**Chapter 1**

**Perspectives on Human Sexuality**

**Chapter Outline**

**1. Studying Human Sexuality**

Students study sexuality for a variety of reasons. Examining the multiple aspects of this fascinating topic can help students understand, accept, and appreciate their own sexuality and that of others.

**2. Sexuality, Popular Culture and the Media**

Much of sexuality is influenced and shaped by popular culture, especially the mass media.

**A. Media Portrayals of Sexuality**

The media are among the most powerful forces in people’s lives today. Mass-media depictions of sexuality are meant primarily to entertain and exploit, not to inform

**B. Television and Digital Media**

Television and digital media are the most prevalent and pervasive media. At the same time, the risks and responsibilities that accompany this programming remain disproportionate to the sexual images that are portrayed.

**C. Feature Length Films**

From their very inception, motion pictures have dealt with sexuality. Movies are not that dissimilar from television in their portrayal of the consequences of unprotected sex, such as unplanned pregnancies or STIs, including HIV/AIDS.

**D. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer People in Film and Television**

Gay men, lesbian women, and bisexual and transgender individuals are slowly being integrated into mainstream films and television. However, when gay men and lesbian women do appear, they are frequently defined in terms of their sexual orientation. Gay men are generally stereotyped as effeminate, flighty, or “arty,” or they may be closeted. Lesbian women are often stereotyped as super feminine and stilettoed.

**E. Online Social Networks**

The Internet and mobile technology have expanded the ways in which people meet and interact with others. The use of online dating sites as a means to meet and/or match make has become widespread. Additionally, social networking sites allow member users to communicate with others in innovative ways such as posting profile information, sending public or private online messages, or sharing photos instantly.

**Key Terms:**

* self-objectification
* sexualization
* queerbating
* sexting

**3. Sexuality Across Cultures and Time**

One of the most powerful forces shaping human sexuality is culture. Culture molds and shapes our sexual interests.

**A. Sexual Interests**

All cultures assume that adults have the potential for becoming sexually aroused and for engaging in sexual intercourse for the purpose of reproduction. But cultures differ considerably in terms of how strong they believe sexual interests are. These beliefs, in turn, affect the level of desire expressed in each culture.

The Mangaia of Polynesia and the Dani of New Guinea represent cultures at the opposite ends of a continuum, with the Mangaia having an elaborate social and cultural framework for instructing adolescents in sexual technique and the Dani downplaying the importance of sex.

Middle-class Americans in the nineteenth century believed that men had strong sexual drives but that women had little sexual desire. Because sexuality was considered animalistic, the Victorians separated sex and love. The sexual revolution brought significant changes to previous assumptions about sexuality.

**B. Sexual Orientation**

Sexual orientation is a complex, multidimensional construct composed of sexual identity, attraction and behavior.

In contemporary America, heterosexuality, or emotional or sexual attraction between men and women, is the only sexual orientation that receives full societal legitimacy. Homosexuality refers to emotional and sexual attraction to an individual of the same sex or gender, bisexuality involves emotional and sexual attraction to both males and females, and asexuality is a state of having no sexual attraction to anyone, or low or absent sexual activity.

In ancient Greece, same-sex relationships between men represented the highest form of love. Among the Sambians of New Guinea, boys have sexual contact with older boys, believing that the ingestion of semen is required for growth. When the girls to whom they are betrothed reach puberty, adolescent boys cease these same-sex sexual relations.

**C. Gender**

The socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men and women are otherwise called gender. While culture helps shape masculinity or femininity, biology defines men and women.

A two-spirit is a person of one sex who identifies with the other sex; in some communities, such as the Zuni, a two-spirit is considered a third gender and is believed to possess great spiritual power.

**Key Terms:**

* sexual interests
* homosexuality
* gay
* queer
* bisexuality
* asexuality
* transgender
* transsexual
* gender queer
* gender fluid
* gender nonconforming
* transvestism
* two-spirit
* androphilic
* gynephilia

**4. Societal Norms and Sexuality**

Sexuality tends to be evaluated according to categories of natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal, and moral/ immoral. These terms are value judgments, reflecting social norms rather than any quality inherent in the behavior itself.  
  
**A.** **Natural Sexual Behavior**There is no commonly accepted definition of natural sexual behavior. Normal sexual behavior is what a culture defines as normal. We commonly use five criteria to categorize sexual behavior as normal or abnormal: subjectively normal, statistically normal, idealistically normal, culturally normal, and clinically normal.

**B.** **Normal Sexual Behavior**Human sexuality is characterized by sexual variation. Researchers believe that the best way to examine sexual behavior is on a continuum. Many activities that are considered deviant sexual behavior exist in most of us to some degree. These include exhibitionism, voyeurism, and fetishism.

**C.** **Sexual Behavior and Variations**Behaviors are not abnormal or unnatural; rather, they are more or less typical or atypical of the group average. Many of those whose behaviors are atypical may be regarded as sexual nonconformists rather than as abnormal or perverse.

**Key Terms:**

* heteronormativity
* normal sexual behavior
* reproduction
* sexual variation

**Learning Objectives**

At the conclusion of Chapter 1, students should be able to:

1. Recognize why we study human sexuality.
2. Explain natural and normal sexual behavior and sexual variations.
3. Understand sexual interests, sexual orientation and gender across cultures and time.
4. Understand the relationship between sexuality, popular culture and the media.

**Lecture and Discussion Ideas**

**Textbook Themes.** Discuss the main themes of the textbook as described in the Prologue. Ask students about their reactions to these themes. The themes are (1) biopsychosocial orientation, (2) sexuality as intimacy, (3) gender roles, (4) sexuality and popular culture, (5) commonality of sexual variation, and (6) significance of ethnicity. Some students may have especially strong feelings about traditional gender roles and gay and lesbian relationships. They may feel uncomfortable about discussing ethnicity because of the taboos surrounding the topic, especially when it is linked to sexuality.

**Media Portrayals of Sexuality.** What purpose is served in the depiction of sexuality in the media? How do different television programs (comedy, drama, commercials, reality shows, music videos, etc.) portray sexuality? Provide examples and analyze the target audience for each show. Analyze your favorite television program. How is sexuality portrayed?

**Online Dating.** Why do people engage in online dating? Is it safe? Should it be regulated? By whom?

**Gender/Sexual Orientation/Biological Sex.** Discuss the differences among gender, sexual orientation, and biological sex. Some students mistakenly believe that homosexuality is a form of gender confusion or that gay men or lesbians want to be the other sex. Some believe that gay men are “feminine” and lesbians “masculine,” mistakenly confusing gender and orientation issues.

**Early Socialization.** What are your earliest memories about sexuality either as a participant or observer? Which were positive and which were negative? How do you relate to similar scenarios today?

**Studying vs. Celebrating Sexual Behaviors.** Some students mistakenly believe that objectively studying a sexual behavior is the equivalent of celebrating the behavior, especially if they have moral objections. Ask students to identify the differences among “studying,” “understanding,” “advocating,” “condoning,” “tolerating,” “accepting,” and “celebrating” diverse sexual activities, values, and orientations.

**Connect**

**Videos**

* Beautiful
* Sex, Sin, and Sickness

**NewsFlash**

* Irish Voters Opt for Marriage Equality, Make History

**Assignment Ideas**

**“Discussing Sex.”** Ask students to suggest reasons why it is difficult to discuss sexuality. List the reasons on the board and ask students to prioritize the list. This exercise can also be done in discussion groups.

**Sexual Vocabulary.** In order to discuss sexuality, it is useful for the students to get desensitized to the use of words relating to human sexuality. Distribute the student worksheet “Sexual Vocabulary” and ask students to fill it out. After they have completed it, ask them to form small groups to discuss the appropriateness of sexual vocabulary in different situations. As a class, discuss appropriate sexual vocabulary in a class setting.

**What Students Want to Learn**. Pass out 3 x 5 cards and ask students to anonymously write what they want to learn in the class and why they are taking the class. Collect the cards, and then randomly distribute them to groups to discuss; have groups exchange cards every few minutes. Then ask class members to identify what students most want to learn and their reasons for taking the class.

**Anonymous-Question Cards.** Have students write anonymous questions on 3 x 5 cards, indicating only their gender. Fold them in half and give or pass them to the instructor. Take 10–15 minutes of class time to answer and discuss the questions. You may do this at the end of class or earlier if you need to break up your lecture. This activity can be done at each class session or as time permits. (This is a popular activity that can wake up a sleepy class.)

**Normal, Natural, and Moral Sexuality**. One of the great inhibitors to objectively studying human sexuality is the tendency to evaluate sexual activities as normal, natural, or moral. To provide insight into underlying beliefs about these judgments, give students the worksheet “Classifying Sexual Behavior.” After students complete the worksheet, discuss the reasons students give for classifying different behaviors as normal, natural, or moral.

**Anthropologist’s Perspective.** Ask students to imagine they are anthropologists from another culture studying American sexual behavior. What “curious” customs and behaviors might they find? Ask them to provide descriptive names, such as “exchanging saliva” (kissing) and “sex with the hand” (masturbation).

SEX AND POPULAR CULTURE

**Sexuality and Your Favorite TV program (worksheet):** Ask students to utilize the student worksheet to analyze their favorite television program. After the students have completed the assignment, make a list of the five most popular TV shows and ask students to comment on their portrayal of sexuality. (This activity can be done either in groups or in the class as a whole.)

**Discussion:** Ask students to identify current media stories, talk shows, or specials relating to human sexuality. Relate this to the appropriate chapter in the textbook or lecture. How accurate is the material? This exercise may be done during each class session or occasionally, as time permits.

**Discussion:** Ask students to describe how sexuality is portrayed in TV, movies, commercials, popular music, and music videos. Are there differences in what is portrayed in different media?

**Discussion:** Ask students how the Internet can shape people’s perceptions of sex and affect sexual interactions. How does the information people find on the Internet compare to the information gleaned from movies and TV? Do online encounters help people learn how to conduct live interactions?

**Discussion:** Ask students if they think the TV Parental Guidelines are useful. How do they think children are affected by exposure to scenes of sex, violence, sexual dialogue, and adult language? Would they trust the judgment of the coders who classify shows as TV-G, TV-PG, or TV-14?

**Discussion:** Ask students to describe recent portrayals of gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered people and relationships on TV or in film. To what degree are the portrayals stereotypical?

**Activity:** Have each student bring a magazine in that targets them as the audience. In small groups, ask them to analyze the content of the front page. How many of the headlines address sexuality explicitly or implicitly? What is the proportion of sexual content to nonsexual content on the cover? How is the front cover model or celebrity positioned and dressed?

**Activity:** Make a videocassette recording of a music video or commercial in which sexuality plays an important role. Show the recording to the class and ask them to discuss the use of sexuality in the video.

HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

**Discussion:** What are some of the sexual issues confronting health-care providers in the twenty-first century, such as the relationship between sexual well-being and health, new reproductive technologies, HIV/AIDS, risk-taking behaviors, and the sexual rights of patients?

**Discussion:** Although many people turn to physicians for sexual advice and counseling, physicians often do not have training in human sexuality. In fact, medical schools rarely offer courses in human sexuality. If you were going to design a human sexuality course for physicians, what would be included in the course?

**Activity:** Have students make a list of healthy and unhealthy sexual behaviors. On what basis did they decide to classify behaviors as healthy or unhealthy?

TAKING ACTION

Media Watch is an organization that challenges sexism, violence, and racism in the media. Go to their Action page (http://www.mediawatch.com) and select an issue that is important to you and participate in the boycott or write a letter.

**Suggested Media – Films and Videos**

(Newer)

*Miss Representation* (2011). Available on Netflix or DVD. Explore how the mainstream media's often disparaging portrayals of women contribute to the under-representation of females in positions of leadership.

*Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising’s Image of Women* (2010). Available on DVD. “At once provocative and inspiring, *Killing Us Softly 4* stands to challenge yet another generation of students to take advertising seriously, and to think critically about its relationship to sexism, eating disorders, gender violence, and contemporary politics.” [www.mediaed.org](http://www.mediaed.org).

*The Kids Are All Right* (2010). Available on DVD, or streaming on a variety of internet providers. Lesbian couple Jules (Julianne Moore) and Nic (Annette Bening) have been together for almost 20 years and have two teenage offspring named Joni and Laser, who were conceived via artificial insemination. Unbeknown to their mothers, Joni and Laser seek out their biological father, a restaurateur named Paul (Mark Ruffalo). Complications arise when the teens bond with Paul and invite him into their lives.

(Older)

*Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community* (1984, 87 min., VHS, The Cinema Guild). Using filmed recollections and archival material, this program traces the social, political, and cultural development of the gay and lesbian community.

*The Clios 2000* (2002, 88 min., VHS, Films for the Humanities & Sciences). A compilation of the Clio-award winning commercials of 2000.

*The Diary of Adam and Eve by Mark Twain* (1978, 15 min., VHS, Indiana University Audio Visual Center). Retells and embellishes the story of Adam and Eve using separate diaries which comment on the same situations to point out the differences in the sexes.

**Web Links and Activities**

In addition to the following links, those listed in this chapter’s “Suggested websites” in the textbook may be useful.

**Internet Links:**

Human Sexuality Collection

<http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/HSC/>

“The Human Sexuality Collection seeks to preserve and make accessible primary sources that document historical shifts in the social construction of sexuality, with a focus on U.S. lesbian and gay history and the politics of pornography.”

The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction

<http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/>

Founded in 1947, The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction is a private, not-for-profit corporation affiliated with Indiana University. The mission of The Kinsey Institute is to promote interdisciplinary research and scholarship in the fields of human sexuality, gender, and reproduction.

Media Watch

<http://mediawatch.com>

Provides examples of how sexuality, race, and violence intersect in the media. It includes educational resources and opportunities for taking action.

Naked Brunch: Berlin’s Sexology Archive

<http://www.libidomag.com/nakedbrunch/archive/berlin.html>

“The massive site is structured to serve teachers, serious students and the constructively curious all at once” (Marianna Beck and Jeff Hafferkamp).

Naked News

<http://nakednews.com>

This website actually presents the news, but as the news is being presented the broadcasters take their clothes off. You might want to consider what this website is all about and how it represents sexuality in the media and in popular culture.

Sexuality Issues in Popular Culture and Media

<http://www.siecus.org>

This annotated bibliography from the SIECUS site presents books on sexuality, popular culture, and the media.

Society for Human Sexuality

<http://www.sexuality.org>

This website presents an in-depth history of the study of sexuality and links to several related sites.

Society for Human Sexuality: San Francisco

<http://www.sexuality.org/sanfrancisco.html>

This website contains San Francisco sexuality-related resources, including information on the fields a student can pursue that would lead to a career in the study of sexuality.

**Activities**

**Sexuality on the Internet:** The Internet has provided a new arena for the presentation of sexual material. List as many ways as you can that the Internet serves as a purveyor of information related to human sexuality. Present a website that represents an example of this type of information.

Make sure you remember to include answers to all of the following questions:

1. What is the URL of the site?

2. What is the title of the site?

3. Who is the author?

4. If an organization sponsors the site, what organization is it?

5. What search engine did you use to find this site? Or what link did you follow to find this site?

6. What keywords did you use in your search engine?

7. What made you select this website to present?

8. Summarize the contents of this website.

9. What two things did you learn from this site that are different from or reinforce the lectures and/or the textbook?

**Worksheet: Sexuality and Your Favorite TV Program**

Name Section Date

Name of program:

Description of content:

What underlying message or stereotype about sexuality did the program present?

How do portrayals of sexuality of women and men differ? Consider the use of language, props, camera angles, spoken lines, and time given to different characters.

Did it present its message or stereotype visually or verbally? How? Was it effective?

Comments:

**OBSERVATION**

Sex, Lies, and Music Videos

It is no secret that many people absorb hours of music videos and other formats of music each day. What effect does this medium have on their sexuality?

Visit YouTube and search for top music videos for the week. Watch at least three and record the following:

1. What were the titles of the songs?

2. What were the artists’ names?

3. What was/were the message(s) in each song?

4. What images helped to convey or reinforce the message?

5. What apparel was worn by each gender represented in the video?

6. What kind of body language was used? How did it reinforce the messages?

7. What else did you notice?

8. Did the videos have any content related to sexuality? If so, was its view sex-positive, sex-negative, or neutral?

9. What did you learn as a result of watching music videos?

PART 2

Commercials may employ tactics that reinforce sex role stereotypes and provide calculated images of men, women, sex, and relationships. Turn on prime-time TV and observe three advertisements while recording the following information:

1. What product was the advertiser trying to sell?

2. What images were provided to encourage vulnerability and/or desire for the product?

3. How were the people dressed? Were there wardrobe differences for each gender?

4. What poses or images were used by the characters to sell the product?

5. What kind of background music was used?

6. Did the commercials have content related to sexuality? If so, were their views sex-positive, sex-negative, or neutral?

7. If a narrator or voice over the scene was used, was it male or female? How did that influence what is being advertised?

8. As a result of this advertisement, would you buy this product? Why or why not?

**REFLECTION**

“Firsts” in Growing Up

Throughout the course you will be asked to recall your own experiences and feelings about sex, growing up, relationships, and so on. The following statements are intended to give you the opportunity to explore your own sexuality and to begin processing the information from this course into a context that makes sense to you.

Use the following statements as a guide but don’t feel constrained by them:

· I first recall being a girl or a boy when . . .

· What my parents told me about sex was . . .

· The first time I was made to feel shame about my body was…

· For me, the experience of approaching adolescence was . . .

· When I learned about menstruation my reaction was . . .

· My family’s reaction to my budding sexuality was . . .

· I began noticing the same or other sex when . . .

· The first experience I ever had that I would define as sexual was . . .

· My attitudes about sex differed from my friends when it came to . . .

· I think my sexual experiences have affected me by . . .

· What I’ve learned about my sexuality from recalling my history is . . .

**GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITY QUESTIONS**

The Impact of Media

The influence of the media, for some, is overwhelming, dramatic, and profound. Try to recall how movies, TV, computer-age technology, and other forms of media have affected your attitudes and behaviors as you respond to the following statements:

• The types of media that influenced my sexual identity the most were . . .

• The persons I admired the most included . . .

• The images I tried to achieve included . . .

• The media portrayed love relationships to be . . .

• This affected me . . .

• The media portrayed family relationships to be . . .

• This affected me . . .

• The most positive effect the media have had on my sexuality is . . .

• The most negative effect the media have had on my sexuality is . . .

• As a result of the media, my self-image and/or self-esteem was affected . . .

• I became aware of the impact of the media on my sexuality when . . .

**Additional Readings**

Dines, G., & McMahon, J. M. (Eds.). (2015). Gender, race and class in media: A critical reader (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. An analysis of media entertainment culture.

Francoeur, R. T., & Noonan, R. (Eds.). (2004). The continuum complete international encyclopedia of sexuality. New York: Continuum. The foremost reference work on sexual behavior throughout the world.

Rosewarne, L. (2016). Intimacy on the Internet: Media representations of online connections. New York: Routledge. Media representations are categorized and analyzed to explore what they reveal about the intersection of gender, sexuality, technology, and the changing mores regarding intimacy.

Sales, N. J. (2016). American girls: Social media and the secret lives of teenagers. New York: Vintage Books. Though limited by its single-gender focus, the author discusses the ways in which the sexual behavior of teenagers is being changed and shaped by new technology, including the influence of online porn.

Strasburger, V. C., Wilson, B. J., & Jordan, A. B. (2014). Children, adolescents, and the media (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Explores mass media, including the sexual messages the media convey and their impact on adolescents.

Tiefer, L. (2004). Sex is not a natural act and other essays (2nd ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press. A revised collection of provocative essays on sex and its many meanings in our culture.