CHAPTER 1
What is Human Sexuality?

CHAPTER-AT-A-GLANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Outline</th>
<th>Instructional Ideas</th>
<th>Supplemental Materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choices, Information, and Decision Making</td>
<td></td>
<td>IM Activity: The Sexual Permissiveness Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Human Sexuality?</td>
<td>Learning Objective 1, Learning Objective 2, Learning Objective 3, Learning Objective 4, Discussion Question 1, Discussion Question 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality and Ethics</td>
<td>Learning Objective 5, Discussion Question 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality and Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking Critically About Human Sexuality</td>
<td>Teaching Tip 1</td>
<td>IM Activity: Thinking About Self-Help Books and websites on Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives On Human Sexuality</td>
<td>Learning Objective 6, Learning Objective 7, Learning Objective 8, Learning Objective 9, Discussion Question 4, Teaching Tip 2</td>
<td>IM Lecture Material: Animal Sexual Behaviour, IM Activity: Small Group Discussion Questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter begins by discussing the need for studying human sexuality as opposed to learning about it just by experience and challenges students to consider what they really know about sexuality. The authors suggest that making choices is a critical part of our development sexually and propose that scientific information and morals and values can inform sexual decision making. The breadth of information provided will permit the student to understand psychological, biological and sociological aspects of sexuality. The introduction is followed by a clarification of terms that will be used throughout the text. Of particular relevance is the emphasis on conceptualizing sexual behaviour as something that goes beyond reproduction.

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

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

The authors present historical, biological, evolutionary, cross-species, sociological and anthropological, and psychological perspectives on human sexuality. The historical approach contextualizes sexuality by examining the cultural mores and ethics of a particular time and place. The authors give a brief overview of various societies throughout history. Issues such as bisexuality, homosexuality, pederasty, sadomasochism and gender roles are described in light of the social and political context of each society. The section ends with a brief introduction to the pioneers of the scientific 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 controversial evolutionary perspective based on Darwin's theories is explained and applied to the concept of "erotic plasticity." From this perspective, sexual behaviour is interwoven with reproductive success. Males tend to be more promiscuous because their reproductive success is related to the number of women they can impregnate. Women's reproductive success, since they
can produce only a few offspring in their lifetime, is related to mating with the fittest males. The cross-species perspective provides an introduction to analogues of human sexual behaviour. It also points to the fact that as we climb the "evolutionary ladder," psychosocial factors start acquiring a greater relevance in determining the occurrence and "quality" of the sexual response. The sociological and anthropological perspectives emphasize the ways that cultural context shape sexual behaviour.

Psychological perspectives include psychoanalysis (that focuses on the hypothesized inner conflicts between sexual drives and social constraints), learning theories (that emphasize the reciprocal determinism of person, behaviour and environment) and cognitive views (which emphasize the importance of cognitive activity). Finally, the sociological perspective asserts that social factors (socioeconomic status, gender) will affect our sexual values, beliefs and behaviours.

The chapter closes with a discussion of feminist and queer theories. Finally, the authors suggest that considering multiple approaches is the most effective way to understand the complexity and range of human sexual behaviour.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Explain the need for a scientific study of human sexuality.
2. State the authors' definition of human sexuality.
3. Explain the authors' contention that the study of human sexuality would be incomplete without an examination of values.
4. Discuss the relevance of different cultures and societies in the understanding of human sexuality.
5. Explain the relationships between the three ethical positions presented (ethics of divinity, ethics of community, and ethics of autonomy) and sexual decision making.
6. Identify the biological systems involved in the sexual response.
7. Use critical thinking skills to analyze the biological and evolutionary perspectives.
8. Explain the contributions and limitations from cross-species comparisons of sexual behaviour.
9. Evaluate the contributions of different psychological approaches to the understanding of human sexual behaviour.
USING THE ACTIVITIES AND ADDITIONAL LECTURE MATERIAL

I. What is Human Sexuality?

• Activity I: Distribute copies of the six-item scale, which allows students to identify their values about premarital intercourse. This scale is included in the Activities section.

II. Thinking Critically about Human Sexuality.

• Activity II: Discuss self-help books on sex. Ask students to bring some books (or you can bring some) and ask them to use critical thinking to analyze them. The discussion can also be enriched by asking them to locate and report on websites that provide some sort of self-help.

III. Perspectives On Human Sexuality

• Lecture I: When you are discussing the cross-species perspective, refer to Animal Sexual Behaviour, which gives additional examples of the varied sexual behaviour among animals.
• Activity III: After finishing the chapter have students break up into mixed-gender groups of three or four to discuss questions related to gender roles. A representative from each group can then present a summary of the discussion to the entire class.

TEACHING TIPS

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

5. How would a Freudian psychologist explain why a five-year-old girl likes to play with dolls? How would this be explained by a behaviourist?

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**Literature**


**Videos**

(The websites for many of the major education video distribution companies are listed on page 257 of this manual.)

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

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

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

**Program 17. Sex and Gender (1990, 30 minutes).** This video, part of the Discovering Psychology series by Philip Zimbardo presents the major findings in sex and gender. Probably could also be used in the chapter 6, Gender Identity. The Annenberg/CPB Collection

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

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

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

**Web Sites**

http://sexualityandu.ca A Canadian site providing the latest news and updates related to sexual health.
http://www.siecus.org The site of a prestigious non-profit organization devoted to sex education.

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

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

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

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

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

Activity I: The Sexual Permissiveness Scale

How permissive are you toward premarital intercourse? Do you see yourself as traditional or as an advocate of the “sexual revolution?” Do you subscribe to a double standard for men and women? Do you adhere to a sex-with-affection standard? Express your opinions by agreeing or disagreeing with the following items.

NOTE: Since this is a 20-year-old scale, you might want to ask students to define the concept of permissiveness and to provide an historical context for it.
1. Sexual intercourse is acceptable for the male before marriage when he is in love.

   Agree    Disagree

2. Sexual intercourse is acceptable for the male before marriage when he feels strong affection for his partner.

   Agree    Disagree

3. Sexual intercourse is acceptable for the male before marriage even if he does not feel particularly affectionate toward his partner.

   Agree    Disagree

4. Sexual intercourse is acceptable for the female before marriage when she is in love.

   Agree    Disagree

5. Sexual intercourse is acceptable for the female before marriage when she feels strong affection for her partner.

   Agree    Disagree

6. Sexual intercourse is acceptable for the female before marriage even if she does not feel particularly affectionate toward her partner.

   Agree    Disagree


Activity II: Thinking About Self-Help Books on Sex

The Joy of Sex, the New Joy of Sex, Super Marital Sex, Extended Sexual Orgasm, The Real Truth About Women and AIDS, Light His Fire, How to Satisfy a Woman Every Time and Have Her Beg for More, Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex but Were Afraid to Ask, Human Sexual Inadequacy, The Marilyn Syndrome, The Cinderella Complex, The Birth Control Book, How to Get Pregnant, The No-Hysterectomy Option, The New Male, The New Assertive Woman, Our Bodies Ourselves—these are but a sample of the hundreds of books on sex that have inundated the marketplace in recent years. People who are lonely, sexually inhibited, fearful of AIDS, confused about birth control, struggling with infertility, suffering from sexual harassment, concerned about
pornography, perplexed about homosexuality, or incapable of reaching orgasm search the book stores and the checkout counter racks of supermarkets in hopes of discovering the books that will contain the answers they seek.

When we are seeking help through books, how can we know what to buy? How can we sort the beneficial wheat from the detrimental chaff: How can we be wise consumers? Offer the following suggestions only after students (individually or in small groups) have come up with their own ways of sorting "the good from the bad.” The following measures will help you think critically about self-help books on sex:

1. *Don’t judge a book by its cover or by its title.* Well-researched books can have covers as sexy and titles as catchy as bad books. With all the titles vying for shelf space, publishers try to do something to get your attention.

2. *Avoid books that make outrageous claims.* No technique can help everyone who tries it. In addition, few techniques work overnight.

3. *Check authors’ credentials.* Be leery if the abbreviation ‘Dr.’ is placed before the author’s name. It could be a bogus doctorate bought through the mail. Persons who identify themselves as “doctors” should indicate the type of doctoral degree they hold, such as Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy), Ed.D. (Doctor of Education) or M.D. (Doctor of Medicine), and the institution that granted the degree. Ask yourself, does the person hold a recognized degree from a reputable institution? Is the degree in a field that bears a relationship to the subject matter of the book?

4. *Check authors’ affiliations.* There are no guarantees, but sociologists and psychologists in colleges and universities, and physicians affiliated with medical schools may address their subject matter more carefully than unaffiliated writers.

5. *If authors complain about the medical or psychological “establishment,” be suspicious.* Respectable authors do not claim to be ahead of their time or castigate their professional organizations as reactionary or pigheaded. While there may be occasional disagreements among professionals, writers who regularly voice strenuous objections to their colleagues may have a personal “ax to grind.”

6. *Examine the kinds of evidence described in the book.* Poorly researched books usually rely more on anecdotes and personal endorsements or testimonials than on scientifically sound research.

7. *Check the bibliography and reference citations for evidence.* Legitimate sex research is reported in the professional journals. If the references are suspicious or unscientific, be wary.

There are no quick fixes, no guarantees. However, by applying critical thinking, you can become a more sophisticated consumer of self-help books on sex.
Activity III: Small Group Discussion Questions

Changing Gender Roles

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

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

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

3. Have employment equity policies affected gender roles?

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

*Lecture I: Animal Sexual Behaviour*

Before the lecture, ask students what they think/know are the similarities and differences between different species with respect to sexual behaviour. Can we make statements about "universality" of sexual behaviour when comparing different species? The sexual behaviours of lower animals are so varied that accepting them as standards would probably expand rather than restrict the repertoire of human sexual activities. Consider the following examples. Should they set the standard for natural sex?
Courtship among many species, such as sea gulls and the three-spined stickleback fish, involves outbursts of attack and flight before mating. Sometimes the attacks are overzealous. Many female Siamese fighting fish are slaughtered by their suitors. With finches, the female is the aggressor. Does nature advocate violence as foreplay?

Cobras of both sexes strike at each other for an hour or more before mating. Is nature advocating sadomasochistic practices (S and M)?

Man’s best friend, the dog, is often seen attempting to copulate with the leg of a man or woman. Is this bestiality in reverse?

Though wolves and beavers generally keep a mate for life, most mammals copulate with multiple partners throughout their sexual careers. Is nature serving as a model for promiscuity?

Before copulating, the male turtle often takes the female’s head into his mouth and later sucks on her feet, one at a time. Should these forms of oral stimulation precede copulation?

The male porcupine will thoroughly douse the female with urine before mating. (No comment.)

The female Praying Mantis decapitates the male and eats his head during copulation as a form of fodder. (His nether parts continue to thrust.) Is nature saying that males should literally lose their heads in love? Should sex literally consume us? Is the Mantis’ nature a wry comment on the value of male’s brains?

Rhinoceri mate continuously for one and a half hours. The male ejaculates numerous times with his two-feet-long penis. For chimpanzees, it is all over in less than 30 seconds. Which scenario provides the natural model for humans?

Perhaps it is fortunate that humans do not follow the lead of other species in their sexual practices. We would be hard-pressed to demonstrate that any human sexual practice is unnatural—if by unnatural we refer to acts without animal analogues. The only universal cross-species pattern of sexual behaviour is some form of procreative sex.