**CHAPTER 1: SEXUALITY IN PERSPECTIVE**

**SUMMARY**

**Sex and Gender**

* The term "sex" is used in this book to refer to sexual anatomy and sexual behaviour
* The term "gender" is used to refer to the state of being a man or a woman
* Sexual behaviour is defined as activity that produces arousal and increases the chance of orgasm

**Influences on Sexuality**

*Religion*

* Religion is a source of values and ethics regarding sexuality and a powerful influence on sexual attitudes and behaviours
* People of different religions have different understandings and beliefs about human sexuality

*Science*

* The scientific study of sexuality began in the late 19th century
* Surveys of human sexuality have been conducted in the United States, Britain, and Germany, but no major national surveys have been conducted in Canada
* The scientific study of sexuality is interdisciplinary

*The Media*

* Canadians' views about sexuality are more likely to be influenced by the media than by scientific findings
* Communications theorists believe that the media have three types of influence: cultivation (i.e., the idea that what is expressed in the media reflects reality), agenda-setting (i.e., the media determines what people pay attention to by coverage of certain stories), and social learning (i.e., people copy the behaviour of others they see in the media)

*The Internet*

* The Internet is a powerful influence and has become a venue for sexual activity
* The Internet has the potential for both positive and negative effects on sexual health
* Many people also share explicit material about themselves with others online
* Sites like www.sexandu.ca provides information about sexual health, however young people are also solicited for sex online which can be dangerous.

**Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Sexuality**

* Ethnocentrism refers to the tendency to believe that one's own culture is the only appropriate way of thinking and acting
* All societies regulate sexual behaviour one way or another, with the incest taboo being one of the few universal proscriptions

**Variations in Sexual Techniques**

* There is much variety with respect to sexual activities (e.g., kissing), frequency of intercourse, and times when intercourse is prohibited

*Masturbation*

* Attitudes toward masturbation vary widely across cultures

*Premarital and Extramarital Sex*

* Attitudes toward premarital and extramarital sex vary considerably, often by geographical region of the world

*Sex with Same-Sex Partners*

* There is a wide range of attitudes in various cultures toward sex same same-sex partners-sex partners
* Same-sex sexual behaviour exists in all cultures in the world, although never as the predominant form of sexuality

*Standards of Attractiveness*

* Standards of attractiveness vary widely from culture to culture (e.g., preferences for plump women or women with large labia majora)
* One of the few universal preferences with respect to attractiveness is for a good, healthy complexion

*Regional and Cultural Variation in Sexuality*

* When compared to "average" Canadians, various social classes and ethnic groups have different norms and attitudes concerning sexuality (e.g., Quebecers, Indigenous peoples, new Canadians)

*The Significance of Cross-Cultural Studies*

* Cross-cultural studies illustrate the extent of similarities and differences in human sexual variation and highlight culture as a major determinant of sexuality

**Cross-Species Perspectives on Sexuality**

* Cross-species perspectives on sexuality put human sexuality in an evolutionary perspective and shed light on what's "natural" and what’s “unnatural” with respect to sexuality

*Masturbation*

* Masturbation is common across many species of mammals
* Techniques include stimulating the genitals with hands or rubbing the genitals against an object

*Same-Sex Sexual Behaviour*

* Same-sex sexual behaviour is common in many species

*In What Ways are Humans Unique?*

* Although sex in lower species is largely instinctual, sex in humans is the combination of instinctual or hard-wired preferences and determined by learning

*The NonSexual Uses of Sexual Behaviour*

* Humans and other animals use sex for non-sexual purposes such as displays of aggression, dominance, appeasement

**The Sexual Health Perspective**

* There is an emerging worldwide movement that acknowledges the importance of physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing in sexual expression
* All humans have basic sexual rights (e.g., freedom from sexual violence)

**CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

1. **Sex Bingo Ice Breaker**

The purpose of this exercise is to help break the ice among students in the classroom. Students can use a Sex Bingo chart like the one given below to get to know their classmates and to become comfortable with talking about sex. Students will have to get up and walk around the classroom in order to talk to classmates. Once students have found someone in the class who meets the criteria of each box (e.g., “someone who wants to have children”), they should ask them their name and write their initials in the box. Once students have written initials in each box on the chart, they can call “Bingo,” and the instructor can declare a sex bingo winner. This would be an appropriate time to discuss respecting diversity in the classroom context.

Use the chart below to get to know your classmates; you will have to get up and walk around the classroom in order to talk to other students. When you find someone who meets the criteria of a box, ask their name and write their initials in the box. When you have initials in each box on the chart, you can call “Bingo.”

Find someone in the class who....

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **B** | **I** | **N** | **G** | **O** |
| Has a gay relative | Is single | Believes in “pro-life” | Can name a sex researcher | Doesn’t want children |
| Can define “intersexual” | Can name a theory that explains sex | Teaches about sexuality | Is dating | Knows what  “on the down low” means |
| Doesn’t have children | Is in love | **Free**  **Square** | Practices safer sex | Plans to have children |
| Knows what “teabagging” means | Is cohabiting | Believes in “pro-choice” | Can define “fellatio” | Approves of same-sex marriage |
| Approves of premarital sex | Wants to teach others about sexuality | Can define “polygamy” | Is married | Uses contraceptives |

1. **What’s in a Name? Part 1**

The purpose of this exercise is to help students get over initial discomfort speaking publically about sexuality. Terminology with respect to sex and body parts abounds. There are both clinical terms (e.g., vagina, penis) and slang terms (e.g., pussy, dick) for many aspects of sexuality. Using the list provided below, have students identify which terms they feel the most comfortable with—or, have them provide another term that they prefer. Students should be able to articulate which of the terms they find objectionable, and why. For example, students may find that some of the terms are too medical, or too crude. This would be an appropriate time to discuss respecting diversity in the classroom context.

There are both clinical terms and slang terms for many aspects of sexuality. On the line provided, identify which of the following terms you feel the most comfortable with—or provide another term that you prefer. Think about which of the terms you find objectionable, and why.

1. Vagina, pussy

2. Penis, dick

3. Masturbate, jerk off

4. Intercourse, screwing

5. Intercourse, making love

6. Breasts, boobs

7. Breasts, tits

8. Testicles, balls

9. Testicles, nuts

10. Semen, cum

11. Hymen, cherry

12. Clitoris, button

13. Cunnilingus, eating out

14. Cunnilingus, muff diving

15. Fellatio, blow job

16. Fellatio, sucking off

17. Lesbian, dyke

18. Gay man, fag

19. Anal sex, fudge packing

20. Analingus, rimming

1. **Sex on the Internet**

The purpose of this exercise is to familiarize students with some Canadian sexuality resources available on the Internet. Divide students in groups (at least one member per group should have a computer with wireless access to the Internet) and assign each group to one of the following Internet sites. Have students evaluate the site critically by asking themselves the following questions: What is the purpose or goal of the website? Who is the sponsor or the author of the website? Does the website reflect a particular bias with respect to sexuality? Students should be prepared to report back to their classmates about each website.

<http://www.sexandu.ca/>

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

<http://www.egale.ca/>

<http://www.talksexwithsue.com/sexual-info.php>

1. **Create positive sexual outcomes for pre-teens using the Internet**

The Internet can be a dangerous place for pre-teens, but it can also be a source of information that can benefit the sexual well-being of young people. Have students work alone or in groups and imagine that they are in charge of advising a local group of parents of pre-teens about how to promote sexual health using the Internet. Have students prepare a document advising parents how to protect their children from the perils of the Internet as well as suggesting ways in which pre-teens can learn about sexual health safely using the Internet.

1. **A Short Sexual History, Part 1**

The textbook discusses different cultural influences on sexuality, including ethnicity and nationality, as well as socioeconomic status and geographical region. Have students write a short personal sexual history (either in class, or as part of a longer assignment) referring to how various cultural influences including nationality, ethnicity, religion, immigrant status, social class, cohort (e.g., baby boomer, Gen X, Gen Y) and geographical region (e.g., rural vs. urban) may have influenced their sexuality and the expression of their sexuality. Have students address topics such as the sexual double standard, masturbation, premarital sex, extramarital sex, and homosexuality.

1. **Non-Sexual Uses of Sex**

According to the textbook, species other than human species, especially primates, sometimes use sex for non-sexual (i.e., non-reproductive) purposes. Have students brainstorm in small groups about using sex for non-sexual purposes. What are some of the non-sexual uses of sex found in other animals? In humans? Have students list as many examples as they can of uses of non-sexual sex in both animals and human beings. Use the blackboard to lists examples under the two headings (i.e., Non-Sexual Sex in Animals, Non-Sexual Sex in Humans) and then compare the two lists. What conclusions can be made about cross-species non-sexual use of sex, if any? Discuss with reference to the cross-species perspective on sexuality.

1. **Talking about Sex (à la Sue Johanson)**

Sue Johanson is a registered nurse, a sex educator, and a well-known media personality in Canada. She has written books including *Sex, Sex, and More Sex* (2005), and she travels extensively making public presentations about sex. In her presentations, she asks members of the audience to write anonymous questions about sexuality on notecards (e.g., “What is female circumcision?”), which are then collected so she can respond to the questions without embarrassing any individual member of the audience. In the first class of the semester, give students an index card and have them write an anonymous question about sex on the card. Over the course of the semester, the instructor can answer students’ questions when appropriate.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. The word sex can have different meanings in different contexts. What is the first meaning that comes to you when you hear the word sex? How is sex different from sexuality, or from sexual behaviour? What is the difference between sex and gender? Try to come up with your own definitions for these terms and then compare yours with those used in the textbook.
2. Sexuality occurs in multiple contexts: historical contexts, religious contexts, national contexts. Our sexuality is influenced by the place and the time—and the values—that we experience as human beings. How would a woman in Victorian England differ sexually from a woman in 21st century Canada?
3. Discuss how the Internet can have a positive or a negative impact on pre-teen an adolescent sexual health. What can parents do to help protect their children from the negative aspects of the Internet? How can parents use the Internet to promote healthy sexual development in their children?
4. There are very few universal beliefs and attitudes with respect to sexuality; one of the few is the incest taboo. Other aspects of sexuality differ greatly from one culture to another. Compare and contrast the sexual experiences of men in two disparate cultures: the men of Irish Inis Beag, and the men of Polynesian Mangaia. Which experience would you or men you know prefer, and why?
5. There are differences in attitudes toward various aspects of sexuality between Canada and the United States. Similarly, there are differences between Quebec and English Canada. What factors might explain these differences? Be sure to consider the role of religion in your response.
6. Human beings differ from other animals in many ways. Why should we learn about the sexual practices of animals? How can the sexual practices of animals inform us about human sexuality? Discuss the pros and cons of learning about the sex lives of animals. In particular, consider topics such as masturbation and homosexuality.
7. 1 What are sexual rights as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO)? Which of these sexual rights do you agree with, if any? State why you agree or disagree with the sexual rights defined by the WHO. Are there, in your opinion, any sexual rights that the WHO has left out? Are there any sexual rights that you would add to the list?

**REFLECTIVE ASSIGNMENT**

1. Choose a culture different from your own and research their sexual behaviours. Compare and contrast the differences with your own culture’s sexual ideologies.