

UNDERSTANDING
**HUMAN
SEXUALITY**

THIRTEENTH EDITION

**Mc
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Education

JANET SHIBLEY **HYDE**
JOHN D. **DELAMATER**

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University of Wisconsin—Madison

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To our family:

Peter

Elizabeth

Margaret

Laura

Luke

Author Biographies

Janet Shibley Hyde, the Helen Thompson Woolley Professor of Psychology and Gender & Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, received her education at Oberlin College and the University of California, Berkeley. She has taught a course in human sexuality since 1974, first at Bowling Green State University, then at Denison University, and now at the University of Wisconsin. Her research interests are in gender differences and gender development in adolescence. Author of the textbook *Half the Human Experience: The Psychology of Women*, she is a past president of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality and is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. She has received many other honors, including an award for excellence in teaching at Bowling Green State University, the Chancellor's Award for teaching at the University of Wisconsin, and the Kinsey Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality for her contributions to sex research. In 2000–01 she served as one of the three scientific editors for U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher's report *Promoting Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior*. She is married to John DeLamater.

John D. DeLamater, Conway-Bascom Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, received his education at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of Michigan. He created the human sexuality course at the University of Wisconsin in 1975 and has since taught it regularly. His current research and writing are focused on the biological, psychological, and social influences on sexual behavior and satisfaction in later life. He has published papers on the influence of marital duration, attitudes about sex for elders, and illness and medications on sexual expression. He co-edited the *Handbook of the Sociology of Sexualities*. He is the co-author of the textbook *Social Psychology*. He is a Fellow of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality and the 2002 recipient of the Kinsey Award from the Society for Career Contributions to Sex Research. He has received awards for excellence in teaching from the Department of Sociology and the University of Wisconsin and is a Fellow and past Chair of the Teaching Academy at the University of Wisconsin. He regularly teaches a seminar for graduate students on teaching undergraduate courses. He is married to Janet Hyde.

Contents in Brief

CHAPTER 1	Sexuality in Perspective	1
CHAPTER 2	Theoretical Perspectives on Sexuality	22
CHAPTER 3	Sex Research	42
CHAPTER 4	Sexual Anatomy	67
CHAPTER 5	Sex Hormones, Sexual Differentiation, and the Menstrual Cycle	89
CHAPTER 6	Conception, Pregnancy, & Childbirth	115
CHAPTER 7	Contraception and Abortion	152
CHAPTER 8	Sexual Arousal	184
CHAPTER 9	Sexuality and the Life Cycle: Childhood and Adolescence	222
CHAPTER 10	Sexuality and the Life Cycle: Adulthood	244
CHAPTER 11	Attraction, Love, and Communication	271
CHAPTER 12	Gender and Sexuality	302
CHAPTER 13	Sexual Orientation: Gay, Straight, or Bi?	323
CHAPTER 14	Variations in Sexual Behavior	350
CHAPTER 15	Sexual Coercion	378
CHAPTER 16	Sex for Sale	399
CHAPTER 17	Sexual Disorders and Sex Therapy	429
CHAPTER 18	Sexually Transmitted Infections	452
CHAPTER 19	Ethics, Religion, and Sexuality	474
CHAPTER 20	Sex and the Law	499
EPILOGUE	Looking to the Future: Sexuality Education	526



McGraw-Hill Education Psychology's APA
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Contents

Author Biographies iii

Preface xii



CHAPTER 1

Sexuality in Perspective 1

Sex and Gender 2

The History of Understanding Sexuality: Religion and Science 3

Religion • Science

The Media 6

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Sexuality 7

Variations in Sexual Techniques

• *Masturbation • Premarital and Extramarital Sex • Sex with Same-Gender Partners • Standards of Attractiveness • Social-Class and Ethnic-Group Variations in the United States • The Significance of Cross-Cultural Studies*

A Sexually Diverse World: Sexuality in Two Societies 9

A Sexually Diverse World: Sex in China 14

Cross-Species Perspectives on Sexuality 17

Masturbation • Same-Gender Sexual Behavior • Sexual Signaling Human Uniqueness • The Nonsexual Uses of Sexual Behavior

The Sexual Health Perspective 19

Critical Thinking Skill 20

Summary 21

Suggestions for Further Reading 21



CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Perspectives on Sexuality 22

Evolutionary Perspectives 23

Sociobiology • Evolutionary Psychology

Psychological Theories 26

Psychoanalytic Theory • Learning Theory • Social Exchange Theory • Cognitive Theory

A Sexually Diverse World: Learning Theory and Sexual Orientation in a Non-Western Society 32

Critical Theories 34

Feminist Theory • Queer Theory

Sociological Perspectives 35

Symbolic Interaction Theory • Sexual Scripts • Sexual Fields • Social Institutions

Critical Thinking Skill 40

Summary 40

Suggestions for Further Reading 41

CHAPTER 3

Sex Research 42

Measuring Sex 43

Self-Reports • Behavioral Measures • Implicit Measures • Biological Measures

Issues in Sex Research 45

Sampling • Accuracy of Measurement • Extraneous Factors • Ethical Issues

The Major Sex Surveys 50

The Kinsey Report • The NHSLs • The NSSHB • Sexual Behavior in Britain and Australia • A Survey of Latino Women • Magazine Surveys

Milestones in Sex Research: Alfred C. Kinsey 52

Studies of Special Populations 55

Web-Based Surveys 55

Media Content Analysis 56

Qualitative Methods 57

**Milestones in Sex Research:
Masters and Johnson: The Physiology
of Sexual Response 58**

Experiments 60

Meta-Analysis 61

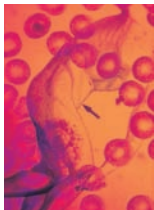
Statistical Concepts 62

*Average • Variability • Average
versus Normal • Incidence versus
Frequency • Correlation*

Critical Thinking Skill 64–65

Summary 65

Suggestions for Further Reading 66

**CHAPTER 4****Sexual Anatomy 67**

Female Sexual Organs 68

*External Organs • Internal Organs
• The Breasts*

**A Sexually Diverse World:
Female Genital Cutting 72**

Male Sexual Organs 77

External Organs • Internal Organs

Cancer of the Sex Organs 82

*Breast Cancer • Cancer of the Cervix,
Endometrium, and Ovaries • Cancer
of the Prostate • Cancer of the Testes*

First Person: The Pelvic Exam 82

First Person: Testicular Examination 86

Critical Thinking Skill 87

Summary 88

Suggestions for Further Reading 88

**CHAPTER 5****Sex Hormones, Sexual Differentiation,
and the Menstrual Cycle 89**

Sex Hormones 90

*Sex Hormone Systems in Males • Sex
Hormone Systems in Females*

Prenatal Sexual Differentiation 93

*Sex Chromosomes • Gonads • Prenatal
Hormones and the Genitals • Descent
of the Testes and Ovaries • Brain*

Differentiation • Homologous Organs

• Atypical Prenatal Gender Differentiation

**Milestones in Sex Research:
Endocrine Disrupters 95**

Sexual Differentiation during Puberty 99

*Changes in Girls • Changes in
Boys • Changes in Behavior*

**A Sexually Diverse World: The Debate over
the Treatment of Intersex Individuals 100**

The Menstrual Cycle 106

*Biology of the Menstrual Cycle • Menstrual
Problems • Psychological Aspects
of the Menstrual Cycle • Cycles in Men*

Critical Thinking Skill 113

Summary 113

Suggestions for Further Reading 114

CHAPTER 6**Conception, Pregnancy, &
Childbirth 115**

Conception 116

*Sperm Meets Egg: The Incredible
Journey • Improving the Chances of
Conception: Making a Baby*

First Person: Planning a Pregnancy? 117

Development of the Conceptus 119

*The Embryo and Its Support Systems • Fetal
Development*

Pregnancy 122

*The Stages of Pregnancy • Sex during
Pregnancy • Nutrition during Pregnancy
• Effects of Substances Taken during Pregnancy*

Birth 131

*The Beginning of Labor • The
Stages of Labor • Cesarean Section
(C-Section) • Childbirth Options*

**After the Baby Is Born: The Postpartum
Period 136**

*Physical Changes • Psychological Changes
• Attachment to the Baby • Sex during Postpartum*

Breast-Feeding 138

*Biological Mechanisms • Physical and Mental
Health*

Problem Pregnancies 140

*Ectopic Pregnancy • Pseudocyesis
(False Pregnancy) • Pregnancy-Induced
Hypertension • Viral Illness during Pregnancy*

- *Birth Defects* • *Rh Incompatibility*
- *Miscarriage (Spontaneous Abortion)* • *Preterm Birth*

Infertility 143

- Causes of Infertility* • *Psychological Aspects of Infertility* • *Treatment of Infertility*

Assisted Reproductive Technologies 145

- Artificial Insemination* • *Sperm Banks* • *Embryo Transfer* • *Test-Tube Babies* • *GIFT* • *Gender Selection* • *Prenatal Genetic Diagnosis*

Critical Thinking Skill 149

Summary 150

Suggestions for Further Reading 151



CHAPTER 7

Contraception and Abortion 152

Hormonal Methods 153

- The Combination Pill* • *Other Kinds of Pills* • *The Patch* • *The Vaginal Ring* • *Depo-Provera Injections* • *Emergency Contraception*

First Person: Margaret Sanger—Birth Control Pioneer 156

LARC 159

- Implants* • *IUDs*

Condoms 161

- The Male Condom* • *The Female Condom*

Diaphragms, FemCap, and the Sponge 164

- The Diaphragm* • *FemCap* • *The Sponge*

Spermicides 166

Withdrawal 168

Fertility Awareness (Rhythm) Methods 169

Sterilization 171

- Male Sterilization* • *Female Sterilization*

Psychological Aspects: Attitudes toward Contraception 173

Milestones in Sex Research: History of the Development of Sophisticated Methods of Contraception 174

Abortion 175

- Abortion Procedures* • *Psychological Aspects* • *Men and Abortion*

A Sexually Diverse World: Abortion in Cross-Cultural Perspective 178

New Advances in Contraception 180

- Male Methods* • *Female Methods*

Critical Thinking Skill 182

Summary 182

Suggestions for Further Reading 183

CHAPTER 8

Sexual Arousal 184

The Sexual Response Cycle 185

- Excitement* • *Orgasm* • *Resolution* • *More on Women's Orgasms*

Other Models of Sexual Response 191

- Kaplan's Triphasic Model* • *The Sexual Excitation-Inhibition Model* • *Emotion and Arousal*

First Person: William Masters and Virginia Johnson 192

Neural and Hormonal Bases of Arousal 194

- The Brain, the Spinal Cord, and Sex* • *Brain Control of Sexual Response* • *Hormones and Sex* • *Sex Offenders—Castration or Incarceration?*

A Sexually Diverse World: Sexuality and Disability 197

Milestones in Sex Research: Mapping the Sexual Brain 202

Pheromones 205

Sexual Techniques 207

- Erogenous Zones* • *One-Person Sex* • *Two-Person Sex* • *Aphrodisiacs* • *Exceptional Sex*

First Person: The Protestant Ethic: Sex as Work 218

First Person: A Personal Growth Exercise—Getting to Know Your Own Body 219

Critical Thinking Skill 220

Summary 220

Suggestions for Further Reading 221

CHAPTER 9

Sexuality and the Life Cycle: Childhood and Adolescence 222

Data Sources 223

Infancy and the Preschool Years (Birth to 4 Years) 224

- Attachment* • *Self-Stimulation* • *Child-Child Encounters* • *Sexual Knowledge and Interests* • *Knowledge about Gender*

Childhood (5 to 11 Years) 226

Masturbation • Heterosexual Behavior • Same-Gender Sexual Behavior • Sex Knowledge and Interests • The Sexualization of Children

Adolescence (12 to 18 Years) 228

Masturbation • Same-Gender Sexual Behavior • Heterosexual Behavior • Too Early Sex • Romantic Relationships • Internet Use, Risk, and Sexting

Milestones in Sex Research: The Impact of the Media on Adolescent Sexuality 230**Milestones in Sex Research: Teen Pregnancy and Parenthood 234****The College Years 239**

Masturbation • Patterns of Heterosexual Behavior • Casual Sex • Same-Gender Sexual Behavior

How Sexuality Aids in Development 241

Critical Thinking Skill 242

Summary 242

Suggestions for Further Reading 243

CHAPTER 10**Sexuality and the Life Cycle: Adulthood 244****Sex and the Single Person 245**

Sexual Unfolding • The Never Married • Being Single

Cohabitation 249**Marital Relationships 250**

Marital Sexuality • Sexual Patterns in Marriage • Sex and the Two-Career Family • Keeping Your Mate

Nonmonogamous Relationships 256

Extra-Relationship Sex • Attitudes toward Extramarital Sex • Internet Infidelity • Equity and Extramarital Sex • Evolution and Extramarital Sex • Open Nonmonogamous Relationships • Consequences of Nonmonogamous Relationships

Post-Relationship Sex 261**Sex in Later Life 262**

Physical Changes in Women • Physical Changes in Men • Attitudes about Sex and the Elderly • Sexual Behavior

Critical Thinking Skill 269

Summary 269

Suggestions for Further Reading 270

CHAPTER 11**Attraction, Love, and Communication 271****Attraction 272**

The Girl Next Door • Birds of a Feather • Physical Attractiveness • The Interpersonal Marketplace • From the Laboratory to Real Life • Attraction Online • Explaining Our Preferences

Intimacy 278

Defining Intimacy • Intimacy and Self-Disclosure • Measuring Intimacy

Theories of Love 280

Triangular Theory of Love • Attachment Theory of Love • Love as a Story • Passionate and Companionate Love • The Biology of Love

Milestones in Sex Research: Jealousy 286**Research on Love 287**

Measuring Love • Love and Adrenaline • Cross-Cultural Research

Communication 291

Communication and Relationships • Being an Effective Communicator • Fighting Fair • Checking Out Sexy Signals • Relationship Education

A Sexually Diverse World: Gender Differences in Communication 294**First Person: How Solid Is Your Relationship? 298**

Critical Thinking Skill 300

Summary 300

Suggestions for Further Reading 301

CHAPTER 12**Gender and Sexuality 302****Gender Roles and Stereotypes 303**

Gender Roles and Ethnicity • Socialization

Psychological Gender Differences 307**Gender Differences in Sexuality 308**

Masturbation • Attitudes about Casual Sex • Use of Pornography • Arousal to Erotica • Orgasm Consistency • Sex Drive

Why the Differences? 310

Are the Differences Bogus? • Biological Factors • Cultural Factors • Other Factors



A Sexually Diverse World: Male Sexuality 313**Beyond the Young Adults 314****Transgender 315***The Experiences of Trans People*

- *Sexual Orientation and Transgender Identity* • *Trans Health* • *The Medical and Surgical Transition Process* • *What Causes Gender Variance?*

Milestones in Sex Research: Measuring Anti-Trans Prejudice 317

Critical Thinking Skill 321

Summary 321

Suggestions for Further Reading 322

**CHAPTER 13****Sexual Orientation: Gay, Straight, or Bi? 323****Attitudes toward Gays and Lesbians 324***Attitudes* • *Gays and Lesbians as a Minority Group***Milestones in Sex Research: Does Gaydar Exist? 326****Life Experiences of LGBs 328***LGB Development* • *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Communities* • *Gay and Lesbian Relationships* • *Lesbian and Gay Families***Milestones in Sex Research: The Ethics of Sex Research: The Tearoom Trade 332****First Person: A Gay Couple: Lee and Bob 333****How Many People Are Gay, Straight, or Bi? 334****Sexual Orientation and Mental Health 336***Sin and the Medical Model* • *Research Evidence* • *Can Sexual Orientation Be Changed by Therapy?***Why Do People Become Gay or Heterosexual? 338***Biological Theories* • *Learning Theory* • *Sociological Theory* • *The Bottom Line***Differences between Gay Men and Lesbians 341****Sexual Orientation in Multicultural Perspective 342****A Sexually Diverse World: Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia 343****Bisexuality 344***Stereotypes and Prejudice* • *Bisexual Development* • *Mostly Heterosexuals* • *Concluding Reflections***First Person: Sexual Fluidity and Questioning 346**

Critical Thinking Skill 347

Summary 348

Suggestions for Further Reading 349

CHAPTER 14**Variations in Sexual Behavior 350****When Is Sexual Behavior Abnormal? 351***Defining Abnormal* • *The Normal–Abnormal Continuum***Fetishism 352***Why Do People Develop Fetishes?***First Person: A Case History of a Shoe Fetishist 353****Cross-Dressing 354****Sadism and Masochism 356***Definitions* • *Sadomasochistic Behavior* • *Causes of Sadomasochism* • *Bondage and Discipline* • *Dominance and Submission***Milestones in Sex Research: Sexual Addictions? 358****Voyeurism and Exhibitionism 361***Voyeurism* • *Exhibitionism***Hypersexuality and Asexuality 363***Hypersexuality* • *Asexuality***Cybersex Use and Abuse 366****Other Sexual Variations 368***Asphyxiophilia* • *Zoophilia* • *Other Variations***Prevention of Sexual Variations 370****Treatment of Sexual Variations 371***Medical Treatments* • *Cognitive–Behavioral Therapies* • *Skills Training* • *AA-Type 12-Step Programs* • *What Works?*

Critical Thinking Skill 375

Summary 376

Suggestions for Further Reading 377

CHAPTER 15**Sexual Coercion 378****Rape 379***The Impact of Rape* • *Date Rape* • *Marital Rape* • *Causes of Rape* • *The Role of Alcohol in Sexual Assault* • *Rapists*

- *Men as Victims of Rape* • *Prison Rape* • *Ethnicity and Rape* • *Preventing Rape*

First Person: A Date-Rape Victim Tells Her Story 380

First Person: How Can Friends Help a Rape Victim? 382

Milestones in Sex Research: Fraternity Gang Rape 385

Child Sexual Abuse 389

- *Patterns of Child Sexual Abuse* • *Impact on the Victim* • *The Offenders*

Milestones in Sex Research: False Memory Syndrome? Recovered Memory? 392

Sexual Harassment 394

- *Sexual Harassment at Work* • *Sexual Harassment in Education: An A for a Lay* • *Doctor–Patient Sex*

Critical Thinking Skill 397

Summary 397

Suggestions for Further Reading 398

CHAPTER 16

Sex for Sale 399



Prostitution 400

- *Venues for Sex Work* • *The Role of Third Parties* • *Sex Trafficking* • *The Career of a Sex Worker* • *Sex Workers' Well-Being* • *The Role of Early Abuse* • *Customers* • *Male Sex Workers* • *Sex Tourism*

First Person: Working Their Way Through College 405

Pornography 410

- *Terms* • *Overview* • *The Porn Industry* • *The Producers* • *The Consumers* • *The Effects of Exposure* • *Issues Related to Pornography*

First Person: Behind the Scenes: Making X-Rated Videos 416

First Person: “Nicole”: A Victim of Child Pornography 418

Critical Thinking Skill 427

Summary 427

Suggestions for Further Reading 428

CHAPTER 17

Sexual Disorders and Sex Therapy 429



Kinds of Sexual Disorders 430

- *Desire Disorders* • *Arousal Disorders* • *Orgasmic Disorders* • *Pain Disorders*

First Person: A Case of Female Orgasmic Disorder 433

What Causes Sexual Disorders? 434

- *Physical Causes* • *Drugs* • *Psychological Causes* • *Combined Cognitive and Physiological Factors* • *Interpersonal Factors* • *A New View of Women's Sexual Problems and Their Causes*

Therapies for Sexual Disorders 442

- *Behavior Therapy* • *Cognitive–Behavioral Therapy* • *Couple Therapy* • *Sex Therapy Online* • *Specific Treatments for Specific Problems* • *Biomedical Therapies*

First Person: A Case of Low Sexual Desire 444

Evaluating Sex Therapy 448

Some Practical Information 449

- *Avoiding Sexual Disorders* • *Choosing a Sex Therapist*

Critical Thinking Skill 450

Summary 451

Suggestions for Further Reading 451

CHAPTER 18

Sexually Transmitted Infections 452

Chlamydia 453

- *Symptoms* • *Treatment* • *Prevention?*

HPV 454

- *Diagnosis* • *Treatment* • *Vaccine*

Genital Herpes 455

- *Symptoms* • *Treatment* • *Long-Term Consequences* • *Psychological Aspects: Coping with Herpes*

HIV Infection and AIDS 457

- *An Epidemic?* • *Transmission* • *The Virus* • *The Disease* • *Diagnosis* • *Treatment* • *Women, Children, Ethnic Minorities, and AIDS* • *Psychological Considerations in AIDS* • *Recent Progress in AIDS Research*

A Sexually Diverse World: AIDS in Thailand 458

Gonorrhea 464

- *Symptoms* • *Diagnosis* • *Treatment*

First Person: Safer Sex in the AIDS Era 465

Syphilis 467

- *Symptoms* • *Diagnosis* • *Treatment*

- Hepatitis B 468
- Trichomoniasis 469
- Pubic Lice 469
- Preventing STIs 469
- First Person: Cool Lines about Safer Sex 470**
- Other Genital Infections 471**
Candida • Prostatitis
- Critical Thinking Skill 472
- Summary 472
- Suggestions for Further Reading 473



CHAPTER 19

Ethics, Religion, and Sexuality 474

- Basic Concepts 475**
- Sexuality in Great Ethical Traditions 476**
Classical Greek Philosophy • Judaism • Christianity • Humanism
- Sexuality in Other Major Religions 481**
Islam • Hinduism • Buddhism
- A Sexually Diverse World: Dissent over Sexual Ethics in the Roman Catholic Church 482**
- Contemporary Issues in Sexual Ethics 485**
Sex Outside Marriage • Contraception • Abortion • Homosexuality • HIV and AIDS
- A Sexually Diverse World: Religious Position Statements on Abortion: Pro-life versus Pro-choice 490**
- Technology and Sexual Ethics 494**
- Toward an Ethics of Human Sexuality 495**
- Critical Thinking Skill 496
- Summary 497
- Suggestions for Further Reading 498



CHAPTER 20

Sex and the Law 499

- Why Are There Sex Laws? 500**
- What Kinds of Sex Laws Are There? 501**
Crimes of Exploitation and Force • Criminal Consensual Acts • Crimes against Good Taste • Crimes against Reproduction • Criminal Commercial Sex
- A Sexually Diverse World: Universal Sexual Rights 504**

Discriminatory Laws Related to Sexuality 507

Orientation and Gender Identity • Same-Sex Marriage

Sex-Law Enforcement 509

- Trends in Sex-Law Reform 510**
Efforts at Sex-Law Reform • Right to Privacy • Equal Protection • Victimless Crimes • The Problem of Obscenity and Pornography • The Controversy over Reproductive Freedom • Ethnicity and Sex Laws

Sex and the Law in the Future 520

Sex-Law Reform and Backlash • The Legal Challenge of Assisted Reproductive Technologies

- Critical Thinking Skill 524
- Summary 525
- Suggestions for Further Reading 525

EPILOGUE

Looking to the Future: Sexuality Education 526

- In the Home, in the School, or Somewhere Else? 526**
- Standards for Sexuality Education 528**
- What to Teach at Different Ages 528**
Children's Sexual Knowledge • Children's Sexual Interests
- The Curriculum 530**
Abstinence-Only Programs • The Politics of Sexuality Education • HIV and AIDS Risk Education • Comprehensive, Theoretically Based Programs
- A Sampling from a Comprehensive Sexuality Education Curriculum 532**
- The Teacher 534**
- Condom Distribution 535**
- Effective Multicultural Sexuality Education 535**

Bibliography B-1

Glossary G-1

Index I-1

Directory of Resources DR-1

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 Psychology's APA Documentation
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Preface

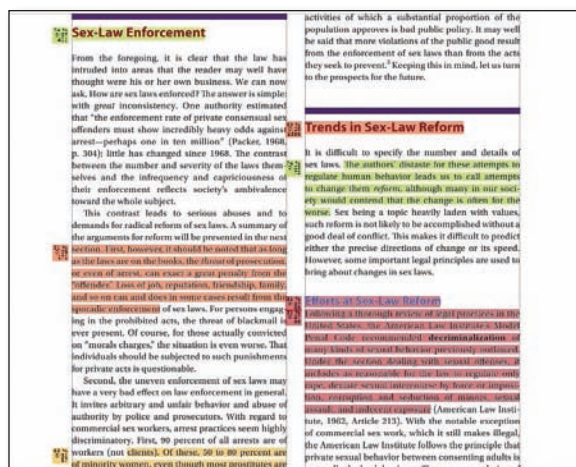
Hyde and DeLamater—Continuing a research-based tradition in sexuality

Since its conception, *Understanding Human Sexuality* has achieved distinction and success by following the science of human sexuality. The first of the modern sexuality textbooks, *Understanding Human Sexuality* introduced this topic to students through the science that has uncovered what we know about the field. Groundbreaking when it first appeared, this research-based tradition continues to result in a contemporary, balanced introduction to human sexuality in an integrated learning system that engages students in learning the content of the course, about others, and about themselves.


Better Data, Smarter Revision, Improved Results

Students helped inform the revision strategy:

STEP 1. Over the course of three years, data points showing concepts that caused students the most difficulty were anonymously collected from McGraw-Hill Connect® for Human Sexuality’s LearnSmart® adaptive learning system. **STEP 2.** The authors were provided with data from LearnSmart that graphically illustrated “hot spots” in the text affecting student learning (see image below). **STEP 3.** The authors used the heat map data to refine content and reinforce student comprehension in the new edition. Additional quiz questions and assignable activities were created for use in Connect for Human Sexuality to further support student success.



RESULT: With empirically based feedback at the paragraph and even sentence level, the authors developed the new edition using precise student data to pinpoint concepts that caused students to struggle.

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Following the Science to Understand Human Sexuality

Understanding Human Sexuality is grounded in science and the research that informs science. This foundation, drawn from several perspectives, is reflected by us, as the authors. Janet's background is in psychology and biology. John's is in sociology. We bring these different perspectives to our introduction to human sexuality. The importance we place on science comes from the desire to provide students with an understanding of human sexuality based on the best available research and also on what we see and do as researchers ourselves. Janet's research has explored psychological gender differences and similarities, focusing on gender and sexuality as well as topics such as sexuality in dual-earner couples. John's research has investigated the influences of the person's history and current relationships on sexual expression, and the relative importance of illnesses and medications on sexuality in later life.

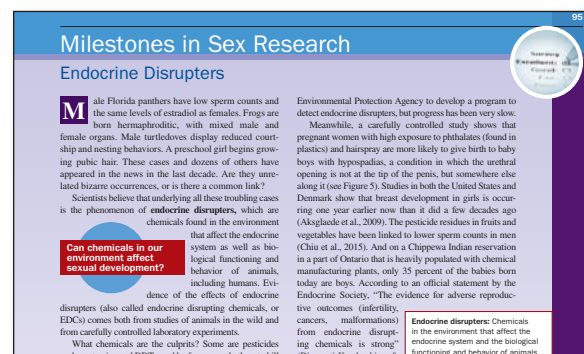
The quality of sex research is highly variable, to put it mildly. Some journalists think they are sex researchers if they have interviewed 10 people and written a book about it! Too often we see equal weight given to an article from the local newspaper and a refereed journal article from the *New England Journal of Medicine* or the *Journal of Sex Research*—and those few readers who are motivated enough have to do a lot of detective work to find the real source for a statement. One of our responsibilities as authors is to sift through available studies and present only those of the best quality and the greatest relevance to this course. We are thrilled to observe that the quality of sex research improves every decade.

Following the Science to Understand Oneself and Others

To understand human sexuality fully, one must recognize his or her own sexuality as well as the diversity of others' sexuality. We provide support for student understanding of personal sexuality in several ways:

- To reflect current thinking in the field, we have made the chapters as “trans-friendly” as possible.
- To reflect the breathtaking pace of social change and law, we include the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court ruling establishing same-sex marriage nationwide.
- Practical information needed for everyday living, such as information about sexual anatomy, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections, and for dealing with problems in sexual functioning, such as early ejaculation or inability to have an orgasm.
- Appreciation of the fabulous diversity of human sexuality along many dimensions, including age, sexual orientation and identity, ethnicity within the United States (a multiethnic perspective), and culture around the world (a multicultural perspective) through examples in the text.

All of the above information is supported by research so that students feel confident in what they are learning and in applying it to their lives (see image below).



Thinking Critically about Sexuality

Critical thinking is a well-developed area of psychological research with proven methods for teaching it. We are not experts in critical thinking, so we consulted with one of the nation's experts, Dr. Diane Halpern, former president of the American Psychological Association

and a faculty member at Claremont-McKenna College. Dr. Halpern provided us with wonderful readings so that we could educate ourselves on the topic. We then wrote a critical thinking skill feature for each chapter; Dr. Halpern reviewed each one and gave us feedback. To ensure that the material was accessible to students, next we invited nine undergraduates to read and identify any material that was unclear (they were, by the way, very enthusiastic about the material they read). In Chapter 1, the first feature introduces students to the concepts and principles of critical thinking; in later chapters, specific skills are explained and applied to sexuality. Examples of these include the importance of sampling in research (Chapter 3), understanding the difference between anecdotal evidence and scientific evidence (Chapter 4), evaluating alternatives in making a health care decision (Chapter 6), understanding the concept of probability (Chapter 7), and decision making and problem solving (Chapter 9).

Critical THINK ing Skill
Decision making and problem solving

In making good decisions, it helps to (1) identify your goal(s) in the situation; (2) list at least two possible solutions to the problem; and (3) evaluate the quality of each solution (Does it help you meet your goal? Does it have any negative aspects?) and decide on the best one. Consider the following scenario.

Britney, a student at State U., has been seeing Craig for a month. At a party in a campus house, she sees Shelley flirting with Craig and starts to worry that Shelley will steal him from her. Back at her own apartment the next day, she tries to decide what to do to keep Craig. They have not had intercourse yet but have done just about everything else sexually. She thinks maybe the thing to do is text him a nude picture of herself to get his interest and make herself seem hot to him.

What should Britney do? Apply the techniques listed above to consider what her best decision is. (1) What is her goal? (2) What are at least two possible solutions? (3) Evaluate each solution in terms of whether it helps her meet her goal and whether it has any negative aspects. Do this before you read the next paragraph.

Britney's goal is to keep Craig. One solution is to send him the nude photo. Another is to do nothing. Did you think of a third or fourth solution? A third solution would be to text him a positive, enthusiastic message without a nude photo. A fourth solution would be to make sure that she bumps into him before class that day so that she can be friendly and flirt. If Britney is feeling emotional and desperate, it would be best to take out a piece of paper and write down her goal and the possible solutions.

Here are evaluations of each solution:

Additional Resources



The **Instructor Resources** have been updated to reflect changes to the new edition; these can be accessed by faculty through Connect for Human Sexuality. Resources include the test bank, instructor's manual, PowerPoint presentation, and image gallery.



Easily rearrange chapters, combine material, and quickly upload content you have written, such as your course syllabus or teaching notes, using **McGraw-Hill Education Create**. Find the content you need by searching through thousands of leading McGraw-Hill Education textbooks. Arrange your book to fit your teaching style. Create even allows you to personalize your book's appearance by selecting the cover and adding your name, school, and course information. Order a Create book, and you will receive a complimentary print review copy in three to five business days or a

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Capture lessons and lectures in a searchable format for use in traditional, hybrid, “flipped classes” and online courses by using **Tegrity** (<http://www.tegrity.com>). Its personalized learning features make study time efficient, and its affordability brings this benefit to every student on campus. Patented search technology and real-time Learning Management System (LMS) integrations make Tegrity the market-leading solution and service.



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McGraw-Hill Education Campus includes access to McGraw-Hill Education's entire content library, including ebooks, assessment tools, presentation slides, multimedia content, and other resources. McGraw-Hill Education Campus provides instructors with open, unlimited access to prepare for class, create tests/quizzes, develop lecture material, integrate interactive content, and more.

Annual Editions: Human Sexualities

This volume offers diverse topics on sex and sexuality with regard to the human experience. Learning Outcomes, Critical Thinking questions, and *Internet References* accompany each article to further enhance learning. Customize this title via **McGraw-Hill Create** at <http://create.mheducation.com>.

Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Human Sexuality

This debate-style reader both reinforces and challenges students' viewpoints on the most crucial issues in human sexuality today. Each topic offers current and lively pro and con essays that represent the arguments of leading

scholars and commentators in their fields. *Learning Outcomes*, an *Issue Summary*, and an *Issue Introduction* set the stage for each debate topic. Following each issue is the *Exploring the Issue* section with *Critical Thinking and Reflection* questions, *Is There Common Ground?* commentary, *Additional Resources*, and *Internet References* all designed to stimulate and challenge the student's thinking and to further explore the topic. Customize this title via **McGraw-Hill Create** at <http://create.mheducation.com>.

Chapter Changes in the Thirteenth Edition

In our not entirely objective opinion, there is no more exciting course to teach or to take than human sexuality. One thing that makes it so exciting is the fantastic pace of change that we see nearly every week in scientific knowledge, social attitudes, laws, current events, and countless other facets of our lives involving sex. Today we have hookups and same-sex marriage. Every year, advances are made in the prevention and treatment of AIDS. New methods of contraception are developed and made available. Viagra bursts on the scene, transforming the sexual experience for thousands of men and their partners, and we wonder what can be done to help women with sexual disorders. Much has changed in the new edition of this textbook as well. Chapter-by-chapter revisions are listed below.

Overall

An overall goal for this revision was to make the narrative more “trans friendly,” that is, to make it a comfortable book for transgender individuals to read and study, with a strong section, in the Gender chapter, on the transgender experience, those who have a genderqueer identity, and those who seek gender reassignment.

Chapter 1: Sexuality in Perspective

- The concept of *microaggressions* is introduced in the context of ethnic minorities, with extensions to sexual minorities.
- The concept of *intersectionality* is explained with the example of the intersection of gender and ethnicity.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives on Sexuality

Last third of the chapter substantially reorganized and expanded:

- New section added, “Critical Theories.” Two theories new to the book introduced: feminist theory and queer theory.
- Section “Sociological Perspectives” substantially revised. The order of presentation of the theories revised: begins with symbolic interaction (emphasis on communication), then script theory (emphasis on interaction), then field theory (emphasis on social context), and social institutions discussed last. Now organized from the most specific social influences to the most general.
- Added summary of “field theory,” a new perspective. Deleted discussion of Reiss’s macro-theory of the social regulation of sexuality.

Chapter 3: Sex Research

- A new section explains *meta-analysis* in a way that all students can understand.
- Subsection on ethical issues updated with new research showing no harm and some benefits to people who participate in sex research.
- The newest British (Natsal) and Australian (ASHR) surveys have been added.
- New survey of Latino women.

Chapter 4: Sexual Anatomy

- Box on “Female Genital Cutting” updated.
- New data indicating that drugs used to treat breast cancer can also prevent it.

Chapter 5: Sex Hormones, Sexual Differentiation, and the Menstrual Cycle

- New study of epigenetic changes in the brain during prenatal sexual differentiation.
- The recently discovered hormone kisspeptin and its role in puberty are introduced.
- Ages for milestones in pubertal development updated.
- Subsection on menstrual cycle fluctuations in mood completely rewritten to focus on a recent excellent study.

Chapter 6: Conception, Pregnancy, & Childbirth

- Statistics updated throughout chapter.
- Updated coverage of psychological changes in fathers during pregnancy based on new comprehensive research review.

- Revised discussion of effects of alcohol consumption during pregnancy, more clearly distinguishing *fetal alcohol spectrum disorder* and *fetal alcohol syndrome*.
- Revised and expanded coverage of effects of marijuana use during pregnancy, and association between marijuana use and infertility.
- New coverage of occupational exposure to solvents prenatally on child behavioral outcomes.

Chapter 7: Contraception and Abortion

- The category of LARC (long-acting reversible contraceptives, i.e., IUDs and implants) is introduced and made more prominent, given emphasis on its use by family-planning professionals.
- New methods such as Ella and Skyla have been added.
- New data on women denied abortions.

Chapter 8: Sexual Arousal

- Box on “Sexuality and Disability” completely rewritten with updated research and concepts.
- Subsection on brain imaging studies rewritten for greater clarity and accessibility.

Chapter 9: Sexuality and the Life Cycle: Childhood and Adolescence

- Statistics on frequencies of behaviors at various ages updated throughout the chapter.
- Brief discussions added to improve trans coverage.
- In childhood, the concept of cross-gender behavior is introduced, with the statement that it often does not persist into adolescence.
- In adolescence, added discussion of the development of gender identity, expanding the concept to include gender-variant identities. Also a discussion of the events that intensify concern with identity.
- Expanded discussion of first intercourse and influences on whether it is a positive or a negative experience. Added new research showing that a positive experience leads to improved sexual relationships up to seven years later.
- Significant expansion of coverage of casual sex in college. Introduced “fuck buddies” and “booty calls” as types of casual sex, and distinguished between them and “friends with benefits.” Also expanded coverage of role of alcohol and of mental health outcomes of engaging in casual sex.

Chapter 10: Sexuality and the Life Cycle: Adulthood

- Substantially revised.
- Changed terminology throughout. Wherever it made sense, changed “marital” to “long-term committed,” making coverage more inclusive of cohabiting relationships. Also, changed “extramarital” to “extra-relationship,” since recent research shows that daters, cohabiters (of both sexes), and married persons “cheat.” Revised headings and text as appropriate in light of these changes. Also added studies showing similarity of processes across couple-types.
- Expanded discussion of use of electronic apps like Grindr and Tinder in meeting people, and cell phones in initiating, maintaining, and terminating relationships.
- Introduced topic of influences on why people “cheat.” Describe results of three recent studies.
- Introduced topic of consequences of nonmonogamous relationships. Discuss research on impact on participant’s mental health, relationship, and termination/divorce.
- Completely rewritten discussion of menopause—symptoms, treatments, and current guidelines for hormonal therapy. Added discussion of variations in symptoms and treatment preferences of women in different racial/ethnic groups.
- Updated statistics on relationship statuses, differences by age, gender, race/ethnicity throughout.

Chapter 11: Attraction, Love, and Communication

- Added recent research on where couples (heterosexual and same-sex) met that includes recent data on the role of the Internet.
- Added recent research on role of physical attractiveness and its relative importance to men and women in selecting mates.
- Added recent cross-cultural research testing hypotheses from sexual strategies theory on mating preferences on men and women.
- New subsection on relationship education programs, evaluations of their effectiveness, and their applications to military couples.

Chapter 12: Gender and Sexuality

- The term “gender binary” is introduced.
- The entire section on transgender was rewritten from scratch. It recognizes people whose identity falls

outside the gender binary. It considers transgender health and the possibility of medical interventions for gender reassignment for some individuals. Revisions were made in consultation with a trans research expert and a genderqueer individual.

- Updated to *DSM-5* terminology and concepts.
- Clearer evidence that the vomeronasal organ, for sensing pheromones, is not functional in humans, but the human nose still has cells with pheromone receptors, and genes coding for these receptors have recently been identified.

Chapter 13: Sexual Orientation: Gay, Straight, or Bi?

- New boxed insert, Milestones in Sex Research: “Does Gaydar Exist?”
- New statistics on attitudes about homosexuality around the world.
- Evidence on the resilience of LGBs added.
- New hypothesis added about epigenetic factors in prenatal development contributing to sexual orientation.
- New data on bisexuality.
- Research on “mostly heterosexuals” added.

Chapter 14: Variations in Sexual Behavior

- Revised throughout to make language and discussion consistent with the *DSM-5*. Changed several definitions and key terms. Reframed discussion of research to bring it into line with revised *DSM-5* criteria.
- Added new research on “kink” communities and the variations in practices.
- Substantial revision of Milestones in Sex Research box, “Sexual Addictions?” Added research on the use of the term in legal cases.
- In light of new *DSM-5* criteria, revised discussion of types and treatment of “hypersexuality.”
- Substantial revision of subsection on “Asexuality.”
- More nuanced discussion of pornography use and types/categories of misuse—compulsive versus addictive.
- Substantial revision of the entire section “Treatment of Sexual Variations.” Discussion made consistent with *DSM-5* distinction between paraphilias and paraphilic disorders. Added new research on effectiveness of various forms of treatment, emphasizing that each works with only some types of problems/offenders. Added new research on effectiveness of AA/12-step type treatment programs.

Chapter 15: Sexual Coercion

- New subsection on the role of alcohol in sexual assault.
- Statistics updated throughout.

Chapter 16: Sex for Sale

- Added original data from the Urban Institute’s detailed report on the underground commercial sex economy in the United States.
- Added commentary to emphasize the intersections of social class and race with the venues of sex work—for example, that call girls are often well educated and middle class and cater to wealthy white men.
- Greater emphasis on the role of cell phones and apps in commercial sex work.
- Expanded discussion of strip clubs as a venue, and discussion of the fact that some cater to women, some to lesbians.
- Expanded discussion and research base for entry into the career of a sex worker.
- New box: First Person: “Working Their Way Through College.” A discussion of student involvement in commercial sex work, drawing on three recently published studies and accounts written by students employed as sex workers.
- Expanded discussion of male sex workers and the venues in which they work, and their clients.
- New outline of content to make a more cohesive flow of topics.
- “Pornography” replaced in numerous places with “X-rated materials,” “these materials.”
- The former subsection “Types of Pornography” is now “The Porn Industry”; it includes an updated discussion of porn on the Web. Included new data comparing student stereotypes of film stars with actual data from actors/actresses.
- New subsection: “The Producers.” Discussion of producers for each of several types of material. Added new data on characteristics of actors/actresses in films/DVDs/Web clips. Discussion of pathways into the industry to parallel discussion of pathways into commercial sex work in the first half of the chapter.
- The former subsection “The Customers” is now “The Consumers,” with updated material.
- The former subsection “Effects of Pornography” is now “Effects of Exposure.” Broader coverage than previous editions. Added new data from studies on effects of exposure for various age and gender groups.

Added studies of effects on behavior of exposure of men who have sex with men to images of unprotected anal intercourse.

- The former subsection “What Is the Solution?” is now “Issues Related to Pornography.” Recast discussion of feminist criticisms to issues raised by various groups. Added discussion of porn addiction.

Chapter 17: Sexual Disorders and Sex Therapy

- Updated to *DSM-5* terminology and concepts, while noting controversies over *DSM-5*.
- Introduced the concept that Viagra and similar drugs are PDE5 inhibitors and linked this to the mechanism through which they work. Discussion of erection drugs thoroughly updated.
- New discussion of developments about flibanserin, the so-called “pink Viagra.”
- Updates on which treatments are effective for which disorders.

Chapter 18: Sexually Transmitted Infections

- Statistics updated throughout.
- Entire section on HIV/AIDS rewritten to streamline and update it. Reflects new view of HIV infection as a manageable long-term disease, in view of new developments in ART, treatment as prevention, and preexposure prophylaxis. Includes new CDC criteria for stages.
- New HPV vaccine, Gardasil 9, protects against nine HPV types.

Chapter 19: Ethics, Religion, and Sexuality

- Pro-life and pro-choice statements of religious groups updated.
- New information on religious groups performing same-gender marriages.
- Ethical issues in HIV/AIDS updated, such as insurance coverage with the Affordable Care Act.

Chapter 20: Sex and the Law

- Updated discussion of laws covering discrimination against LGB persons.

- Added discussion of laws governing discrimination against transgender persons.
- Changed references to “gay marriage” to “same-sex marriage” throughout chapter.
- Revised discussion of history of laws, court decisions regarding same-sex marriage to make it current, including the 2015 Supreme Court decision. Added discussion of changes in public opinion; assessment of claims of damage to children based on research.
- Major revision of subsection, “The Controversy over Reproductive Freedom.”
 - Updated organization of discussion of opponents’ strategies.
 - Added court rulings on some of the recent laws.
 - Added relevant research assessing claims about harms associated with abortion.
 - Added discussion of laws banning abortion after 20 weeks, relevant research.
 - Updated statistics on violence and disruption directed at clinics.

Looking to the Future: Sexuality Education

- Systematically revised to incorporate the material developed by the Future of Sex Education (FoSE), a collaboration of SIECUS and several other health education groups. Generally this replaces material that was derived from SIECUS materials published in 2004.
 - Section “The Teacher”: Discussion of the FoSE National Standards for Teacher Preparation added.
 - Discussion of congressional funding for sex education in the schools updated to 2015.

Acknowledgments

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Over the course of the first 12 editions, numerous reviewers contributed to the development of *Understanding Human Sexuality*. Space limitations prevent us from listing all of them, but their contributions endure, as does our gratitude to them. We are especially grateful to the reviewers who helped shape this edition:

Diana Baltimore, Iowa State University

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Niva Werts, Towson University

Are **YOU** Curious?

1. Do they have sex in other cultures the same way we do in the United States?
2. Is sexual behavior similar in all social classes in the United States?
3. Is homosexuality found in other species?

Read this chapter to find out.



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CHAPTER 1

Sexuality in Perspective

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Sex and Gender

The History of Understanding Sexuality: Religion and Science

Religion
Science

The Media

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Sexuality

Variations in Sexual Techniques
Masturbation
Premarital and Extramarital Sex
Sex with Same-Gender Partners

Standards of Attractiveness

Social-Class and Ethnic-Group Variations
in the United States
The Significance of Cross-Cultural Studies

Cross-Species Perspectives on Sexuality

Masturbation
Same-Gender Sexual Behavior
Sexual Signaling
Human Uniqueness
The Nonsexual Uses of Sexual Behavior

The Sexual Health Perspective

You're so beautiful," he whispered. "I want a picture of you like this with your face flushed and your lips wet and shiny." . . . He tore open a foil packet he'd retrieved from his pocket. Mesmerized, she watched him sheath himself, amazed at how hard he was. She reached out to touch him, but he moved back, made sure she was ready, and then slid neatly inside her, so deeply she gasped. She contracted her muscles around him, and he closed his eyes and groaned, the sound so primal, it made her skin tingle.*

Human sexual behavior is a diverse phenomenon. It occurs in different physical locations and social contexts, consists of a wide range of specific activities, and is perceived differently by different people. An individual engages in sexual activity on the basis of a complex set of motivations and organizes that activity on the basis of numerous external factors and influences. Thus, it is unlikely that the tools and concepts from any single scientific discipline will suffice to answer all or even most of the questions one might ask about sexual behavior.†

*Debbi Rawlins. (2003). *Anything goes*. New York: Harlequin Blaze.

†Laumann et al. (1994).

Strikingly different though they may seem, both of the above quotations are talking about the same thing—sex. The first quotation is from a romance novel. It is intended to stimulate the reader's fantasies and arousal. The second is from a scholarly book about sex. It aims to stimulate the brain but not the genitals. From reading these two brief excerpts we can quickly see that the topic of sexuality is diverse, complex, and fascinating.

Why study sex? Most people are curious about sex, particularly because exchanging sexual information is somewhat taboo in our culture, so curiosity motivates us to study sex. Sex is an important force in many people's lives, so there are practical reasons for wanting to learn about it. Finally, most of us at various times experience problems with our sexual functioning or wish that we could function better, and we hope that learning more about sex will help us. This book is designed to address all of these needs. So let's consider various perspectives on sexuality—the effects of religion, science, and culture on our understanding of sexuality, as well as the sexual health perspective. These perspectives will give you a glimpse of the forest before you study the trees: sexual anatomy and physiology (the "plumbing" part), and sexual behavior (the "people" part), which are discussed in later chapters. But first we must draw an important distinction, between sex and gender.

Sex and Gender

Gender: Being male, female, or some other gender such as trans*.

Sometimes the word *sex* is used ambiguously. In some cases it refers to being male or female, and

sometimes it refers to sexual behavior or reproduction. In most cases, of course, the meaning is clear from the context. If you are filling out a job application form and one item says, "Sex:," you don't write, "I like it" or "As often as possible." It is clear that your prospective employer wants to know whether you are a male or a female. In other cases, though, the meaning may be ambiguous. For example, when a book has the title *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, what is it about? Is it about the sexual practices of primitive people and whether having sex frequently gives them pleasant temperaments? Or is it about the kinds of personalities that males and females are expected to have in those societies? Not only does this use of *sex* create ambiguities, but it also clouds our thinking about some important issues.

To remove—or at least reduce—this ambiguity, the term *sex* will be used in this book in contexts referring to sexual anatomy and sexual behavior, and the term **gender** will be used to refer to being male or female or some other gender such as trans*.

Almost all the research that we discuss in this book has been based on scientists' assuming the "gender binary," the idea that there are only two genders, male and female.

This is a book about sex, not gender; it is about sexual behavior and the biological, psychological, and social forces that influence it. Of course, although we are arguing that sex and gender are conceptually different, we would not try to argue that they are totally independent of each other. Certainly gender roles—the ways in which males and females are expected to behave—exert a powerful influence on the way people behave sexually, and so one chapter will be devoted to gender and its connections to sexuality.

How should we define *sex*, aside from saying that it is different from *gender*? Many Americans count only penis-in-vagina intercourse as sex (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007; Sanders & Reinisch, 1999). And while nearly everyone agrees that penis-in-vagina intercourse counts as sex, there is less agreement about whether oral-genital sex counts as “having sex.” Some people think it does and others think it doesn’t (Horowitz & Spicer, 2013). Our definition in this textbook includes much more than that, though.

A biologist might define sexual behavior as “any behavior that increases the likelihood of gametic union [union of sperm and egg]” (Bermant & Davidson, 1974). This definition emphasizes the reproductive function of sex. However, medical advances such as the birth control pill have been developed that allow us to separate reproduction from sex. Most Americans now use sex not only for procreation but also for recreation.¹

The noted sex researcher Alfred Kinsey defined *sex* as behavior that leads to orgasm. Although this definition has some merits (it does not imply that sex must be associated with reproduction), it also presents some problems. If a woman has intercourse with a man but does not have an orgasm, was that not sexual behavior for her?

To try to avoid some of these problems, **sexual behavior** will be defined in this book as *behavior that produces arousal and increases the chance of orgasm*.²

The History of Understanding Sexuality: Religion and Science

Religion

Throughout most of recorded history, at least until about 100 years ago, religion (and rumor) provided most of the information that people had about sexuality. The ancient Greeks openly acknowledged both heterosexuality and homosexuality in their society and explained the existence of the two in a myth in which the original humans were double creatures with twice the normal number of limbs and organs; some were double males, some were double

¹Actually, even in former times sex was not always associated with reproduction. For example, a man in 1850 might have fathered 10 children; using a very conservative estimate that he engaged in sexual intercourse 1,500 times during his adult life (once a week for the 30 years from age 20 to age 50), one concludes that only 10 in 1,500 of those acts, or less than 1 percent, resulted in reproduction.

²This definition, though an improvement over some, still has its problems. For example, consider a woman who feels no arousal at all during intercourse. According to the definition, intercourse would not be sexual behavior for her. However, intercourse would generally be something we would want to classify as sexual behavior. It should be clear that defining *sexual behavior* is difficult.

females, and some were half male and half female (LeVay, 1996). The gods, fearing the power of these creatures, split them in half, and forever after each one continued to search for its missing half. Heterosexuals were thought to have resulted from the splitting of the half male, half female; male homosexuals, from the splitting of the double male; and female homosexuals, from the splitting of the double female. It was through this mythology that the ancient Greeks understood sexual orientation and sexual desire.

Fifteenth-century Christians believed that “wet dreams” (nocturnal emissions) resulted from intercourse with tiny spiritual creatures called *incubi* and *succubi*, a notion put forth in a papal bull of 1484 and a companion book, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (“witch’s hammer”); the person who had wet dreams was considered guilty of sodomy (see the chapter “Ethics, Religion, and Sexuality”) as well as witchcraft.

Over the centuries, Muslims have believed that sexual intercourse is one of the finest pleasures of life, reflecting the teachings of the great prophet Muhammad. However, the way that the laws of the Koran are carried out varies greatly from country to country (Boonstra, 2001; Ilkcaracan, 2001).

People of different religions hold different understandings of human sexuality, and these religious views often have a profound impact. A detailed discussion of religion and sexuality is provided in the chapter “Ethics, Religion, and Sexuality.”

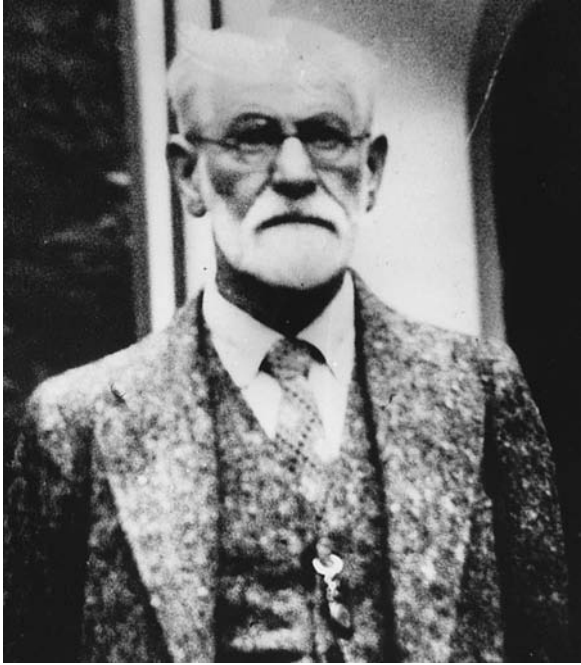
Science

It was against this background of religious understandings of sexuality that the scientific study of sex began in the 19th century, although, of course, religious notions continue to influence our ideas about sexuality. In addition, the groundwork for an understanding of the biological aspects of sexuality had already been laid by the research of physicians and biologists. The Dutch microscopist Anton van Leeuwenhoek (1632–1723) had discovered sperm swimming in human semen. In 1875 Oskar Hertwig (1849–1922) first observed the actual fertilization of the egg by the sperm in sea urchins, although the ovum in humans was not directly observed until the 20th century.

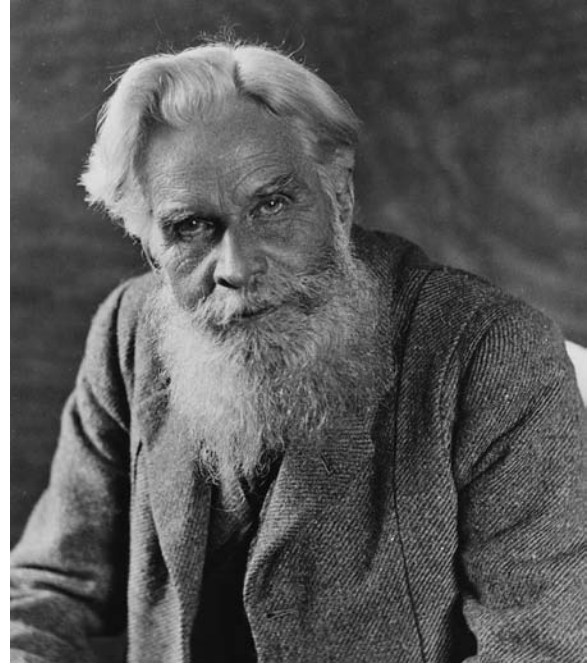
A major advance in the scientific understanding of the psychological aspects of human sexuality came with the work of the Viennese physician Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), founder of psychiatry and psychoanalysis (Figure 1a). His ideas are discussed in detail in the chapter “Theoretical Perspectives on Sexuality.”

It is important to recognize the cultural context in which Freud and the other early sex researchers crafted their research and writing. They began their work in the Victorian era, the late 1800s, both in the United States and in Europe. Norms about sexuality were extraordinarily rigid and

Sexual behavior: Behavior that produces arousal and increases the chance of orgasm.



(a)



(b)

Figure 1 Two important early sex researchers. (a) Sigmund Freud. (b) Henry Havelock Ellis.

(a) © AP Images; (b) © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis

oppressive (Figure 2). Historian Peter Gay characterized this repressive aspect of Victorian cultural norms as

a devious and insincere world in which middle-class husbands slaked their lust by keeping mistresses, frequenting prostitutes, or molesting children, while their wives, timid, dutiful, obedient, were sexually anesthetic and poured all their capacity for love into their housekeeping and their child-rearing. (Gay, 1984, p. 6)

Certainly traces of these Victorian attitudes remain with us today. Yet at the same time the actual sexual behavior of Victorians was sometimes in violation of societal norms. In his history of sexuality in the Victorian era, Gay documented the story of Mabel Loomis Todd, who, though married, carried on a lengthy affair with Austin Dickinson, a community leader in Amherst, Massachusetts. Many people actually knew about the “secret” affair, yet Mrs. Loomis did not become an outcast (Gay, 1984). Doubtless, this wide discrepancy between Victorian sexual norms and actual behavior created a great deal of personal tension. That tension probably propelled a good many people into Dr. Freud’s office, providing data for his theory, which emphasizes sexual tensions and conflict.

An equally great—though not so well known—early contributor to the scientific study of sex was Henry Havelock Ellis (1859–1939; Figure 1b). A physician in Victorian England, he compiled a vast collection of information on sexuality—including medical and anthropological findings, as well as case histories—which was published in

a series of volumes entitled *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* beginning in 1896. Havelock Ellis was a remarkably objective and tolerant scholar, particularly for his era. He believed that women, like men, are sexual creatures. A sexual reformer, he believed that sexual deviations from the norm are often harmless, and he urged society to accept them. In his desire to collect information about human sexuality rather than to make judgments about it, he can be considered the forerunner of modern sex research.

Another important figure in 19th-century sex research was the psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902). His special interest was “pathological” sexuality. He managed to collect more than 200 case histories of pathological individuals, which appeared in his book entitled *Psychopathia Sexualis*. His work tended to be neither objective nor tolerant. Nonetheless, it has had a lasting impact. He coined the concepts of sadism, masochism, and pedophilia, and the terms *heterosexuality* and *homosexuality* entered the English language in the 1892 translation of his book (Oosterhuis, 2000). One of his case histories is presented in the chapter “Variations on Sexual Behavior.”

One other early contributor to the scientific understanding of sexuality deserves mention, the German Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935). He founded the first sex research institute and administered the first large-scale sex survey, obtaining data from 10,000 people on a 130-item questionnaire. (Unfortunately, most of the information he amassed was destroyed by the Nazis.) Hirschfeld also established the first journal devoted to the study of sex, established a

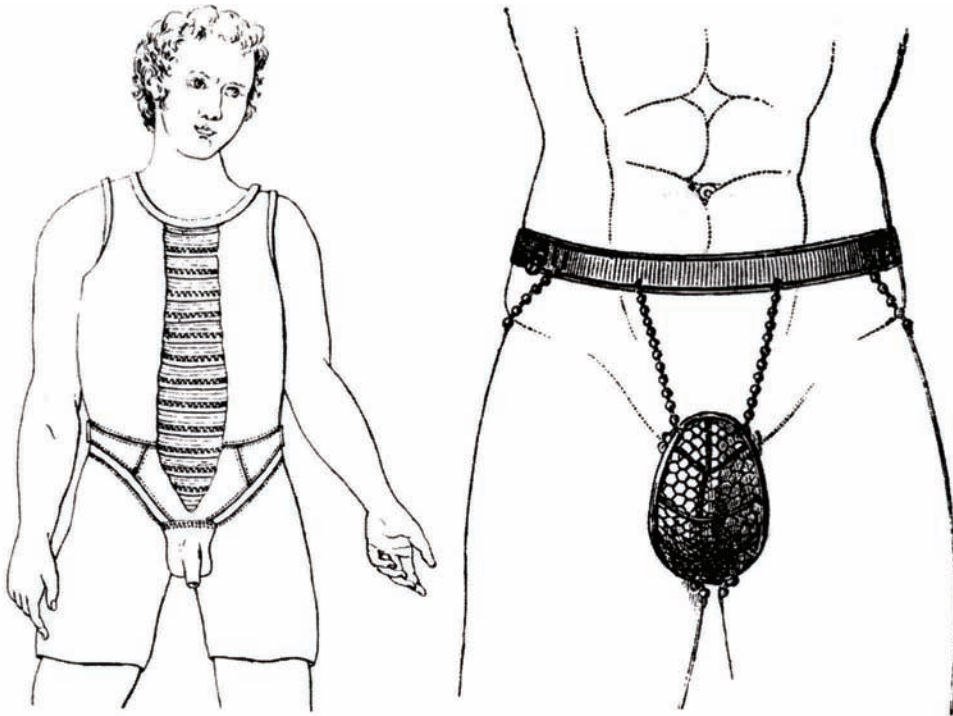


Fig. 350. Korsett von Lajade-Lafaud zur Verhinderung der Onanie. Nach Fleck: Die Verirrungen des Geschlechts-triebes. Stuttgart 1830.

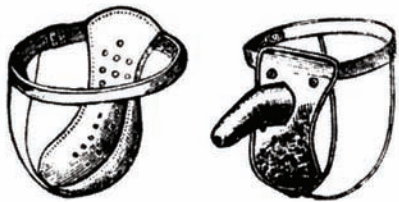


Fig. 351.

Onaniebandage für weibliche Patienten. Onaniebandage für männliche Patienten.

(a)



(b)

Figure 2 Devices designed to prevent masturbation. (a) The Victorian era, from which Freud and Ellis emerged, was characterized by extreme sexual repression. Here are some apparatuses that were sold to prevent onanism (masturbation). (b) Are things so different today? Here are current devices for sale on the Web, for the same purpose.

(a) Reprinted by permission of The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, Inc., photo by Bill Dellenback;

(b) Courtesy of A.L. Enterprises

marriage counseling service, worked for legal reforms, and gave advice on contraception and sex problems. His special interest, however, was homosexuality. Doubtless some of his avant-garde approaches resulted from the fact that he was himself both homosexual and a transvestite and, in fact, he introduced the term *transvestite*. His contributions as a pioneer sex researcher cannot be denied (Bullough, 1994).

In the 20th century, major breakthroughs in the scientific understanding of sex came with the massive surveys of human sexual behavior in the United States conducted by Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues in the 1940s and

with Masters and Johnson's investigations of sexual disorders and the physiology of sexual response. At about the same time that the Kinsey research was being conducted, some anthropologists—most notably Margaret Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski—were beginning to collect data on sexual behavior in other cultures. Other, smaller investigations also provided important information. By the 1990s we had a rich array of sex research, including major national surveys (e.g., Laumann et al., 1994), detailed investigations of sexual disorders and sexual orientation, and studies of the biological processes underlying sexual response.

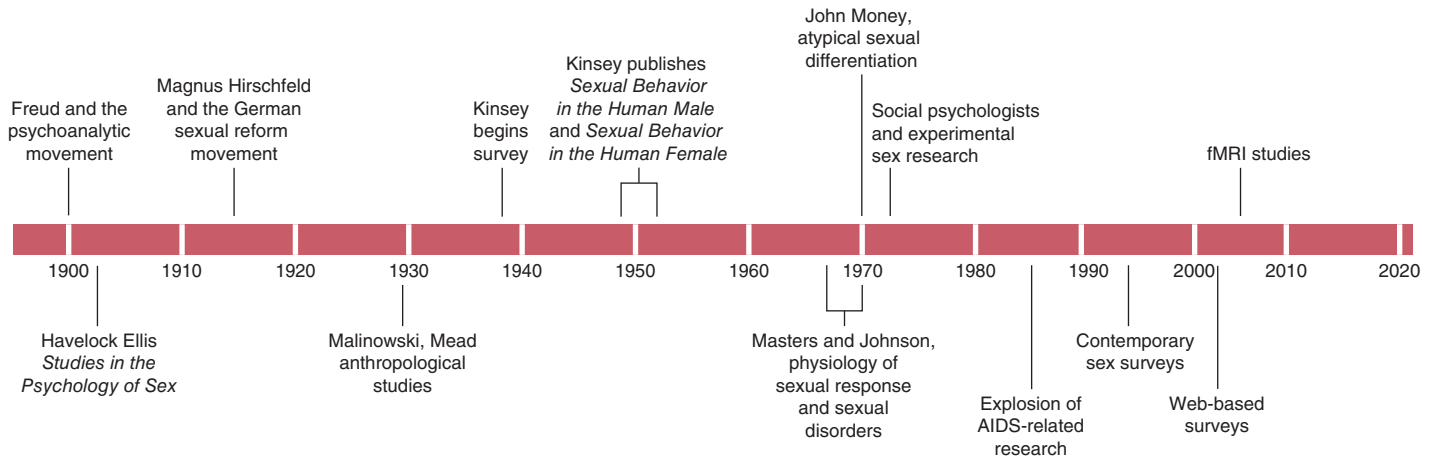


Figure 3 Milestones in the history of scientific research on sex.

The scientific study of sex has not emerged as a separate, unified academic discipline like biology or psychology or sociology. Rather, it tends to be interdisciplinary—a joint effort by biologists, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and physicians (see Figure 3). This approach to understanding sexuality gives us a better view of humans in all their sexual complexity.

The Media

In terms of potency of influence, the mass media in America today may play the same role that religion did in previous centuries. American adolescents spend 11 hours per day with some form of mass media (Rideout et al., 2010). According to the American Time Use Survey, television viewing occupies the most time of all leisure activities, at an average of 2.8 hours per day for those aged 15 and older (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). An analysis of the 25 television programs most frequently viewed by adolescents indicated that, in a typical hour of viewing, adolescents were exposed to an average of 17 instances of sexual talk or sexual behavior (Schooler et al., 2009). References to safer sex—both for STD (sexually transmitted disease) prevention and pregnancy prevention—are rare. Only 2 percent of sexual scenes portray any sexual precautions (Kunkel et al., 2005; Figure 4).

Cultivation: In communications theory, the view that exposure to the mass media makes people think that what they see there represents the mainstream of what really occurs.

In short, the average American's views about sexuality are likely to be much more influenced by the mass media than by scientific findings. Communications theorists believe that the media can have

three types of influence (Brown, 2002; Kunkel et al., 2007). The first, called **cultivation**, refers to the notion that people begin to think that what they see on television and in other



Figure 4 Sexual portrayals in the media have become much more explicit, as in this scene from *Twilight*.

© Summit Entertainment/The Kobal Collection/Art Resource

media really represents the mainstream of what happens in our culture (Gerbner et al., 2002). For example, college students who watch the soaps are more likely than nonviewing students to overestimate the incidence of divorce.

The second influence is **agenda setting**. News reporters select what to report and what to ignore and, within the stories they report, what to emphasize. For example, in 1998 the media chose to highlight the sexual dalliances of President Bill Clinton, suggesting to the public that these matters were important. In contrast, the illicit sexual activities of President John F. Kennedy were not revealed during his presidency. The media in many ways tell us what the agenda is to which we should pay attention.

The third influence is **social learning**, a theory we will take up in detail in the chapter “Theoretical Perspectives on Sexuality.” The contention here is that characters on television, in the movies, or in romance novels may serve as models whom we imitate, perhaps without even realizing it. Research has found, for example, that teens who watch more sexy television engage in first intercourse earlier than do other teens (Brown, 2002).

The *Internet* is a powerful mass media influence. Computer and Internet use is spreading more rapidly than any previous technology, and 84 percent of U.S. homes with children have Internet access (Rideout et al., 2010). Exposure to sex on the Internet is also growing rapidly. In one study, 28 percent of male adolescents reported looking at pictures of people having sex at least once a week, compared with 3 percent for female adolescents (Peter & Valkenburg, 2008). As we discuss in later chapters, the Internet has the potential for both positive and negative effects on sexual health. A number of sites, such as that for the American Social Health Association, www.iwannaknow.org, provide excellent information about sexuality and promote sexual health. At the same time, a repeated, well-sampled study of youth between the ages of 10 and 17 indicated that, whereas in 2000, 19 percent had been sexually solicited on the Internet, by 2010 the number had actually fallen to 9 percent (Mitchell et al., 2013a). Most youth who received a solicitation responded by removing themselves from the situation (blocking the solicitor, leaving the site) or by telling the solicitor to stop. Experts believe that there is greater online safety for youth today than in the past, for a number of reasons. One is that they receive more talks about online safety from teachers and police (Mitchell et al., 2013).

In the chapters that follow, we examine the content of the media on numerous sexual issues, and we consider what the effects of exposure to this media content might have on viewers.

Let us now consider the perspectives on sexuality that are provided by scientific observations of humans in a wide variety of societies.

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Sexuality

Humans are a cultural species (Heine & Norenzayan, 2006). Although some other species are capable of learning from others, humans are unique in the way that cultural learning accumulates over time. What do anthropologists mean by the term *culture*? Generally,

culture refers to traditional (that is, passed down from generation to generation) ideas and values transmitted to members of the group by symbols (such as language). These ideas and values then serve as the basis for patterns of behavior observed in the group (Frayser, 2004; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1963).

Ethnocentrism tends to influence our understanding of human sexual behavior. Most of us have had experience with sexuality in only one culture—the United States, for example—and we tend to view our sexual behavior as the only pattern in existence, and certainly as the only “natural” pattern. But anthropologists have discovered that there are wide variations in sexual behavior and attitudes from one culture to the next (Figure 5). Considering these variations should help us to put our own sexual behavior in perspective.

The major generalization that emerges from cross-cultural studies is that all societies regulate sexual behavior in some way, though the exact regulations vary greatly from one culture to the next (DeLamater, 1987). Apparently no society has seen fit to leave sexuality totally unregulated, perhaps fearful that social disruption would result. As an example, **incest taboos** are nearly universal: Sex is regulated in that intercourse between blood relatives is prohibited (Gregersen, 1996). Most societies also condemn forced sexual relations such as rape.

Beyond this generalization, though, regulations vary greatly from one society to the next, and sexual behavior and attitudes vary correspondingly (see *A Sexually Diverse World: Sexuality in Two Societies*). Let’s

Do they have sex in other cultures the same way we do in the United States?

Agenda setting: In communications theory, the idea that the media define what is important and what is not by which stories they cover.

Social learning: In communications theory, the idea that the media provide role models whom we imitate.

Culture: Traditional ideas and values passed down from generation to generation within a group and transmitted to members of the group by symbols (such as language).

Ethnocentrism: The tendency to regard one’s own ethnic group and culture as superior to others and to believe that its customs and way of life are the standards by which other cultures should be judged.

Incest taboo: A societal regulation prohibiting sexual interaction between blood relatives, such as brother and sister or father and daughter.



Figure 5 Margaret Mead, an anthropologist who contributed much to the early cross-cultural study of sexuality.

© AP Images

look at the ways in which various societies treat some key areas of human sexual behavior.

Variations in Sexual Techniques

Kissing is one of the most common sexual techniques in our culture. It is also very common in most other societies (Gregersen, 1996). There are a few societies, though, in which kissing is unknown. For example, when the Thonga of Africa first saw Europeans kissing, they laughed and said, “Look at them; they eat each other’s saliva and dirt.” There is also some variation in techniques of kissing. For example, among the Kwakiutl of Canada and the Trobriand Islanders, kissing consists of sucking the lips and tongue of the partner, permitting saliva to flow from one mouth to the other. Many Americans might find such a practice somewhat repulsive, but other peoples find it sexually arousing.

Cunnilingus (mouth stimulation of the female genitals) is fairly common in our society, and it occurs in a few other societies as well, especially in the South Pacific. A particularly interesting variation is reported on

the island of Ponape; the man places a fish in the woman’s vulva and then gradually licks it out prior to coitus.

Masturbation: Self-stimulation of the genitals to produce sexual arousal.

Inflicting pain on the partner is also a part of the sexual technique in some societies. The Apinaye woman of the Brazilian highlands may bite off bits of her partner’s eyebrows, noisily spitting them aside. Ponapean men usually tug at the woman’s eyebrows, occasionally yanking out tufts of hair. People of various societies bite their partners to the point of drawing blood and leaving scars; most commonly, men and women mutually inflict pain on each other (Frayser, 1985).

The frequency of intercourse for married couples varies considerably from one culture to the next. The lowest frequency seems to be among the Irish natives of Inis Beag (discussed in *A Sexually Diverse World: Sexuality in Two Societies*), who engage in intercourse perhaps only once or twice a month; however, the anthropologists who studied them were unable to determine exactly how often couples did have sex because so much secrecy surrounds the act. At the opposite extreme, the Mangaians (also described in *A Sexually Diverse World: Sexuality in Two Societies*) have intercourse several times a night, at least among the young. The Santals of southern Asia copulate as often as five times per day every day early in marriage (Gregersen, 1996). Recent surveys of U.S. sexuality indicate that our frequency of intercourse is about in the middle compared with other societies (e.g., Herbenick et al., 2010).

Very few societies encourage people to engage in sexual intercourse at particular times (Frayser, 1985). Instead, most groups have restrictions that forbid intercourse at certain times or in certain situations. For example, almost every society has a postpartum sex taboo—that is, a prohibition on sexual intercourse for a period of time after a woman has given birth, with the taboo lasting from a few days to more than a year (Gregersen, 1996).

Masturbation

Attitudes toward **masturbation**, or sexual self-stimulation of the genitals, vary widely across cultures. Some societies tolerate or even encourage masturbation during childhood and adolescence, whereas others condemn the practice at any age. Almost all human societies express some disapproval of adult masturbation, ranging from mild ridicule to severe punishment (Gregersen, 1996). However, at least some adults in all societies appear to practice it.

Female masturbation certainly occurs in other societies. The African Azande woman uses a phallus made of a wooden root; however, if her husband catches her masturbating, he may beat her severely. The following is a description of the Lesu of the South Pacific, one of the few societies that express no disapproval of adult female masturbation:

A woman will masturbate if she is sexually excited and there is no man to satisfy her. A couple may be having intercourse in the same house, or near enough for her to see them, and she may thus become aroused. She then sits down and bends her right leg so that her heel presses against her genitalia. Even young girls of about six years

A Sexually Diverse World

Sexuality in Two Societies



Inis Beag

Inis Beag is a small island off the coast of Ireland. It is probably one of the most naive and sexually repressive societies in the world.

The people of Inis Beag seem to have no knowledge of a number of sexual activities such as French kissing, mouth stimulation of the breast, or hand stimulation of the partner's penis, much less oral sex or homosexuality. Sex education is virtually nonexistent; parents do not seem to be able to bring themselves to discuss such embarrassing matters with their children, and they simply trust that, after marriage, nature will take its course.

Menstruation and menopause are sources of fear for the island women because they have no idea of their physiological significance. It is commonly believed that menopause can produce insanity; in order to ward off this condition, some women have retired from life in their mid-forties, and a few have confined themselves to bed until death years later.

The men believe that intercourse is hard on one's health. They will desist from sex the night before they are to do a job that takes great energy. They do not approach women sexually during menstruation or for months after childbirth; a woman is considered dangerous to the man at these times.

The islanders abhor nudity. Only babies are allowed to bathe while nude. Adults wash only the parts of their bodies that extend beyond their clothing—face, neck, lower arms, hands, lower legs, and feet. The fear of nudity has even cost lives. Sailors who never learned to swim because it involved wearing scanty clothing drowned when their ships sank.

Premarital sex is essentially unknown. In marital sex, foreplay is generally limited to kissing and rough fondling of the buttocks. The husband invariably initiates the activity. The male-on-top is the only position used, and both partners keep their underwear on during the activity. The man has an orgasm quickly and falls asleep immediately. Female orgasm either is believed not to exist or is considered deviant.

Mangaia

In distinct contrast to Inis Beag is Mangaia, an island in the South Pacific. For the Mंगाians, sex—for pleasure and for procreation—is a principal interest.

The Mangaian boy first hears of masturbation when he is about 7, and he may begin to masturbate at age 8 or 9. At around age 13 he undergoes the superincision ritual (in which a slit is made on the top of the penis, along its entire length). This ritual initiates him into manhood; more important, however, the expert who performs the superincision gives him sexual instruction. He shows the boy how to perform oral sex, how to kiss and suck breasts, and how to bring his partner to orgasm several times before he has his own. About two weeks after the operation, the boy has intercourse with an experienced woman, which removes the superincision's scab. She provides him with practice in various acts and positions and trains him to hold back until he can have simultaneous orgasms with his partner.

After this, the Mangaian boy actively seeks out girls, or they seek him out; soon he has coitus every night. The girl, who has received sexual instruction from an older woman, expects demonstration of the boy's virility as proof of his desire for her. What is valued is the ability of the male to continue vigorously the in-and-out action of coitus over long periods of time while the female moves her hips "like a washing machine." Nothing is despised more than a "dead" partner who does not move. A good man is expected to continue his actions for 15 to 30 minutes or more.

The average "nice" girl will have three or four successive boyfriends between the ages of 13 and 20; the average boy may have 10 or more girlfriends. Mangaian parents encourage their daughters to have sexual experiences with several men. They want them to find marriage partners who are congenial.

At around age 18, the Mंगाians typically have sex most nights of the week, with about three orgasms per night. By about age 48, they have sex two or three times per week, with one orgasm each time.

All women in Mangaia apparently learn to have orgasms. Bringing his partner to orgasm is one of the man's chief sources of sexual pleasure.

Sources: Marshall (1971); Messenger (1993).

may do this quite casually as they sit on the ground. The women and men talk about it freely, and there is no shame attached to it. It is a customary position for women to take, and they learn it in childhood. They never use their hands for manipulation. (Powdermaker, 1933, pp. 276–277)

Premarital and Extramarital Sex

Societies differ considerably in their rules regarding premarital sex (Frayser, 1985). At one extreme are the Marquesans of eastern Polynesia. Both boys and girls in that culture have participated in a wide range of sexual experiences before puberty. Their first experience with intercourse occurs with a heterosexual partner who is 30 to 40 years old. Mothers are proud if their daughters have many lovers. Only later does marriage occur. In contrast are the Egyptians of Siwa. In this culture a girl's clitoris is removed at age 7 or 8 in order to decrease her potential for sexual excitement and intercourse. Premarital intercourse is believed to bring shame on the family. Marriage usually occurs around the age of 12 or 13, shortening the premarital period and any temptations it might contain.

These two cultures are fairly typical of their regions. According to one study, 90 percent of Pacific Island societies permit premarital sex, as do 88 percent of African and 82 percent of Eurasian societies; however, 73 percent of Mediterranean societies prohibit premarital sex (Frayser, 1985).

Extramarital sex is complex and conflicted for most cultures. Extramarital sex ranks second only to incest as the most strictly prohibited type of sexual contact. One study found that it was forbidden for one or both partners in 74 percent of the cultures surveyed (Frayser, 1985). Even when extramarital sex is permitted, it is subjected to regulations; the most common pattern of restriction is to allow extramarital sex for husbands but not wives.

Sex with Same-Gender Partners

A wide range of attitudes toward same-gender sexual expression—what many in the United States call *homosexuality*—exists in various cultures (Murray, 2000). At one extreme are societies that strongly disapprove of same-gender sexual behavior for people of any age. In contrast, some societies tolerate the behavior for children but disapprove of it in adults. Still other societies actively encourage all their male members to engage in some same-gender sexual behavior, usually in conjunction with puberty rites (Herdt, 1984). A few societies have a formalized role for the adult gay man that gives him status and dignity.

Even across European nations, attitudes about homosexuality vary considerably (Lottes & Alkula, 2011). For example, people in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden have the most positive attitudes. Positive attitudes are also found in a large group of countries including Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece,

Italy, and Spain. Attitudes are more negative in Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Russia; and the cluster of countries with the most negative attitudes includes Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Ukraine.

While there is wide variation in attitudes toward homosexuality and in same-gender sexual behavior, two general rules do seem to emerge (Ford & Beach, 1951; Murray, 2000; Whitam, 1983): (1) No matter how a particular society treats homosexuality, the behavior always occurs in at least some individuals—that is, same-gender sexuality is found universally in all societies; and (2) same-gender sexual behavior is never the predominant form of sexual behavior for adults in any of the societies studied.

The first point, that same-gender sexual behavior is found universally in all cultures, is so well established that there was quite a stir in 2010 when a team of anthropologists reported on a group of people, the Aka foragers of the Central African Republic (Hewlett & Hewlett, 2010). The Aka were not aware of such practices and had no term for them. In fact, it was difficult for the anthropologists to convey what they meant. We may need to amend the earlier statement, to say that same-gender sexual behavior is *nearly* universal across societies.

In the United States and other Western nations, we hold an unquestioned assumption that people have a sexual identity, whether gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual. Yet sexual identity as an unvarying, lifelong characteristic of the self is unknown or rare in some cultures, such as Indonesia (Stevenson, 1995). In those cultures the self and individualism, so prominent in American culture, are downplayed. Instead, a person is defined in relation to others and behavior is seen as much more the product of the situation than of lifelong personality traits. In such a culture, having a “gay identity” just doesn't compute.

Sex with same-gender partners is discussed in detail in the chapter “Sexual Orientation: Gay, Straight, or Bi?”

Standards of Attractiveness

In all human societies physical characteristics are important in determining whom one chooses as a sex partner. What is considered attractive varies considerably, though (Figure 6). For example, the region of the body that is judged for attractiveness varies from one culture to the next. For some peoples, the shape and color of the eyes are especially significant. For others, the shape of the ears is most important. Some societies go directly to the heart of the matter and judge attractiveness by the appearance of the external genitals. In a few societies, elongated labia majora (the pads of fat on either side of the vaginal opening in women) are considered sexually attractive, and it is common practice for a woman to pull on hers in order to make them longer. Among the Nawa women of Africa, elongated labia majora are considered a mark of beauty and are quite prominent.