (or set of genes). Taken together, when all modules are set in a congruent manner, the SD program in its entirety is carried out uniformly so that the individual commits entirely to being either female or male.

We may consider the genes involved with sexual differentiation as being subject to sexually antagonistic selection, i.e. they represent loci under intralocus sexual conflict (IASC; see Chapter 2). They have a beneficial effect when expressed in conjunction with other developmental processes that promote the production of spermatozoa c.q. oocytes, or more simply put when the carrier is male c.q. female. However, they have a detrimental effect when they are expressed along with developmental processes which would promote the production of oocytes over spermatozoa, i.e. in otherwise female individuals or c.q. spermatozoa over oocytes in otherwise male individuals. IASC loci are predicted to evolve so that conflict becomes resolved either by becoming sex-specifically expressed, or by becoming linked to a sex-determining gene (Bonduriansky & Chenoweth, 2009; Parsch & Ellegren, 2013). In systems with polygenic SD, the genes involved are predicted to become linked to each other, e.g. to prevent fertility issues (Charlesworth et al., 2005). Here, the regulation of SA genes and SD genes exhibit similar patterns. It remains unclear under which conditions IASC loci are more likely to evolve to become

sex-linked versus when they become sex-specifically expressed. Similarly, some sex-specific functions may be less likely to be assimilated into the regulatory network controlled by the master SD gene for yet unknown reasons, and instead they may evolve to be uniformly regulated along with other SD genes simply by becoming linked to these other SD genes. A possible explanation here may be that full monogenic control of SD is infeasible as the SD program is carried out by a still too variable set of genes.

Evolution of polymorphic sex determination mechanisms

Spatial heterogeneity in SD may arise by local rather than global transitions in SD mechanisms. Any mechanisms capable of driving a transition in SD may then be capable of causing such heterogeneity, provided that their action is restricted to certain geographical localities. For example, selection by direct benefits (Bull & Charnov, 1977) may favour a given SD gene in one location, but when its beneficial effects are context-dependent, this may result in it being disfavoured elsewhere. A more complicated example would be when meiotic drive sex chromosomes (cf. (Jaenike, 2001; Kozielska et al., 2010)) are unable to spread due to incompatibilities with other (e.g. autosomal) genes in some but not all populations (Verspoor et al., 2018). Similarly, when genetic variants at SA loci are differently selected upon in different environments (García-Roa et al., 2020), their benefit or cost to carriers may differ accordingly, so that the evolution of an SD gene near these loci becomes less favourable (cf. (van Doorn & Kirkpatrick, 2007, 2010)).

The model presented in Chapter 3 shows that established sex chromosomes may experience increased stability owing to interactions with autosomal genes. The fitness effect of the autosomal gene was modelled as neutral on its own, and had a relatively simple effect on individual fitness via epistatic interactions. This model results in a straightforward genetic network underlying fitness. Fitness under natural conditions is however construed by a vastly more complicated genetic architecture. Under natural conditions, this network may be exposed to different selective pressures in different habitats, and as a result is likely to diverge between populations to some extent. When local adaptation affects those components of the network that are also involved in autosome-sex chromosome interactions, the stabilizing effect of these interactions on the SD system may be affected, so that in

different populations the stability of the SD system may vary accordingly. Such a scenario may apply to the different male-determining M-factors found in the housefly *Musca domestica*. In this species, males bearing an M-factor on autosome III (III^{M}) had a fitness benefit over males bearing the 'standard' Y-chromosomal M-factor (Y^{M}) in one experiment (Hamm et al., 2009), though a similar experiment using different strains found that Y^{M} bearing males had a fitness benefit over III^{M} males (Hamm & Scott, 2008). This suggests that the fitness of Y^{M} and/or III^{M} males is affected by their genetic background. To test this more rigorously, it is necessary to introgress different M-factors into different backgrounds (similar to the baby-sex chromosome procedure in Chapter 5) followed by assessing their capacity to invade into a population or inversely to withstand invasion by another M-factor.

Polymorphic SD systems may however not have evolved due to SD drivers acting only locally. In Chapter 4, I showed that environmental influences on SD can enable transitions in SD, but may not necessarily be the driving force behind these transitions. Instead, environmental influences can allow for SD genes to evolve to interact differently with other genes within the regulatory network of SD. Mutations in SD genes resulting in altered interactions may occur anywhere, but are likely to be strongly counterselected when the resulting altered interactions are not accommodated under local conditions. When such mutations occur under favourable conditions, it may invade as driven by other drivers of SD transition (e.g. sex ratio selection), but only in those parts of the populations where conditions are similarly favourable. The effect of environmental influences on SD may however be much more straightforward. The model in Chapter 4 assumes a positive effect of an environmental cue such as temperature on the expression level of an SD gene, but negative effects are also possible. For example, increased temperature may increase the degradation rate of a specific SD gene's product so that it cannot perform its function. A different gene which is insensitive (or less sensitive) may evolve to function as a substitute. Altogether, polymorphism in SD mechanisms need not be caused by local modulation of a driver of SD transitions but rather by modulation of the regulatory network underlying SD. The manner in and extent to which such effects occur are likely to be underreported, and may provide fruitful options for future research on SD systems.

Transitions in sex determination and the evolution of sex chromosomes

Transitions in SD require genomic reorganisations and may set off further evolutionary change. The evolution of a new SD gene on a former autosome represents the first step in the evolution of sex chromosomes (reviewed in (Charlesworth et al., 2005; Schenkel & Beukeboom, 2016)). The sex chromosomes represent specialized genomic niches, because they are differently transmitted from and to males and females (Patten et al., 2013). Sex-chromosomal genes may therefore evolve differently from their autosomal counterparts, for example by increased selection for male-beneficial variants on the Y-chromosome (Rice, 1998). A striking feature of differentiated sex chromosomes is their specialized gene content, which is characterized by an excess of regulatory genes and/or genes with sex-specific functions compared to autosomes (e.g. (Lahn & Page, 1997; Bellott et al., 2014)). Interactions between sex-chromosomal and autosomal genes may be abundant, resulting in a pivotal role for the sex chromosomes in individual fitness. Sex chromosome evolution is characterized by being initiated by small-scale changes on the level of individual genes, and culminating in chromosome-wide differentiation of both the X- and the Y-chromosome. In some cases, the process may continue further and lead to the loss of the sex-determining chromosome (i.e. the male-determining Y in XY systems or female-determining W in ZW systems), which represents another SD transition from an XY or ZW to an X0 or Z0 system (Graves, 2006; Bachtrög, 2013).

Although late-stage sex chromosomes have been thoroughly studied across different species, early-stage sex chromosomes have been studied on a much smaller scale. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated the utility of *M. domestica* as a model system for studying the initial phases of sex chromosome evolution. By exploiting the variation in SD mechanisms in this species, I was able to establish strains in which formerly-autosomal male-determining genes (M-factors) were crossed out of a genomic background with a dominant female-determining gene *tra^D*. In presence of *tra^D*, M-factors can be transmitted through males and females, but when crossed out of this background M-factors induce masculinization in all carriers. This mimics the *de novo* evolution of a male-determining gene and the evolution of a novel Y-chromosome. Aside from being straightforward to perform, this methodology has three key conceptual advantages over other commonly-used approaches to studying

early-stage sex chromosome evolution. Firstly, early-stage sex chromosome evolution can be studied from the absolute onset and in real time. Other studies have used a retrospective approach aimed at inferring past evolution of sex chromosome systems by studying systems of varying age. Secondly, comparative analyses can be performed within a single species, rather than between sex chromosome systems in different species (e.g. (Bracewell & Bachtrog, 2020)). Thirdly, this approach is highly repeatable as it can be used to generate different replicates, and thereby additionally allows for novel sex chromosomes to be maintained under different conditions to assess the importance of different evolutionary phenomena in driving the early stages of sex chromosome evolution. The possibility to generate new sex chromosome systems in *M. domestica* (and possibly other species harbouring similar variation in SD mechanisms) therefore provides a powerful tool to study sex chromosome evolution with unprecedented rigour.

The utility of baby-sex chromosomes for studying early sex chromosome evolution however requires a methodology for assessing fitness in *M. domestica*. In Chapter 6, I discussed how fitness may be measured in a sex-specific manner in *M. domestica*, and how proxies for male and female fitness may be developed in this species. In females, fitness is primarily determined by fecundity, with increased egg production being strongly associated with increased offspring numbers. However, a female's fitness may also be influenced by her ability to discern low- and high-quality mates, and to prevent low-quality mates from mating with her. In males, fitness is primarily determined by mating success, as females are thought to exhibit low to no remating owing to males transferring a seminal product which inhibits this behaviour (Leopold, 1970; Leopold, Terranova, Thorson, et al., 1971).

I however assumed that female promiscuity is strongly inhibited by males so that females only mate once. This might not be true. Males that mate repeatedly become less efficient in inhibiting remating in later mates (Leopold, Terranova, & Swilley, 1971). The seminal compound which inhibits remating is transferred during later stages of copulation (Riemann et al., 1967; Arnqvist & Andrés, 2006), and females exhibit higher remating rates when mating is prematurely disrupted. Remating inhibition may be less effective if mating is often disrupted in natural conditions or if males may mate sequentially with different females. Female promiscuity and by extension

postcopulatory sexual selection may then be much more prominent than documented here (Birkhead & Pizzari, 2002; Pitnick & Hosken, 2002). Female promiscuity would favour adaptations in males that act after mating to enhance their fitness (e.g. via sperm precedence). Female fitness may also be affected, as promiscuity can have both direct (i.e. increased fecundity) as well as indirect (e.g. good genes, genetic diversity) benefits to the female. Additionally, female promiscuity extends the scope for interlocus sexual conflict to occur: males no longer control the paternity over the offspring generated by the females they have mated, and females may actively mediate paternity instead via e.g. cryptic female choice. Taken together, the extent to which females are promiscuous, and the impact thereof on how fitness is accrued by males and females in *M. domestica*, requires further investigation for a definitive fitness assessment methodology may be established. Such fitness assays are crucial for determining the selective effects of baby-sex chromosomes at different evolutionary stages, which will reveal how these chromosomes evolve during their early stages.

Conclusion

The diversity of SD mechanisms has in the past been explained primarily by models that utilize a simplified view of sex determination and, in a sense, the outcome of the SD process. This has led to the identification of processes that may affect the evolution of SD mechanisms, but in line with their simplistic origin, their explanatory power with regard to complex SD systems is limited. The notion that complex SD systems are evolutionary instable (e.g. (Rice, 1986)) is at odds with the reality that such systems can persist for extended periods of time, suggesting that these systems have in fact been shaped and are maintained by adaptive benefits. Understanding what these benefits are requires an integrative consideration of how different processes may interact to affect SD genes (Figure 1). Here, the evolution of SD genes is affected not only by the selective pressures acting on SD genes or loci to which they are linked (as commonly seen in models of SD turnover), but may also be affected by environmental factors as well as genetic interactions with other genes or chromosomes. A less simplistic perspective such as the one proposed here, where SD is considered as a more complex developmental process involving many genes and as being sensitive to perturbation by genetic and non-genetic factors, may

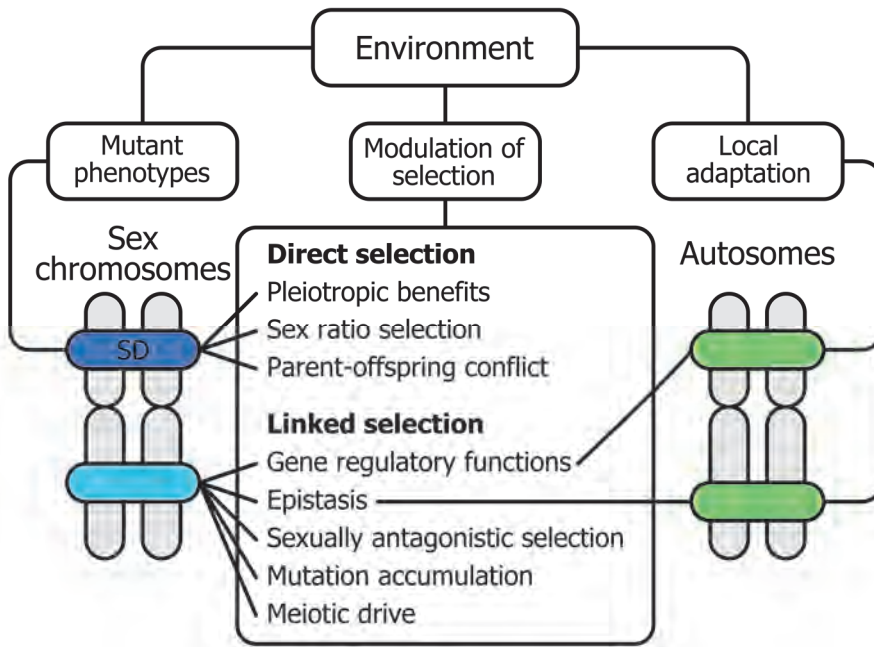


Figure 1: Evolution of sex determination mechanisms in an integrative perspective. A given sex-determining gene (SD, dark blue) can evolve in response to numerous factors. Selection can act directly on SD either via its sex-determining function or via some other pleiotropic function. Linkage to other genes (light blue) results in linked (or indirect) selection from affecting it. Through this, it may also be affected by the remainder of the genome as the linked gene interacts with other autosomal genes (green). Overlaying the spectrum of selective pressures acting on SD and the chromosome pair on which it is located, environmental dependencies can affect SD in various ways. Context-dependence of mutant phenotypes means that some SD variants may exert different functions under different conditions. Environmental influences may bias the various selective pressures potentially acting on SD via direct or linked selection. Third, local adaptation to environment may alter the genetic composition of autosomal loci with which the sex chromosome interacts, or alternatively the loci on the sex chromosomes itself (not shown). Altogether, SD is affected by a myriad of phenomena that may affect its evolution.

provide novel insights into complex SD systems in particular as well as SD systems in general. The diversity of SD mechanisms has often been hailed as being in stark contrast with its simple binary outcome. This perspective must be cast away, and instead we must regard the diversity of SD mechanisms as being in line with the complexity of ecological and evolutionary processes with which it is so strongly intertwined.

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SUMMARY

Sex determination (SD) is the process by which individuals commit to being either male or female during their development. SD must be properly executed to ensure that the sexual development occurs in a consistent manner, which in turn is required to ensure that the individual is capable of reproducing. Improper execution of the SD program results in incomplete female or male development and such intersexuality is generally associated with (severely) impaired reproductive capacity. Thus, the process of SD is subject to strong selection. In stark contrast to this, the mechanisms controlling SD are highly variable, as different cues both genetic and non-genetic may impinge on the process.

Past (mostly theoretical) work has sought to determine how different evolutionary phenomena contribute to the diversification of SD mechanisms. Different models predict that SD mechanisms can evolve either by neutral evolution or adaptive evolution. Additionally, various biological conflicts can contribute to SD evolution, such as conflicts between parents and their offspring, between different genetic elements (e.g. nuclear versus cytoplasmic) or between males and females (sexual conflict). Despite these advances in our understanding of how different factors may affect SD evolution, several unresolved issues remain, of which two are most relevant here. Firstly, most species exhibit a single SD mechanism (monomorphic SD), whereas in others multiple different SD mechanisms (polymorphic SD) may persist, e.g. when different SD mechanisms occur in different populations. Secondly, SD in some species is controlled solely by genetic factors (GSD) whereas in others it is controlled by environmental factors (ESD). In many species SD may however be affected by a combination of genetic and environmental factors, but it is unclear which stable SD mechanisms may be formed under such mixed control. Extending the existing body of work on SD evolution is necessary to increase our understanding of more complex SD systems.

Aside from the open questions with regard to the cause of transitions in SD, others remain with regard to their consequences. The evolution of a novel SD gene is thought to set off the evolution of a former autosome into a sex chromosome (proto-sex chromosome). Theory predicts that during this process, the sex-biased transmission pattern of the SD gene-bearing chromosome favours its enrichment with sexually antagonistic (SA) genes, which have a positive effect in one sex but a negative effect in the other. For example, a male-determining gene would thereby become associated with genetic variants that enhance fitness in male bearers, but

decrease fitness in female bearers. Testing this theory has proven difficult, owing in large part to the lack of suitable model systems.

In this thesis, I have studied the evolutionary genetics and dynamics of transitions in sex determination, with the twofold aim of increasing our understanding of both the causes of SD evolution as well as its consequences. I was inspired by and made use of the housefly *Musca domestica*, in which various SD systems are found. This species harbours different male-determining genes on both sex chromosomes and all autosomes, and a dominant female-determining gene that overrules the action of the male-determining genes. In nature, the frequencies of these genes vary between populations along latitudinal gradients. The work presented in this thesis is based on this complex SD system, and seeks to contribute to an increased understanding of how it may have evolved and how it may be exploited to study the evolution of SD and sex chromosomes.

In Chapter II, I have first reviewed past work on sexual conflict, which encompasses two distinct subforms: intralocus (IASC) and interlocus sexual conflict (IRSC). IASC is defined by the occurrence of conflicting selective pressures acting on a shared gene in males and females, so that the optimal genotype for males is not the same as that for females. Under IASC, sex-specific adaptive evolution is impeded as this would require maladaptive evolution in the opposite sex. IASC can be resolved by the evolution of sex-specific genetic architectures for males and females, after which the underlying loci may then differentiate between the two sexes.

IRSC is defined as the conflict between (potential) reproductive partners over the outcome of interactions between them, where the optimal outcome for the male and female is different. Both parties are independently affected by selection to maximize their own fitness by achieving their preferred outcome, even if at the expense of their mates. Evolutionary change under IRSC occurs in response to the social environment, which is formed by an individual's pool of compatible mates. When an adaptation arises in one sex that enhances the capacity of individuals of this sex to achieve their preferred outcome when interacting with potential mates, individuals of the other sex become less likely to achieve their preferred outcome. This then leads to enhanced selection in the maladapted sex to evolve counteradaptations. IRSC is therefore characterized by reiterated bouts of

adaptation-counteradaptation, and may give rise to fast and continuous evolutionary change.

In chapter III, I investigated the effect of interchromosomal interactions on the stability of existing sex chromosome systems and the invasibility of novel sex chromosomes. Sex chromosomes often harbour a number of genes, aside from the SD gene, which interact with other autosomal genes to affect individual fitness. Such interactions can give rise to epistasis, where the combined effect of both genes differs from the sum of their terms. Here, I show that such epistatic interactions can have both stabilizing and destabilizing effects on an ancestral SD system. Epistasis can also enhance the invasibility of novel sex chromosomes, but these effects are generally weaker. This difference is likely caused by the less extensive differentiation of novel sex chromosomes, due to which epistasis would occur less frequently. Once established, even young sex chromosomes may already have undergone substantial genetic differentiation at a limited number of loci. If these are involved in epistasis, it can strongly enhance the stability of sex chromosomes even if only established recently.

Sex can be determined genetically or environmentally, but in many species both types of cues may affect the SD process. How this affects the evolution of the genetic component remains unresolved. In Chapter IV, I investigated the evolution of a genetic SD mechanism in which the expression of one sex determination gene is positively affected by temperature. I showed that different SD systems may be evolutionary stable depending on the activity level of this gene, which in turn depends on the local temperature. Variation in temperature between different locations (i.e. subpopulations) then enables the establishment of different SD systems between them.

I applied this temperature model to the housefly *M. domestica* to determine if it can explain the existence of its multiple SD systems and their latitudinal distribution. I found that the reported allelic frequency gradient of its female-determining gene (*transformer*) may be explained by local invasion of a dominant variant in high-temperature environments. From this, gradients in male-determining genes may arise as well. Male-determining genes that have a benefit in heterozygotes but a cost in homozygotes may then be favoured in locations where the dominant female-determining variant is not present (and therefore male-determining genes can only be heterozygous). If a dominant female-determining

gene is however present, the costs of this particular male-determining gene in homozygous individuals cause it to be counterselected against, and instead a different male-determining gene may arise in these populations. This can thus generate frequency gradients in at least three SD genes as found in *M. domestica*, and thereby provides the first adaptive evolutionary hypothesis for the existence of this complex SD system.

The existence of different SD systems in *M. domestica* not only posed an evolutionary conundrum, but also provides opportunities for solving one. Male-determining genes are expected to induce Y-chromosome evolution on the chromosomes that harbour them. In presence of a dominant female-determining gene, this process is halted, and instead these chromosomes remain in a regular autosomal state. In Chapter V, I used interpopulation crosses to introgress autosomal male-determining genes from a population with a dominant female-determining gene into a genomic background without it. This process mimics the evolution of a new SD gene on an autosome, and establishes a pair of so-called baby-sex chromosomes. These baby-sex chromosomes can be used to study the very first stages of sex chromosome evolution, which in naturally-occurring systems is generally infeasible due to the degenerative nature of (late-stage) Y-chromosome evolution. I furthermore discussed how this can be used to test the "sexual antagonism" hypothesis of sex chromosome evolution, which is canonically accepted but for which empirical evidence remains sparse.

Exploiting the housefly as a model system for evolutionary biology in general and SD evolution in particular requires an understanding of how fitness is determined in this species, and how it can accurately be estimated. In Chapter VI, I investigated how female and male fitness may be assessed in *M. domestica*. For females, fitness is in large part determined by their own fecundity, whereas for males fitness is determined by the capacity to achieve mating success and thereby access to females' eggs for fertilization. However, current knowledge on housefly mating behaviour is limited, and the impact of female promiscuity on both female and male fitness is unknown. Under female promiscuity, the scope for selection extends to cover the postcopulatory phase, which can lead to the evolution of a variety of traits in males and females that can affect individual fitness, e.g. via IRSC. To develop a definitive fitness assessment methodology, it will be necessary to consider to what extent female remating occurs in this species, and how this influences males and females.

The evolutionary variability of SD systems has long been considered to be at odds with its conserved function, which must be executed carefully to avoid severe fitness costs to the individual. It has nonetheless become clear that many evolutionary phenomena can contribute to the diversification of SD. In light of this, it may be necessary to reconsider the paradigm for SD evolution: rather than being constrained by its critical function, we must consider this function as being integrated into the biology of the organism as a whole. Through this, selection can affect it in many ways, and adaptations in the underlying system arise accordingly to yield an astonishing variety of SD systems.

SAMENVATTING

Geslachtsbepaling is het proces waarbij individuen zich ontwikkelen als vrouw of man. Geslachtsbepaling moet zorgvuldig uitgevoerd worden zodat de seksuele ontwikkeling op een consistente manier plaatsvindt, wat weer nodig is om ervoor te zorgen dat het individu zich kan voortplanten. Wanneer de geslachtsbepaling niet correct verloopt leidt dit tot onvolledige mannelijke of vrouwelijke ontwikkeling. Zulke interseksualiteit gaat vaak gepaard met een (sterk) verminderde reproductief vermogen. De uitkomst van het geslachtsbepalingsproces is dus onderhevig aan sterke selectie. In tegenstelling hierop zijn de mechanismen die de geslachtsbepaling instrueren zeer variabel, en kunnen er zowel tussen soorten als tussen populaties van een soort verschillende geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen bestaan, waarbij zowel genetische als niet-genetische factoren het geslachtsbepalingsproces kunnen beïnvloeden.

Eerder (voornamelijk theoretisch) onderzoek heeft de rol van verscheidene evolutionaire processen in de diversificatie van geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen geprobeerd aan te tonen. Verschillende modellen voorspellen dat geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen kunnen evolueren door neutrale of adaptieve evolutie. Daarnaast kunnen biologische conflicten bijdragen aan de evolutionaire diversificatie van geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen, zoals conflicten tussen ouders en hun nakomelingen, tussen verschillende genetische elementen (bijvoorbeeld nucleaire versus cytoplasmatische elementen), of tussen vrouwen en mannen (seksueel conflict). Ondanks de belangrijke bijdrage van deze modellen aan ons begrip van de evolutie van geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen kunnen enkele aspecten daarvan met deze modellen nog niet verklaard worden, waarvan twee hier het meest relevant zijn. Ten eerste, hoewel de meeste soorten een enkel geslachtsbepalingsmechanisme hebben, bestaan er ook soorten met meerdere mechanismen, zowel binnen een enkele populatie als tussen verschillende populaties. Ten tweede, geslachtsbepaling vindt in sommige soorten plaats enkel op basis van genetische verschillen tussen mannen en vrouwen, terwijl in andere soorten het plaats vindt op basis van omgevingsfactoren zoals temperatuur. In veel soorten kan geslachtsbepaling echter door zowel genetische als omgevingsfactoren beïnvloedt worden, maar welke stabiele geslachtsbepalingssystemen (waarin vrouwen en mannen in vergelijkbare proporties voorkomen en interseksualiteit zeldzaam of zelfs compleet afwezig is) dan gevormd kunnen worden is nog onduidelijk. Het is derhalve nodig dat we onze kennis van de evolutie van

geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen verder ontwikkelen om dergelijke systemen beter te begrijpen.

Naast de open vragen met betrekking tot de oorzaak van evolutionaire transities in geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen bestaan er ook onbeantwoorde vragen met betrekking tot de gevolgen daarvan. De evolutie van een nieuw geslachtsbepalingsgen wordt geacht ertoe te leiden dat het chromosoom waarop het zich bevindt zich ontwikkelt van een normaal autosoom in een geslachtschromosoom. Theoretische modellen voorspellen dat tijdens dit proces dit chromosoom geslachtsspecifieke adaptatie ondergaat als gevolg van de verschillen in overerving van en naar vrouwen en mannen. Hierbij zullen seksueel-antagonistische varianten, die een positief effect in dragers van het ene geslacht hebben maar een negatief effect in dragers van het andere geslacht, toenemen in frequentie. Een gen voor mannelijkheid zou bijvoorbeeld gekoppeld kunnen raken aan genetische varianten die de fitness van mannetjes verbetert, maar die in vrouwtjes juist een verlaging van de fitness zouden veroorzaken. Het testen van deze theorie is moeilijk gebleken, mede doordat er nog geen geschikte modelsystemen voor bestaan.

In dit proefschrift heb ik de evolutionaire genetica en dynamica van transities in geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen onderzocht, met het tweeledige doel om zowel ons begrip van de oorzaken als de gevolgen van dergelijke transities te vergroten. Ik ben hierbij geïnspireerd door de geslachtsbepaling van de huisvlieg *Musca domestica*, waarin verscheidene geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen voorkomen. In deze soort komen mannelijkheidsgenen voor op beide geslachtschromosomen en op alle autosomen, evenals een vrouwelijkheidsgen dat dominant is over alle mannelijkheidsgenen. In de natuur varieert de frequentie van al deze genen tussen populaties langs een gradiënt die van een hoge breedtegraad naar een lage breedtegraad loopt. Het werk in dit proefschrift is gebaseerd op dit gecompliceerde geslachtsbepalingsmechanisme, en er op gericht om te ontrafelen hoe dit systeem geëvolueerd kan zijn en hoe het gebruikt kan worden voor toekomstig onderzoek aan de evolutie van geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen en geslachtschromosomen.

In Hoofdstuk II bespreek ik eerst voorgaand onderzoek op het gebied van seksueel conflict, waarin twee vormen onderscheiden worden: intralocus (IASC) en interlocus seksueel conflict (IRSC). IASC wordt gedefinieerd als de situatie waarin

tegenstrijdige selectiedrukken in vrouwen en mannen een gen beïnvloeden dat in beide geslachten voorkomt, zodat het optimale genotype voor mannen en vrouwen niet hetzelfde is. In dit geval wordt geslachtsspecifieke adaptatie verhinderd doordat dit vereist dat het andere geslacht maladaptie ondergaat. Dit conflict kan opgelost worden wanneer de genetische basis voor vrouwen en mannen van elkaar gescheiden wordt, waarna de betrokken loci vervolgens gedifferentieerd kunnen raken tussen de twee geslachten.

IRSC wordt op haar beurt gedefinieerd als het conflict tussen (potentiële) partners over de uitkomst van interacties tussen hen; hierbij is de optimale uitkomst voor de vrouw anders dan die voor de man. Selectie beïnvloedt beiden afzonderlijk om hun eigen fitness te maximaliseren, zelfs als dit ten koste gaat van de fitness van hun partner(s). Evolutie als gevolg van IRSC vindt plaats in de sociale context die gevormd wordt door de (potentiële) partners van het individu. Wanneer een adaptatie ontstaat in het ene geslacht waardoor individuen van dat geslacht beter in staat zijn om hun voorkeursuitkomst te bewerkstelligen, heeft dit als noodzakelijk gevolg dat individuen van het andere geslacht minder kans maken om hun voorkeursuitkomst te bereiken. Hierdoor ervaren deze individuen een hogere selectiedruk om tegenadaptaties te evolueren. IRSC wordt derhalve gekenmerkt door herhalende rondes van adaptie-tegenadaptatie, en kan daardoor leiden tot snelle en continue evolutionaire verandering.

In Hoofdstuk III onderzoek ik het effect van interchromosomale interacties op de stabiliteit van bestaande geslachtschromosomen en de invasieve capaciteit van nieuwe geslachtschromosomen. Geslachtschromosomen bevatten naast het geslachtsbepalingsgen een aantal andere genen die betrokken zijn bij interacties met autosomale genen en daardoor de fitness van de drager beïnvloeden. Zulke interacties kunnen leiden tot epistasie, waarbij het cumulatieve effect van beide genen afwijkt van de som van hun individuele effecten. Hier toon ik aan dat dergelijke epistatische interacties zowel een stabiliserend als een destabiliserend effect kunnen hebben op bestaande geslachtschromosomen. Epistasie kan tevens de invasie van nieuwe geslachtschromosomen bevorderen, maar deze effecten zijn doorgaans wel zwakker. Zodra een geslachtschromosoompaar zich verspreid heeft kan er op een select aantal loci al genetische differentiatie tussen de beide chromosomen opgetreden zijn, zelfs als dit paar recent geëvolueerd is. Indien deze loci betrokken zijn bij epistatische interacties kan dit de stabiliteit van dit

geslachtschromosoompaar versterken, waarbij dit geldt voor zowel oude als recent-geëvolueerde geslachtschromosomen.

Geslachtsbepaling kan zowel door genetische als omgevingsfactoren plaatsvinden, maar in veel soorten kunnen beide typen factoren een invloed hebben. Het was nog onduidelijk hoe dit de evolutie van de genetische component kan beïnvloeden. In Hoofdstuk IV onderzoek ik de evolutie van een genetisch geslachtsbepalingsmechanisme waarin de expressie van één van de betrokken genen positief beïnvloed wordt door temperatuur. Ik toon aan dat de activiteit van dit gen bepaalt welke geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen evolutionair stabiel zijn. Omdat de activiteit beïnvloed werd door temperatuur is het daarnaast mogelijk dat temperatuurverschillen tussen populaties ertoe leiden dat in deze populaties verschillende geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen evolueren.

Dit model paste ik vervolgens toe op de huisvlieg *M. domestica* om te bepalen of het bestaan van verschillende geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen en de geografische verspreiding van deze mechanismen hiermee verklaard kan worden. Ik ontdekte dat de allelfrequenties op het vrouwelijkheidsgen (*transformer*) in de natuur verklaart kunnen worden door de lokale invasie van een dominante variant in locaties met een hoge temperatuur. Als gevolg hiervan kunnen tevens gradiënten in de frequenties van mannelijkheidsgenen ontstaan. Mannelijkheidsgenen die geassocieerd zijn met een fitnessvoordeel in heterozygoten, maar een fitnessnadeel in homozygoten kunnen dan selectief voordeel hebben in locaties met een lage temperatuur, waar het dominante vrouwelijkheidsgen afwezig is en deze mannelijkheidsgenen dus enkel in heterozygoten voorkomen. Daarentegen hebben deze mannelijksgenen een selectief nadeel in warmere locaties waar dit vrouwelijkheidsgen wel aanwezig is, en ze dus ook in homozygoten kunnen voorkomen en tot een fitnessnadeel kunnen leiden. Deze mannelijkheidsgenen kunnen dan verdrongen worden door andere mannelijkheidsgenen die niet geassocieerd zijn met fitnessnadelen in homozygoten. Hierdoor kunnen dus tenminste drie gradiënten in allelfrequenties ontstaan zoals die aangetroffen zijn in *M. domestica*, en wordt dus een adaptief-evolutionaire verklaring gegeven voor het bestaan van dit gecompliceerde geslachtsbepalingssysteem.

Het bestaan van meerdere geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen in *M. domestica* is niet alleen een evolutionair vraagstuk, maar is tevens een middel om een ander vraagstuk te beantwoorden. De aanwezigheid van een mannelijkheidsgen op een

chromosoom wordt geacht ertoe te leiden dat dit chromosoom evolueert als een Y-chromosoom. Als er tevens een dominant vrouwelijkheidsgen aanwezig is wordt dit proces echter voorkomen, en zullen de chromosomen met mannelijkheidsgenen voortbestaan als reguliere autosomen. In Hoofdstuk V gebruik ik kruisingen tussen individuen van verschillende populaties om mannelijkheidsgenen uit een populatie met een dominant vrouwelijkheidsgen in een genomische achtergrond te kruisen waar dit vrouwelijkheidsgen afwezig is. Dit proces imiteert de evolutie van een nieuw mannelijkheidsgen op een (voormalig) autosoom, en leidt daardoor tot de formatie van een nieuw geslachtschromosoompaar, die we baby-geslachtschromosomen noemen. Deze baby-geslachtschromosomen kunnen gebruikt worden om de eerste stappen in de evolutie van geslachtschromosomen te bestuderen. Dit wordt normaliter verhinderd doordat onder natuurlijke omstandigheden het Y-chromosoom onderhevig is aan genetische degeneratie. Ik bespreek daarnaast hoe deze baby-geslachtschromosomen gebruikt kunnen worden om de "seksueel antagonisme"-hypothese van geslachtschromosomevolutie te testen; deze theorie wordt door velen geaccepteerd, maar het empirisch bewijs ervoor is nog altijd schaars.

Om de huisvlieg te gebruiken als modelsysteem voor evolutionair-biologisch onderzoek in het algemeen en specifiek de evolutie van geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen is een grondigere kennis van hoe fitness wordt bepaald in deze soort vereist, en hoe nauwkeurige schattingen van fitness gemaakt kunnen worden. In Hoofdstuk VI onderzoek ik hoe vrouwelijke en mannelijke fitness vastgesteld kan worden in *M. domestica*. Voor vrouwtjes geldt dat fitness voornamelijk bepaald wordt door hun eigen fecunditeit, d.w.z. de capaciteit om bevruchte eieren te produceren. Voor mannetjes geldt daarentegen dat fitness bepaald wordt door hun paringssucces en de daaruit voortvloeiende toegang tot eitjes van hun vrouwelijke partners. Echter, de huidige kennis van het paringsgedrag van huisvliegen is ontoereikend, en de rol van vrouwelijke promiscuïteit op de fitness van zowel vrouwtjes als mannetjes is nog onbekend. Indien vrouwtjes promiscuïteit vertonen kan dit leiden tot post-copulatieve selectie, wat weer kan leiden tot de evolutie van nieuwe eigenschappen in mannetjes en vrouwtjes ter bevordering van hun fitness, bijvoorbeeld als gevolg van IRSC. Om een definitieve methodologie voor het vaststellen van fitness te ontwikkelen is het nodig om de rol van vrouwelijke promiscuïteit in deze soort vast te stellen, en tevens wat voor gevolgen dit heeft voor hoe fitness in mannetjes en vrouwtjes kan worden bewerkstelligd.

De evolutionaire variabiliteit van geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen is lange tijd geacht in strijd te zijn met haar sterk geconserveerde functie, die nauwkeurig uitgevoerd moet worden om ernstige fitnessnadelen voor het individu te voorkomen. Desalniettemin is het nu duidelijk dat vele evolutionaire processen kunnen bijdragen aan de diversificatie van geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen. Derhalve is het wellicht nodig om de heersende paradigma te heroverwegen: in plaats van dat geslachtsbepaling beperkt wordt door sterke selectie op de bijbehorende functie, moeten we deze functie beschouwen als een onderdeel dat geïntegreerd is in de algehele biologie van het organisme. Hierdoor kan het door en via allerlei factoren beïnvloed worden, met als gevolg dat adaptaties in het onderliggende systeem ook op allerlei manieren kunnen ontstaan – uiteindelijk resulterend in een verbijsterende verscheidenheid aan geslachtsbepalingsmechanismen.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Martijn Schenkel was born on November 4th, 1990 in Groningen, The Netherlands. He started his BSc Biology at the University of Groningen in 2009, and graduated in 2013 with a double major in Ecology & Evolution and Marine Biology. After this, he started the MSc Top Program Evolutionary Biology at the University of Groningen. During this time, he carried out research projects on housefly sex determination genes with prof. dr. Leo Beukeboom and dr. Louis van de Zande at the University of Groningen, and on post-host shift performance of the reproductive parasite *Arsenophonus nasoniae* with Greg Hurst at the Institute for Integrative Biology of the University of Liverpool. He graduated with honours (*cum laude*) in 2015, after which he started working a dual position as a research assistant in the Evolutionary Genetics, Development & Behaviour group at the University of Groningen, and as a copy editor for the journal *Entomologia Experimentalis et Applicata*. In 2016, he started his PhD with prof. Leo Beukeboom, prof. Ido Pen and prof. Jean-Christophe Billeter as part of the Adaptive Life program of the Groningen Institute for Evolutionary Life Sciences at the University of Groningen.

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- MA Schenkel**, LW Beukeboom & I Pen (in prep). Epistatic interactions between the sex chromosomes and autosomes can affect the stability of sex determination systems.
- F Chen, **MA Schenkel**, L van de Zande & Beukeboom LW (in prep). Inbreeding shows absence of complementary sex determination in two *Leptopilina* species (Figitidae, Hymenoptera).
- X Li, S Visser, D Bopp, E Wimmer, **MA Schenkel**, E Geuverink, F Marec, L van de Zande & LW Beukeboom (in prep). Genomic characterization and localization of the transposable male determining loci in the housefly (*Musca domestica*).
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