

CHAPTER 1

What Is Human Sexuality?

CHAPTER-AT-A-GLANCE

Chapter Outline	Instructional Ideas	Supplemental Materials
Choices, Information, and Decision Making		
What Is Human Sexuality?	Learning Objective 1 Learning Objective 2 Learning Objective 3 Learning Objective 4 Discussion Question 1 Discussion Question 2	IM Activity: <i>Introductory Topics Activity & Creating a Good Learning Space</i>
Sexuality and Ethics	Learning Objective 5 Discussion Question 3	
Sexuality and Spirituality		
Thinking Critically About Human Sexuality	Teaching Tip 1	IM Activity: <i>Critical Thinking Activity</i>
Perspectives On Human Sexuality	Learning Objective 6 Learning Objective 7 Discussion Question 4 Teaching Tip 2	IM Activity: <i>Human Sexuality and the Internet</i> IM Activity: <i>Small Group Discussion Questions: Changing Gender Roles</i>

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins by describing the sexual beliefs, norms, and practices of Inis Beag and Mangaia, two very different island cultures, to highlight the importance of culture and diversity in human sexual expression. The authors suggest that making choices is a critical part of our development sexually and propose that scientific information and morals and values can inform sexual decision making. The breadth of information provided will permit the student to understand psychological, biological and sociological aspects of sexuality. The introduction is followed by a clarification of terms that will be used throughout the text. Of particular relevance is the emphasis on conceptualizing sexual behaviour as something that goes beyond reproduction.

The human sexuality field is described as interdisciplinary. The authors identify the examination of values as essential to an understanding of human sexuality. The diversity of Canadian society is discussed with particular emphasis on sexual attitudes and behaviours. Political, social and religious differences between Canada and other countries are highlighted, with particular emphasis on sexual scripts in Kenya. Comparisons between Canada and the United States are drawn. The exploration of sex related behaviours and beliefs worldwide is introduced and related to future chapters.

Ethical issues related to sexuality are raised, and the World Association for Sexual Health's (WAS) principles of sexual rights are introduced. Readers are informed of the importance of critical thinking about sexual information, and suggestions for critical thinking are given.

The authors present historical, biological, cross-species, sociological, and anthropological perspectives on human sexuality. The historical approach contextualizes sexuality by examining the cultural mores and ethics of a particular time and place. The authors give a brief overview of various societies throughout history. Issues such as bisexuality, homosexuality, pederasty, sadomasochism and gender roles are described in light of the social and political context of each society. The section ends with a brief introduction to the scientific study of human sexuality and recent trends and advances in the study of human sexuality.

The biological perspective focuses on the roles that genetics, the nervous system and other biological factors play in human sexuality. The cross-species perspective provides an introduction to analogues of human sexual behaviour. It also points to the fact that as we climb the "evolutionary ladder," psychosocial factors start acquiring a greater relevance in determining the occurrence and "quality" of the sexual response. The sociological and anthropological perspectives emphasize the ways that cultural context shape sexual behaviour. The sociological perspective asserts that social factors (socioeconomic status, gender) will affect our sexual values, beliefs and behaviours.

Finally, the authors suggest that considering multiple approaches is the most effective way to understand the complexity and range of human sexual behaviour.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the need for a scientific study of human sexuality.
2. State the authors' definition of human sexuality.
3. Explain the authors' contention that the study of human sexuality would be incomplete without an examination of values.
4. Discuss the relevance of different cultures and societies in the understanding of human sexuality.
5. Explain the relationships between the three ethical positions presented (ethics of divinity, ethics of community, and ethics of autonomy) and sexual decision making.
6. Describe the historical, biological, cross-species, sociological, and anthropological perspectives on human sexuality.
7. Explain the contributions and limitations of cross-species comparisons of sexual behaviour.

USING THE ACTIVITIES AND ADDITIONAL LECTURE MATERIAL

I. Choices, Information, and Decision Making

II. What is Human Sexuality?

- **Activity I:** This is a good activity to do on the first day of class. Ask students to make a list of sexual topics that they think might be covered during the entire course. You can then discuss these topics and the emotions they elicit in students and use this as an introduction to some of the topics you will be covering in the course.

III. Sexuality and Ethics

IV. Sexuality and Spirituality

V. Thinking Critically about Human Sexuality.

- **Activity II:** Have your students use their critical thinking skills to evaluate a series of statements. Have students break up into pairs or small groups to start and then discuss as a group.

VI. Perspectives on Human Sexuality

- **Activity III:** Have students break up into pairs or small groups to discuss questions related to sexuality information on the Internet. A representative from each group can then present a summary of the discussion to the entire class.
- **Activity IV:** After finishing the chapter have students break up into mixed-gender groups of three or four to discuss questions related to gender roles. A representative from each group can then present a summary of the discussion to the entire class.

TEACHING TIPS

1. Clip a recent newspaper article on a sexuality issue. Distribute copies to students. Have the class examine and discuss the article, keeping in mind the features of critical thinking.
2. Suggest a topic to the students, for example, desired characteristics in a dating or marital partner. Have them break into small discussion groups and assign each group a different approach to guide their discussion. Or have pairs of students discuss the topic from each perspective and then discuss as a class. How would someone who subscribes to the biological perspective explain partner choice? What about the anthropological perspective? The sociological perspective?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What modern beliefs, myths or practices can you trace to the influences of earlier eras?
2. How can ethnocentrism interfere with one's willingness to learn about and accept cultural differences?
3. Is it possible to apply a single "code" of sexual rights to all cultures?
4. This chapter covers several different perspectives on human sexuality. Do you think some of these perspectives can explain our sexuality better than others? Which of the perspectives make(s) the most sense to you?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Literature

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Sprecher, S., & Hatfield, E. (1996). Premarital sexual standards among U.S. college students: Comparison with Russian and Japanese students. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 25(3), 261–288.

Tannahill, R. (1992). *Sex in History*. London: Scarborough House/Publishers.

Teifer, L. (1996). The medicalization of sexuality: Conceptual, normative, and professional issues." *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 7, 252–282.

Trevathan, W. (2000). Perspectives on human sexuality. *American Anthropologist*, 102(3), 649–651.

Videos

"Honored by the Moon" (1989, 15 minutes) Describes traditional roles of men and women in Native American society. *University of Minnesota Film and Video*

Human Sexuality: A Contemporary Guide (1998, three-part series, 29 minutes each). This up-to-date three-part series addresses the subject of human sexuality, offering information on healthy relationships, parenthood responsibilities, risk factors for contracting HIV and other topics. *From Films for the Humanities and Sciences*

Love and Sex (1996, 52 minutes). This segment from the highly acclaimed “Human Animal” series hosted by Phil Donahue takes viewers to a male strip club and a gay rights march, into a hospital room where a teenage mother is giving birth, and into the classroom. Love, monogamy, hetero- and homosexuality are covered by Donahue, Dr. William Masters of the Masters and Johnson Institute, Dr. June Reinisch of the Kinsey Institute, and ordinary people. *From Films for the Humanities and Sciences*

Program 17. Sex and Gender (1990, 30 minutes). This video, part of the *Discovering Psychology* series by Philip Zimbardo presents the major findings in sex and gender. (Probably could also be used in Chapter 5, Gender Identity.) *The Annenberg/CPB Collection*

The Biology of Love (1994, 50 minutes). In this program, Desmond Morris analyzes the biological nature of love, with its attendant patterns of behaviour and signals of health and fertility that have evolved to ensure pair bonding and genetic survival. The pre- and post-pubescent periods of sexual maturation, the stages of courtship, and the aesthetics of physical beauty are studied, along with the anatomical mechanics of sexual arousal and copulation. In addition, the stresses placed on couples by life in an urbanized, crowded world are explored. Contains nudity and sexual activity. *From Films for the Humanities and Social Sciences*

Understanding Sex (1994, 51 minutes). In this program narrated by Candice Bergen, an evolutionary biologist, a botanist, a psychobiologist, a zoologists, and other experts discuss the subject of plant, animal, and human sexuality. Topics discussed include hormones and sexual development and pair-bonding, the evolution of sexual reproduction as a form of gene repair, the vital role of attraction, assisted conceptions and genetic engineering, homosexuality and sexual orientation, and even the use of virtual reality for cyber-sex. Vivid computer imagery complements the program. *From Films for the Humanities and Sciences*

World Erotica (1986, 164 slides or 14 minute video). An outstanding collection of erotic art drawn from a variety of times and cultures: Chinese, Japanese, European, Persian, American and Pre-Columbian cultures. Includes slides of sculpture, drawings, paintings, and household objects. Includes an itemized list of sources and dates for each image. *From Multi-Focus*

Web Sites

<http://sexualityandu.ca> A Canadian site providing the latest news and updates related to sexual health.

<http://www.siecus.org> The site of a prestigious non-profit organization devoted to sex education.

<http://www.sieccan.org> The site of a Canadian non-profit organization dedicated to informing the public and professionals about human sexuality. Provides ordering and publishing information for *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* as well as abstracts of articles published since 1997.

<http://www.kinseyinstitute.org> This is the site of the institute founded by Kinsey. It is devoted to research in sex, gender and reproduction. Provides information on Kinsey's latest research as well as numerous links to other sites.

<http://www.sexuality.org> The site of the Society for Human Sexuality, an all-volunteer social and educational organization devoted to the appreciation of the myriad consensual forms of human relationships and sexual expression. Information about the history, resources, and other sites is provided.

<http://www.guttmacher.org> The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) is a non-profit organization focused on reproductive health research, policy analysis and public education.

<http://www.cfsh.ca/> National non-profit organization advocating access to sexual and reproductive health services, and providing education on sexual health issues, abortion and contraception; formerly Planned Parenthood.

ACTIVITIES

Activity I: Introductory Topics Activity & Creating a Good Learning Space

Ask students to get a piece of paper and pen/pencil and make a list of sexual topics that they think might be covered during the entire course. Each student makes their own list.

- Ask them to shout out their topics. You can list each topic on the board or have students write them up. Note the degree to which students use the word “sex” or “sexual” (e.g., do they say “dysfunctions” or “sexual dysfunctions”). Note any topics that students might be forgetting—or topics/words that they might be avoiding.
- There might be laughter in the beginning of this activity, although this will taper off and by the end there shouldn’t be much laughter.
- After you have a good list, ask students to openly indicate what emotions might arise when discussing these topics. List these emotions on the board in a new color. Consider having students tie each emotion to a topic (e.g., “A person might experience anxiety when discussing which topic?”).
- As a group, analyze the emotions listed. Some common themes are that most of the feelings are “negative.” Discuss the meaning behind this. Also, note that two people can have different emotional responses to the same topic.
- Explain to class how this can make teaching a class in human sexuality challenging. Ask them to make a list of rules that everyone in class can follow to create a good learning space (e.g., what can be done to make the class a safe place where people can make comments and ask questions openly).

Activity II: Critical Thinking Activity

Have your students use their critical thinking skills to evaluate the following statements:

- “Rap music causes adolescents to engage in sexual activity.”
- “Young adults are having sex more often today than 10 years ago.”
- “Having a threesome is a common sexual fantasy among males.”
- “You can have oral sex without losing your virginity.”

Questions to ask:

- What value assumptions held by the author underlie this argument?
- What fallacies in reasoning have you found?
- Who is making this statement?
- What assumptions are being made in each statement?
- What evidence would be needed to support this statement?
- How is “sex” being defined?
- What ambiguous terms do you find? What terms need to be further defined?

- Does each statement reflect an oversimplification or overgeneralization?

Activity III: Human Sexuality and the Internet

This activity can be done in pairs, small groups, or outside the classroom. Students should take an inventory of what they have learned about sexuality from the Internet. Have they used the Internet as a source of information about any sexual topics? Have they used the Internet to explore sexuality? How many hours does each student spend on the Internet for sex-related purposes? What messages about sexuality does the Internet give them? How does it shape their knowledge or values? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet for sexual information or experiences? What are some guidelines that should be used to evaluate the content of information found on the Internet about sexuality? What are some of the particular hazards that the Internet poses related to sexuality? How has the Internet impacted sexual norms and values? Rules of confidentiality should be reviewed for this activity.

Activity IV: Small Group Discussion Questions

Changing Gender Roles

In mixed-gender groups of three to four students each, discuss the following questions and ideas. After 20 minutes, one student from each group should summarize the small group discussion to the class.

1. How might the evolution of gender roles in Western cultures represent an adaptation to changing conditions? Does this reflect an adaptation to increasing economic burdens?
2. Might we return to more traditional gender roles if economic conditions permitted women to quit their jobs and return to domestic roles? Would women want to leave the work force if they could? Would men?
3. Have employment equity policies affected gender roles?
4. When the term “family values” is used by politicians and social commentators, what definitions of gender roles are generally implied? How might different segments of society define “family values?” (i.e., consider culture/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation)