**CHAPTER 1**

**Studying Human Sexuality: An Introduction**

**CHAPTER-AT-A-GLANCE**

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| **Chapter Outline** | **Instructional Ideas** | **Supplemental Materials** |
| **What Is Human Sexuality?** | Learning Objective 1  Discussion Question 1 | **IM Activity:** *Introductory Topics Activity & Creating a Good Learning Space* |
| **The Diversity of Human Sexuality** | Learning Objective 2 |  |
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| **Perspectives on Human Sexuality** | Learning Objective 7  Discussion Question 4  Teaching Tip 2 | **IM Activity:** *Human Sexuality and the Internet*  **IM Activity:** *Small Group Discussion Questions: Changing Gender Roles* |

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The chapter begins by defining human sexuality and discussing the many ways that sexuality is characterized by diversity. The different ways of defining “sex” are discussed – biological, physical, and psychological, and the authors distinguish between biological or anatomical “sex” and “gender”, referring to social or cultural categories. Human sexuality is defined as the ways we experience and express ourselves as sexual beings.

The authors then examine ethnocultural diversity related to sexuality within Canada and compare Canada to other countries with respect to attitudes toward sexuality. The authors describe the sexual beliefs, norms, and practices of Inis Beag and Mangaia, two very different island cultures, to highlight the importance of culture and diversity in human sexual expression. The authors suggest that making choices is a critical part of our development sexually and propose that scientific information as well as morals and values can inform sexual decision making.

The diversity of Canadian society is discussed with particular emphasis on sexual attitudes and behaviours. Political, social, and religious differences between Canada and other countries are highlighted, with particular emphasis on sexual scripts in Kenya. Comparisons between Canada and the United States are drawn. The exploration of sex related behaviours and beliefs worldwide is introduced.

The authors then look at values and sexuality and the importance of using critical thinking to examine sexuality. Ethical issues related to sexuality are raised, and the World Association for Sexual Health’s (WAS) principles of sexual rights are introduced. Readers are informed of the importance of critical thinking about sexual information and suggestions for critical thinking are given.

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

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

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

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Define human sexuality.

2. Identify ways in which human sexuality is characterized by diversity.

3. Describe the interaction between ethnocultural diversity and attitudes toward sexuality in Canada.

4. Compare and contrast attitudes toward sexuality in different countries.

5. Define the value perspectives that people use to evaluate sexual behaviours.

6. Identify and describe the key elements of critical thinking.

7. Discuss the various ways of looking at human sexuality.

**TEACHING TIPS**

1. Clip a recent newspaper article on a sexuality issue. Distribute copies to students. Have the class examine and discuss the article, keeping in mind the features of critical thinking.

2. Suggest a topic to the students, for example, desired characteristics in a dating or marital partner. Have them break into small discussion groups and assign each group a different approach to guide their discussion. Or have pairs of students discuss the topic from each perspective and then discuss as a class. How would someone who subscribes to the biological perspective explain partner choice? What about the anthropological perspective? The sociological perspective?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What modern beliefs, myths or practices can you trace to the influences of earlier eras?

2. How can ethnocentrism interfere with one’s willingness to learn about and accept cultural differences?

3. Is it possible to apply a single “code” of sexual rights to all cultures?

4. This chapter covers several different perspectives on human sexuality. Do you think some of these perspectives can explain our sexuality better than others? Which of the perspectives make(s) the most sense to you?

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

***Web Sites***

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

**http://www.siecus.org** The site of an American non-profit organization devoted to sex education.

**http://www.sieccan.org** The site of a Canadian non-profit organization dedicated to informing the public and professionals about human sexuality.

**http://www.kinseyinstitute.org** The site of the institute founded by Alfred Kinsey at Indiana University. It is devoted to research in sex, gender, and reproduction. Provides information on the Kinsey Institute’s latest research as well as numerous links to other sites.

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

**https://www.actioncanadashr.org** Canadian non-profit organization advocating access to sexual and reproductive health services and providing education on sexual health issues, abortion, and contraception.

**http://www.canadiansexresearchforum.com** The site of the Canadian Sex Research Forum, a multidisciplinary academic organization of sexual health researchers and professionals.

**ACTIVITIES**

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

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

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

***Activity II: Critical Thinking Activity***

Have your students use their critical thinking skills to evaluate the following statements. Have students break up into pairs or small groups to start and then discuss as a group:

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

Questions to ask:

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

***Activity III: Human Sexuality and the Internet***

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

***Activity IV: Small Group Discussion Questions***

***Changing Gender Roles***

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

1. How might the evolution of gender roles in Western cultures represent an adaptation to changing conditions? Does this reflect an adaptation to increasing economic burdens?

2. Might we return to more traditional gender roles if economic conditions permitted women to quit their jobs and return to domestic roles? Would women want to leave the work force if they could? Would men?

3. Have employment equity policies affected gender roles?

4. When the term “family values” is used by politicians and social commentators, what definitions of gender roles are generally implied? How might different segments of society define “family values?” (i.e., consider culture/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation)