

CHAPTER 1

Human Sexuality: An Introduction

Sex is perfectly natural. It's something that's pleasurable. It's enjoyable and it enhances a relationship. So why don't we learn as much as we can about it and become comfortable with ourselves as sexual human beings because we are all sexual?

Sue Johanson, Canadian sex educator

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Objectives

1. Identify the various elements that make up the concept of human sexuality
2. Know the importance of body image for your sexuality
3. Review the nature of sexual decisions and the four themes of making sexual decisions
4. Discuss technology, sexuality, and apps
5. Review the various influences on making sexual decisions
6. Understand the evolution and status of sex education programs in the United States



(Zach Caudle)

Truth OR Fiction?

- T / F** 1. Women make and break virginity pledges more than men.
- T / F** 2. The “hookup culture” (casual sex) is now the predominant sexual value.
- T / F** 3. Comprehensive sex education is mandated in the UK from the primary grades through high school.
- T / F** 4. Believing that a good sexual relationship is something you need to work at is negatively associated with sexual quality.
- T / F** 5. In a high school, if there are more females than males, males are less likely to be romantic or to commit to one partner.

Answers: 1. T 2. F 3. T 4. F 5. T

Courses in human sexuality always fill quickly to capacity and are viewed as “more interesting than other courses” (King et al., 2019b). Sexuality is a core aspect of our being, from reproduction to a sense of self to exhilarating experiences. That sexuality is of prime importance in our lives is the reason for our focus on making informed decisions. Below are examples of situations requiring informed decisions about our sexuality:

- You have just met someone at a party or bar. You’ve had a couple of drinks and are flirting. Your partner flirts back. How soon and what types of sexual activities are appropriate with this person?
- Your partner watches a lot of porn. Do you join in? Confront your partner? Ignore the behavior?

- You have a sexually transmitted infection (STI), have had an abortion, or have previously engaged in sexual behavior your partner does not know about. Do you tell your partner?

These scenarios reflect the need to make decisions about dilemmas such as the timing of introducing sex into a new relationship, the role of pornography, and the timing of revealing sexual secrets. A primary goal of this text is to emphasize the relentlessness of the sexual challenges that confront us and the importance of making deliberate and informed sexual decisions throughout our lives.

Our society also makes decisions about social policies on sexuality, including the availability of abortions, emergency contraception as an over-the-counter medication, the legalization of same-sex marriages, and the nature of sex education in the public school system.

Sexual decisions remain at the core of who we are as individuals and as a nation. Making informed decisions involves knowledge of the psychological, physical, and social consequences of those decisions. Having a partner comfortable with their own sexuality was important to 92% of the 5,500 respondents in Match.com's *Singles in America survey* (2016).

In relation to making sexual decisions, a major theme of this text is positive sexuality (see insert).

Themes of Positive Sexuality

Another term for positive sexuality is sex positivity. The themes behind the term were identified by Ivanski and Kohut (2017). These were based on the thoughts of 52 professionals in sexuality and relationships:

Personal beliefs about sexuality—these include that sex is good as long as no one is being harmed, it encompasses beliefs about women's rights (e.g. to enjoy sex free of negative labeling), and it requires consent of the parties.

Education about sexuality—individuals are informed of basic aspects of sex, anatomy, pregnancy, pregnancy prevention, abortion, STIs. Information emphasizes diversity in ages and sexual orientations and is presented in an open, nonjudgmental way.

Health and safety—individuals use contraception and condoms.

Respect for the individual—includes respect for individual choice, abstinence as a valid option, self-acceptance about your own choices and the choices of others.

Positive relationships with others—includes being accepting of the diversity in genders, sexual identities, and preferences of others.

Negative aspects—sex positivity can lead to oversexualization, particularly in the media; it can promote the idea that everyone should have sex, be judgmental of those who do not have a positive relationship with sex, and cause people to feel pressured into doing things they are not comfortable with.

Self-Assessment 1-1: Sexual Importance Scale



Instructions

Respond to the following questions as truthfully as you can. There are no wrong or right answers. Use the following criteria as you place a check mark above the number indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

1 (Disagree strongly), 2 (Mostly disagree), 3 (Disagree a little), 4 (Neither agree nor disagree),
5 (Agree a little), 6 (Mostly agree), 7 (Agree strongly)

1. ☐ Having a regular sex partner is one of the most important benefits of marriage or other long-term relationships.
2. ☐ I expect my partner to make being a good lover a high priority in our relationship.
- 3.* ☐ Paying attention to each other sexually is one of the most important things couples should do to be happy together.
4. ☐ Couples would be happier if they spent more time making love.
5. ☐ When I am choosing a partner, average looks are okay as long as they are a good lover.
6. ☐ If I knew that I would not get caught, I could see myself doing something illegal to obtain sex.
7. ☐ When I am choosing a partner, it is okay if they are not that smart as long as they are a good lover.
8. ☐ If my partner wanted me to work less and spend more time making love, I would try to do as they wished.
9. ☐ I would feel justified in getting a divorce if I were not sexually satisfied.
10. ☐ If my partner refused to have sex with me after a reasonable amount of time in a dating relationship, I would feel justified in dumping them.
11. ☐ I would dump someone that I liked if I thought they were not good in bed.
12. ☐ When I am choosing a partner, it is okay if they don't have much money as long as they are a good lover.
13. ☐ I would do almost anything to obtain a peak sexual experience.
- 14.* ☐ Paying attention to each other sexually is the most important thing couples should do to be happy together.
15. ☐ I would *not* endanger my health for sex.
16. ☐ There is nothing more important in a long-term relationship than a good sex life.
17. ☐ Sex is *not* that big of a deal to me.

Scoring Instructions and Norms

Reverse-score items 15 and 17. If you selected a 1 for these items, write a 7; if you selected a 2 for these items, write a 6; and so on. After reverse-scoring, add the items. Your score will range from 17 to 119, with a midpoint of 68. Of 89 males, the average score was 60.28; of 150 females, the average score was 50.47. The higher the score, the more important sex is to the individual.

Source: Dossett, J. (2014, November). *How important is sex? The development and validation of the sexual importance scale*. Presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, Omaha, NE. Used by permission of J. Dossett.

* Psychological surveys sometimes contain duplicate entries to help researchers control for individuals who answer the questions at random or without much thought.

Comfort with visible body parts varies by culture. In the United States, the naked breasts of an adult female are viewed as erotic and are not to be displayed in public, as demonstrated in recent debates about breastfeeding in public. However, among the Xavante Indian tribe in Brazil, women's breasts are openly displayed and have a neutral erotic stimulus value. In the United States, we feel the penis should not be exposed in public, whereas in European cultures, it is seen as neutral. Consider public statuary: Michelangelo's *David-Apollo* caused an uproar when it was exhibited on tour in the United States.



1.1 Defining Human Sexuality

Human sexuality is a multifaceted concept. No one definition can capture its complexity. Instead, human sexuality can best be understood in terms of various factors.



(Amberlynn Bishop)

Each person looks in the mirror and “sees” the degree to which they are a sexual person.

1.1a Thoughts

The thoughts we have about sexual phenomena are a major component of human sexuality. Indeed, the major “sex organ” of the human body is the brain. The thoughts a person has about sexual behavior—through previous experience, pornography, movies, and the media—will impact the behavior that person is motivated to engage in. Thoughts about sex are important since they may be inaccurate. For example, males tend to think that “Sex is meant to be quick, without foreplay, and that the man should always be on top.” Similarly, females tend to think that they “should play a passive and receptive role in sexual activities” (Nobre et al., 2003). Having positive thoughts about your sexual well-being, particularly among women, is also associated with life satisfaction (Stephenson & Meston, 2015).

1.1b Sexual Self-Concept

Your **sexual self-concept** is the way you think or feel about your body, while your **sexual self-efficacy** is how you feel about your own competence to function sexually and be a

good sexual partner (Rowland et al., 2015). For women, Frost et al. (2018) used “body scent, buttocks, chest or breasts, appearance of eyes, sex drive, sex activities, face, head hair, and skin condition” as a measure of “sexual attractiveness” in their revision of the Body Esteem Scale. Komarnicky et al. (2019) also found that viewing one’s genitals positively influenced one’s body image. Feeling positively about one’s body is related to the quality of one’s romantic relationship via their own sexual satisfaction (Van den Brink et al., 2018). A study of 53 women ages 29–47 in heterosexual relationships revealed that a poor body image was associated with low dyadic and solitary sexual desire. A low body image also promoted distracting thoughts (e.g. “Does he think I’m fat?”) while engaged in sexual activity with one’s partner (Dosch et al., 2016). Other researchers have confirmed low body image among women (Carvalho et al., 2017). However, men also struggle with body-satisfaction concerns (particularly penis size), which sometimes translates into not seeking early intervention for sex-related illnesses

Sexual self-concept

The way you think and feel about your body, self-evaluation of your interest in sex, and evaluation of yourself as a sexual partner

Sexual self-efficacy

The way you think and feel about your own competence to function sexually or to be a good sexual partner

such as testicular cancer (Johnston et al., 2014). Research indicates that body image may also be an issue for trans men and women, and this may put trans men at higher risks of developing an eating disorder (Witcomb et al., 2015).

For women, Frost et al. (2018) used “waist, thighs, body build, hips, legs, figure or physique, appearance of stomach, weight” as a measure of “weight concern” in their revision of the Body Esteem Scale. Being “over” weight is a major issue in US dating culture. Women often think they are less valuable and attractive if their weight does not approximate the cultural ideal. Morotti and colleagues (2013) noted that lean women reported more frequent intercourse and more orgasms than obese women. Similarly, in a survey of 1,357 heterosexual women between the ages of 18 and 29, respondents reported that sexual satisfaction increased as body image improved (Breuer & Pericak, 2014).

A major source of your body image is your romantic partner. Meltzer and McNulty (2014) emphasized that:

... body valuation by a committed male partner is positively associated with women’s relationship satisfaction when that partner also values them for their nonphysical qualities, but negatively associated with women’s relationship satisfaction when that partner is not committed or does not value them for their nonphysical qualities. (p. 68)

Hence, one’s relationship and the partner’s level of commitment have a powerful effect on one’s sexual self-concept.

In the United States, entire industries encourage people to feel bad about their physical attributes, such as weight, breast size, hair loss, wrinkles, and varicose veins, with advertising designed to create body shame and urge consumers to seek relief through buying the latest products for dieting or skin care. When actress Jane Fonda, now in her late 80s, was asked how she could look so young, she replied, “A lot of money.”

Self-love is about respecting and appreciating every single part of who you are, and being proud to be you.

Miya Yamanouchi, *Embrace Your Sexual Self: A Practical Guide for Women*

We don’t want to eat hot fudge sundaes as much as we want our lives to be hot fudge sundaes.

Geneen Roth, *Women, Food and God: An Unexpected Path to Almost Everything*

Sex is like money—only too much is enough.

John Updike, novelist

1.1c Values

Sexual values are moral guidelines for making sexual decisions in one’s relationships. Among the various sexual values are absolutism, relativism, and hedonism.

Sexual values

Moral guidelines for making sexual decisions



Personal REFLECTION

Take a moment to express your thoughts about the following questions.

Sexual values and sexual behavior may not always be consistent. How often (if ever) have you made a sexual decision that was not consistent with your sexual values? If so, what influenced you to do so (alcohol, peer influence)? How did you feel about your decision then, and how do you feel about it now (guilt, regret, indifference)? There is a gender difference in regard to sexual regret: Women are more likely to regret casual sex, and men are more likely to regret missed sexual opportunities (Galperin et al., 2013).

Absolutism refers to a belief system based on the unconditional power and authority of religion, law, or tradition. Table 1-1 lists a breakdown of the sexual values of 13,070 undergraduate students surveyed on sexual values. Absolutist sexual values were reported by 13% of 3,068 male students and 15% of 10,002 female students queried (Hall & Knox, 2019).

What are the primary reasons for delaying one's sexual debut (the first time one has sexual/anal intercourse)? Of Australians who reported never having had sexual or anal intercourse, the primary reasons for doing so were being proud of being a virgin, not being ready, fearing negative outcomes (e.g. STI), and religion. However, over half of the respondents reported that they had engaged in some form of sexual activity, including deep kissing, sexual touching, or oral sex (Heywood et al., 2018). While religion was not the major influence for virginity among these adolescents, it remains a powerful social influence in that some religions teach that sexual intercourse is permissible only in marriage. An example is True Love Waits, an international campaign designed to challenge teenagers and college students to remain sexually abstinent until marriage. Sponsored by LifeWay Christian Resources, the program requires young people to agree to the absolutist position and sign a commitment to the following:

Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate, and my future children to a lifetime of purity including sexual abstinence from this day until the day I enter a biblical marriage relationship. (Lifeway, 2014)

In a sample of 961 undergraduates, 39% of women and 21% of men (34% total) reported having made an abstinence pledge. Among those who made an abstinence pledge, 65% of women and 52% of men (62% total) reported breaking their pledge (Barnett et al., 2018).

I am not saying renounce sex, I am saying transform it. It need not remain just biological: bring some spirituality to it.

Osho, Indian mystic (1931–1990)

To have her here in bed with me, breathing on me, her hair in my mouth — I count that something of a miracle.

Henry Miller, novelist and playwright

Eighty college students at a Christian university were surveyed about the disparity between what they had been taught and what they personally believed. While 60% reported that they were taught to abstain from sexual intercourse until marriage, about one-third were comfortable with, were engaging in, or were contemplating premarital sex. Reflecting this transition, one respondent noted, “I know that premarital sex is wrong; however, I think it should depend on the couple and relationship.” A conservative

Christian student who was asked how she reconciled her sexual relationship with her religious teachings replied, “That’s easy. I just ignore the teachings and do what works for us” (Williams et al., 2014). In regard to sexual values over time, researchers have found an increase in premarital permissiveness over a 30-year period, with a decrease in religious attendance and an increase in education as influential variables (Elias et al., 2015).

Absolutism

A belief system based on the unconditional power and authority of religion, law, or tradition

Relativism

Sexual value that emphasizes that sexual decisions should be made in the context of a particular situation

Relativism

Relativism is a value system emphasizing that sexual decisions should be made in the context of a particular situation. Table 1-1 reveals that 55% of the male respondents and 62% of the females reported having relativist sexual values. Whereas an absolutist might feel that it is wrong for unmarried people to have intercourse, a relativist might feel that the moral correctness of sex outside marriage depends on the particular situation. For example, a relativist might feel that sex between casual dating partners is wrong in some situations, such as when one partner pressures or lies to the partner in

order to persuade them to have sex. Yet in other cases, when there is no deception or coercion and the dating partners are practicing safer sex, intercourse between casual dating partners may be viewed as acceptable.

Netting and Reynolds (2018) reported on the changes in sexual values among Canadians over a 30-year period. Contrary to the claims of popular media, casual sex (“hookup culture”) has not replaced romantic relationships as the most common context for student sexual behavior. While individuals may go through a period of hedonism, relationship sex is the preferred value.

TABLE 1-1 | Sexual Values of 13,070 Undergraduates

Respondents	Absolutism	Relativism	Hedonism
Male students (N = 3,068)	13%	55%	32%
Female students (N = 10,002)	15%	62%	23%

Data Source: Hall, S., & Knox, D. (2019). [Relationship and sexual behaviors of a sample of 13,070 university students.] Unpublished raw data, Ball State University, Muncie, IN, and East Carolina University, Greenville, NC.

Hedonism

Hedonism is the sexual value that reflects the philosophy that the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain provide the ultimate value and motivation for sexual behavior.

Table 1-1 reveals that, of the 3,068 undergraduate males studied, 32% reported having hedonist sexual values, as did 23% of the 10,002 undergraduate females. Hedonism is sometimes contextual. Tourists sometimes regard being on vacation as being in a “hedonistic zone of exception” (Berdychevsky, 2017). The slogan, “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” is a commercial for hedonism.

The hedonist’s sexual values are reflected in the creed, “If it feels good, do it.” Hedonists are sensation seekers. They tend to pursue novel, exciting, and optimal levels of stimulation and arousal, and their goal is pleasure.

Data analysis from 30 institutions across the United States on single heterosexual college students (N = 3,907), ages 18–25, revealed that in a month prior to the survey, more men (19%) than women (7%) reported having had casual sex. The researchers also found that casual sex was negatively associated with psychological well-being (defined in reference to self-esteem and life satisfaction) and positively associated with psychological distress such as anxiety and depression, with no gender differences (Bersamin et al., 2014). In a sample of 12,401 adolescents, suicide ideation was more frequent among individuals in casual sexual relationships compared to those in stable relationships (Sandberg-Thoma & Kamp Dush, 2014). See the insert on *The Experience of Casual Sex*.

What is the impact of one’s sexual history on divorce and marital satisfaction? Wolfinger (2018) confirmed that virgins who marry have the lowest divorce rate, although that might be related to one’s religious beliefs about divorce. Beyond that finding, having multiple or a few sexual partners does not seem to make a significant difference in the divorce rate. But what about the impact of one’s sexual history on marital satisfaction? Analysis of national data revealed that for both women and men the fewer the sexual partners, the more likely the person is to report being very happily married. This finding was truer for men than women. For example, for women who had one sexual partner, 64% reported being very happily married; for men, 71% reported being very happily married. For women reporting having had 6–10 partners, 52% reported being very happily married; men, 62%.

You have exactly one life in which to do everything you’ll ever do. Act accordingly.

Colin Wright, international speaker

Hedonism

Sexual value that reflects a philosophy that the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the ultimate values and motivation for sexual behavior

The Experience of Casual Sex*

Researchers Farvid and Braun (2017) interviewed 30 ethnically diverse, heterosexual women and men (ages 18 to 46) in New Zealand about their experiences with casual sex. Various themes emerged.

Thrilling Context to Be/Do Whatever

Aside from casual sex being a new, anxious, thrilling experience, one 25-year-old female reported that she enjoyed the fact that she could be completely uninhibited and do whatever she wanted. She noted that, with a boyfriend, she felt scripted but with someone she did not know and who did not know her, “We can do lots of things I don’t normally do ... cause I don’t care what his image is of me.”

Newness in Contrast to the Usual and Dull

Casual sex was also described as a departure from the mundane. One 33-year-old male said, “... things with the same person would get kinda dull but you can do the same things you like with different people and it never gets boring.”

The Value of Flirting

For some, the casual sex was fun due to the flirting beforehand. “... it’s the talking about it without talking about it” thing, where you hint to each other that you’re gonna go home and have sex. For many, the actual sex was disappointing in terms of physical pleasure; the fun was the new partner, the context, the flirting.

Forbidden, Naughty, Unusual

Others said that casual sex crossed boundaries, such as sex with a friend, sex in public, or sex in a van. It was the deviousness that made the encounter exciting.

Ego Boost

Some men thought of casual sex as an ego boost, that they were able to take a woman down. “... I scored this cheerleader from Alabama University or something.” Some women had a similar ego experience in that they were able to get a “really good looking, really popular guy” to take them home for sex. The meaning was in the conquest.

Awkward and Tricky

Feeling anxious, awkward, and uncomfortable are terms used by some to describe their casual sex experience. “Not awkward, awkward ... but it becomes better if you know someone over a period of time.” The difficulty of negotiating the sex and the morning after were sometimes uncomfortable.

Casual Sex as Deficient

Women respondents often talked of the downside of casual sex—quick, unemotional, drunken. “... there’s just nothing there.” Some men had a similar experience, comparing casual sex to meeting a need, like eating to reduce hunger ... not fulfilling. “... in some ways it’s actually nice to even just spend close comfortable time with someone you really care about than to have sex with someone you don’t ...”

Summary

The researchers summarized the reactions to casual sex by saying that the participants identified both positives and negatives but “ultimately claimed a preference for relationship sex as more pleasureable, more meaningful, and better than casual sex” (p.86).

*Adapted and abridged from Farvid P. and V. Braun 2017. Unpacking the “pleasures” and “pains” of heterosexual casual sex: Beyond singular understandings. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 54 (1), pp. 73–90.

Sexual double standard

One standard for women and another for men regarding sexual behavior (In the United States, for example, it is normative for men to have more sexual partners than women do.)

The **sexual double standard**—the view that encourages and accepts the sexual expression of men more than women—is reflected in Table 1-1. The double standard was also evident in a sample of Asian Americans with men expressing more liberal values for men initiating sex, having more sexual partners, and selecting a more conservative spouse (than single playgirl) (Guo, 2019).

Cultural labels for male hedonists include “real men,” “stud,” and “player,” whereas the cultural labels for female hedonists include “whore” and “slut.” It appears

that men in the United States gain status from having sex with a number of partners, while women are more vulnerable to gaining a bad reputation. However, the double standard is decreasing. Stewart-Williams et al. (2017) found that both women and men were reluctant to get involved in a long-term relationship with someone who had an extensive sexual history.

Another example of the double standard revealed that women respondents reported discomfort in initiating sexual interaction for fear of disapproval (Fetterolf & Sanchez, 2015). After sex, some women may also feel guilty and ashamed and experience a drop in self-esteem if they believe that permissive sexual attitudes are unacceptable (Coffman & Jozkowski, 2015). These studies reflect the proverbial “walk of shame” ... the morning after the night that the woman slept over at the guy’s dorm and is walking back to her place.

Finally, sexually hedonistic women use various strategies to mitigate their exposure to disapproval and stigma: detach from religion, withhold information about their sexual behavior from significant others, and reduce their expectations of a future relationship developing from a hookup encounter (Fulle et al., 2015). On the other hand, some women don’t buy into the double standard and feel that seeking sexual pleasure gives them a sense of empowerment (Grose, 2014).

If a girl gets a random hookup, it’s like “Oh, she’s a whore,” but if a guy gets a hookup, it’s like “Bump my fist.”

Respondents in hookup research by Yazedjian, Toews, and Daniel (2014)

1.1d Emotions

Love and intimacy are contexts that influence the expression of sexual behavior (Jardin et al., 2017). Intimacy is a multi-dimensional concept that includes being sensitive to the needs of another, feeling emotional closeness with another, sharing thoughts and feelings with another, and listening reflectively/empathetically to what another is experiencing. Women have traditionally been socialized to experience sex in the context of an emotional relationship. The fact that men are more often hedonists and women are more often absolutists and relativists indicates that an emotional context has value for a higher proportion of women than for men.

Emotional heartbreak is also associated with changes in sexual values. Analysis of data on 286 never-married undergraduates who reported having experienced one or more romantic breakups revealed significant changes in regard to becoming more liberal. Specifically, respondents who were absolutist became more relativistic and those who were relativistic became more hedonistic (Hilliard et al., 2019c).

We want things not because we have reasons for them; we have reasons for them because we want them.

Arthur Schopenhauer, German philosopher

1.1e Behaviors

The term *human sexuality* implies a variety of behaviors. Definitions of what constitutes having had sex vary, with most heterosexuals agreeing that vaginal (5.9 on a 6 point scale) and anal (5.6 on a 6 point scale) intercourse constitute “having had sex,” but less agreement (3.8) on oral sex being defined as “having sex.” These data are from an analysis of 300 heterosexual respondents ages 18–30 (Horowitz & Bedford, 2017). The meanings and behavioral definitions of sex presented here refer to the hetero-normative model. The “gold standard” for sex to gay men is anal sex, with no clear standard for lesbians (Sewell, 2017).

Virginity is a concept that is often muddled. Rather than dichotomous—you are or are not a virgin—a three-part view of virginity might be adopted: oral sex, vaginal sex, and anal sex. No longer is the term *virgin* synonymous with absence of sexual

behaviors in any one of these three areas. Rather, whether an individual has engaged in each of the three behaviors must be identified. Hence, an individual would not just say, “I am a virgin.” Rather, the individual would state, “I am an oral virgin,” or “intercourse virgin,” or “anal virgin,” as the case may be. We have been referring to heterosexual virginity. Huang (2018) confirmed that homosexual males refer to experiencing receptive or penetrative anal sex as having lost their virginity. Lesbians are more diffuse with some reporting that genital fondling could count as loss of virginity (Ellis & Walters, 2018). Regardless, virginity loss is not a salient topic in the LGBTQIA community and is superseded by topics such as coming out.

Another way to express becoming sexually active is by saying that you have made your sexual debut. This has a less negative connotation than the common phrase “lost my virginity,” as you have not lost something by becoming sexually active.



National DATA

Based on a survey of 5,865 adult respondents ages 20–24 in the United States, 83% of men and 64% of women reported having masturbated alone (rather than with a partner) in the past 12 months. In addition, 63% of the men and 70% of the women reported having received oral sex from their heterosexual partner, and 6% of the men and 9% of the women received oral sex in same-sex encounters. “Having experienced vaginal intercourse” was reported by 63% of men and 80% of women, and 23% of women reported engaging in penile-anal intercourse with their male partner (Reece et al., 2012).

1.1f Anatomy and Physiology

The idea of sex often brings to mind the thought of naked bodies or anatomy. Hence, the term *human sexuality* implies sexual anatomy, referring to external genitalia, secondary sex characteristics such as a deepened voice in males and breast development in females, and internal reproductive organs, including ovaries and testes. *Physiology* refers to how the parts work or the functioning of the genitals and reproductive system.

1.1g Reproduction

The term human sexuality includes reproduction of the species. Sociobiologists, who believe that social behavior has a biological basis, emphasize that much of the sexual interaction that occurs between men and women has its basis in the drive to procreate. Indeed, the perpetuation of the species depends on the sperm and egg uniting. Ferreira et al. (2019) analyzed 16 years of data of calls and emails to “Sex Sense,” an information referral source in Canada. Women asked more about contraception, emergency contraceptive pills, and pregnancy, while men asked about sexually transmitted infections, general sexual health, and pleasure. Hence, the focus of women was on preventing reproduction while men focused on avoiding the negative outcomes (STIs).

1.1h Interpersonal Relationships

Although masturbation and sexual fantasies can occur outside the context of a relationship, much of sexuality occurs in the context of interpersonal relationships. Such relationships vary—heterosexual, bisexual, pansexual or homosexual; nonmarital, marital, or extramarital; casual or intimate; personal or business-related (as in webcam sex or sex work); and brief or long-term. The type of emotional and social relationship a couple has affects the definition and quality of their sexual relationship. Indeed, relationship satisfaction is associated with sexual satisfaction (Stephenson et al., 2013). The comment to a partner, “I can’t fight with you all day and want to have sex with you at night” illustrates the impact of the social context on the sexual experience.

Partners in committed relationships report the highest sexual satisfaction (Farvid & Braun, 2017). Whitton and colleagues (2013) found that female college students who were involved in committed dating relationships reported fewer depressive symptoms. Sexuality in the context of a romantic relationship has also been associated with general health (Becasen et al., 2015).

*They told me, “Be sensible with your new love
Don’t be fooled thinking this is the last you’ll find”
But they never stood in the dark with you, love
When you take me in your arms and drive me slowly out of my mind.*

Mel Carter, “Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me,”
written and arranged by David Noble (1952).
Vocal Popular Sheet Music Collection, score 1067,
via the Digital Commons.



Technology and Sexuality 1-1: There’s an App for That!

How people interact with the world around them has changed dramatically over the last 20 years. Instead of relying on newspapers, magazines, and radio to get information, people now turn to their smartphones and tablets, where they can access everything the internet has to offer. Young adults 18–29 are the most connected group in the United States, with 99% of that population owning a cell phone (Pew Research Center, 2019c). Apps may be used for casual sex, but also for dating and networking for people of all sexual orientations (Wu & Ward, 2018). Sawyer (2018) surveyed 509 heterosexual undergraduates, 40% of whom reported having used a dating app. When compared to non-app users, dating app users were more likely to report having unprotected vaginal and anal sex in the last 3 months, more lifetime sexual partners, and using drugs before having sex.

While not every app is related to sexuality, many are. You can find spreadsheets to help you keep track of how often you’re having sex, truth-or-dare games, guides to new sexual positions, and interactive apps sponsored by condom manufacturers that include everything from sex trivia to product information. There seems to be no limit to the type of app available, which might explain why the expression “There’s an app for that” has become part of our culture. With sexuality apps, and social networking and dating apps like Tinder™, people are accessing sexuality content more often than ever before. What are the individual, relationship, and societal impacts of this avalanche of sexuality apps?

Research helps to evaluate the impact of apps on sexuality. Some argue that because apps make it easier for people to hook up, they may increase the risk of contracting an STI. Hahn et al. (2018) noted that the more time individuals spent interacting on their app before meeting the person, the less likely they were to engage in high-risk sexual behavior.

There might be some benefits to sex apps. They can be used as sources of sexual health education, since some provide answers to questions about everything from sexual positions to contraceptive options. Using apps as a means of providing sexual health education can be vital in a country where comprehensive sexuality education is not available to everyone. Some apps that list local health clinics providing free condoms might help to reduce the transmission of STIs.

Apps may be attractive in large part because users can explore their questions and interests from the privacy of their own smartphones. It’s important to keep in mind that sexuality-related apps are not always inherently good or bad—often, it’s how they are used that makes a difference in one’s life. Hence the presence of app technology is independent of the values that determine how it is used. For example, using a hookup app to cheat in a monogamous relationship is using technology in a way that is likely to have negative consequences for the couple’s relationship. But that same app may be used to find one’s lifetime partner.

1.1i Sexual Health

One's sexual health is also tied to the concept of sexuality. Having a positive view of one's sexuality, being free of STIs, guilt, and force are all part of one's sexual health. Campa et al. (2018) emphasized the need for sexual health programs to be available for a wide spectrum of populations. Epstein and Mamo (2017) noted that an academic focus on sexual health also serves to legitimize the study of sexuality.

Related to sexual health is sexual pleasure. According to the World Association for Sexual Health, the first 3 of 6 aspects to sexual pleasure are:

- Fundamental to anyone's sexual health and well-being is that the experience should be pleasurable, safe, and "free of discrimination, coercion, and violence";
- The human experience includes access to sources of sexual pleasure;
- Human rights include sexual rights. (World Association for Sexual Health, 2019)

1.1j Still Other Views

Silver et al. (2018) identified nine themes of sex including male-centric view (penis in vagina), heteronormative, orgasm imperative, interaction (consensual), and humor ("slip the P in the V"). These themes reflect the complexity of human sexuality. Increasingly, to be free of being sexually active is also considered having sexual well-being (Lorimer et al., 2019).

1.2 Nature of Sexual Decisions

Whenever we are confronted with a sexual decision, at least five factors are involved:

1. Not to decide is to decide.
2. Decisions involve trade-offs.
3. Decisions include selecting a positive or negative view.
4. Decisions can produce ambivalence and uncertainty.
5. Some decisions are revocable; some are not.

1.2a Not to Decide Is to Decide

Not making a decision is a decision by default. For example, if you are having oral, vaginal, or anal intercourse and do not make a conscious decision to use a condom or dental dam, you have inadvertently made a decision to increase your risk for contracting a sexually transmitted infection—including HIV. If you are having vaginal intercourse and do not decide to use contraception, you have decided to risk pregnancy. If you do not monitor and restrict your alcohol or drug use at parties or in a new relationship, you have made a decision to drift toward unprotected sex (or increase the risk of sexual assault). Widman et al. (2018) noted that individuals can learn to make conscious decisions about their sexual behavior (e.g. being sexually assertive to alert a partner what you do not want/what you want, STI protection).

1.2b Decisions Involve Trade-Offs

All the decisions you make will involve trade-offs or disadvantages and advantages. The decision to cheat on your partner may provide excitement, but it may also produce feelings of guilt and lead to the breakup of your relationship. The decision to tell your partner of an indiscretion may deepen your feelings of intimacy, but by doing so, you may run the risk of your partner leaving you. The decision to have an abortion may enable you to avoid the hardship of continuing an unwanted pregnancy; however, it can sometimes involve feelings of guilt, anxiety, or regret—especially in a social context in which abortion is stigmatized or where access is limited. Likewise, the decision to continue an unwanted pregnancy may enable you to experience the joy of having a child, but it may also involve the hardships of inopportune parenting.

1.2c Decisions Include Selecting a Positive or Negative View

Regardless of your circumstances, you can choose to focus on the positive aspects of a difficult situation and to approach it as a problem to be solved. A positive problem-solving approach can be used in every situation. For example, the discovery of your partner having an affair can be viewed as an opportunity to open channels of communication and strengthen your relationship. Another example of choosing a positive view is a woman who contracted genital herpes due to repeated casual sex. She viewed her STI as a wake-up call to be more discriminating in the selection of her sexual partners. “It was a wake-up call to sexual responsibility,” she said.

1.2d Decisions Can Produce Ambivalence and Uncertainty

Deciding among options often creates **ambivalence**—conflicting feelings that produce uncertainty or indecisiveness about your course of action.

Ambivalence can occur in the presence of many options. In the United States, for example, a young unmarried couple facing an unplanned pregnancy has several options. The woman can choose to have an abortion, place the baby up for adoption, or rear the baby in a single-parent home. The couple can decide to stay together, perhaps even marry, and keep the baby. While many people navigate these choices without regret, for some, choosing any one of these options can cause ambivalence. Long after the fact, some people may still wonder if they made the right choice.

1.2e Some Decisions Are Revocable; Some Are Not

Some sexual decisions are revocable—they can be changed. For example, a person who has chosen to have sex with multiple partners can subsequently decide to be faithful to one partner or to abstain from sexual relations. An individual who has accepted being sexually unsatisfied in an ongoing relationship (“I never told him how to get me off”) can decide to address the issue or seek sex therapy with that partner.

Although many sexual decisions can be modified or changed, some cannot. You cannot eliminate the effects of some sexually transmissible infections or undo an abortion. However, it is possible to learn from past decisions. Reflecting on good and poor decisions can provide useful information for current and future decisions.

Ambivalence

Conflicting feelings that coexist, producing uncertainty or indecisiveness about a person, object, idea, or course of action

1.3 Making Sexual Decisions

1.3a Four Themes of Sexual Decision-Making by Women

Various themes are involved in making a sexual decision. In 2015, two researchers (Cooper & Gordon, 2015) surveyed the sexual decision-making process of a group of New Zealand women who had previously participated in casual sex without a condom. In interviews with 11 respondents, four major themes of sexual decision-making emerged. Although the sample was small, it revealed a pattern of unhealthy decisions specific to women.

The first theme was the importance of being in a relationship:

I have sex with someone to date them ... and hope they will call again. ... [T]he idea is that you're having casual sex with a guy ... and then it will turn into a relationship, if you have sex often enough—that's mental. But a lot of girls see it as a way into a relationship with someone.

A second theme was the influence of alcohol:

It loosens you up, and your inhibitions run wild. ... [Y]ou're freer, you would go and talk to strangers, and be more confident and flirt a bit more, and stuff like that, because you sort of think you can do anything when you're drunk; there's no consequences.

A third theme was the need to be seen as normal:

When all your friends are having sex, you feel like you are missing out 'cause you are not doing it; ... you're not cool because you are not doing [it]. ... [I]t kind of felt okay to do it because everyone else was doing it.

A final theme was a feeling of powerlessness in negotiating condom use:

If you say no to them, they might not like you; or think, "Oh, if I say no, that's going to be the end of our night ... and then they won't call me [the] next day, or whatever." And I suppose you don't want them going back to their friends ... and tell them what happened; ... they might be like, "That dumb bitch didn't give me any."

Showing a pattern of disempowered decisions about sexual involvement—as a means of securing affection, involving the abuse of alcohol to reduce inhibition, yielding to cultural and peer pressure, and submitting to unprotected sex for fear of rejection or public shaming—these findings reveal a disturbing inequity and lack of agency in women's experience of sexual relationships.

1.3b Deciding to Improve One's Sexual Growth

How important is working on your sexual relationship to make it a good one? **Sexual growth** is the term for sexual satisfaction that results from work and effort with one's partner with the goal of a mutually satisfying sexual relationship. *Self-assessment 1–2* provides a way to determine the degree of your sexual growth beliefs.

Sexual growth

The term for sexual satisfaction that results from work and effort with one's partner for a good sex life

Self-Assessment 1-2:

Sexual Growth Beliefs Measure



Write the number to the left of each item that reflects your level of disagreement/agreement:

1 (Disagree strongly), 2 (Mostly disagree), 3 (Disagree a little), 4 (Neither agree nor disagree),
5 (Agree a little), 6 (Mostly agree), 7 (Agree strongly)

1. ___ Sexual satisfaction often fluctuates over the course of a relationship.
2. ___ A satisfying sexual relationship evolves through hard work and resolution of incompatibilities.
3. ___ In order to maintain a good sexual relationship, a couple needs to exert time and energy.
4. ___ Successful sexual relationships require regular maintenance.
5. ___ Without acknowledging romantic partners' different sexual interests, a sexual relationship cannot improve.
6. ___ A satisfying sexual relationship is partly a matter of learning to resolve sexual differences with a partner.
7. ___ Making compromises for a partner is part of a good sexual relationship.
8. ___ Working through sexual problems is a sign that a couple has a strong bond.
9. ___ In a relationship, maintaining a satisfying sex life requires effort.
10. ___ Sexual desire is likely to ebb and flow (i.e., change) over the course of a relationship.
11. ___ Communicating about sexual issues can bring partners closer together.
12. ___ Acknowledging each other's differing sexual interests is important for a couple to enhance their sex life.
13. ___ Even satisfied couples will experience sexual challenges at times.

Total score _____

Scoring

Add the numbers you wrote before each item to obtain a total score. The higher your total score (91 is the highest possible score), the greater your beliefs in sexual growth—that sexual satisfaction is a function of hard work and effort with your partner to resolve sexual incompatibilities. The lower your score (13 is the lowest possible score), the less you believe that sexual growth results from effort. A score of 49 places you at the midpoint between not believing that hard work and effort is necessary for sexual growth and believing that effort is important. Maxwell et al. (2017) conducted several studies and found that sexual growth beliefs were moderately positively associated with both sexual and relationship quality.

Source: Maxwell, J. A., A. Muise, G. MacDonald, I. C. Day, N. O. Rosen, & E. A. Impett, 2017, How implicit theories of sexuality shape sexual and relationship well-being. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 112(2), pp. 238–279.

1.3c Spatial Context of Sex

Sexual decisions are made in a spatial context. While the most frequent context for sex is in a bed at night, Struckman-Johnson et al. (2017) reported on sex in parked cars. Analysis of data from 195 men and 511 women revealed about 60% reported engaging in sexual behavior while in a parked car. Most respondents were in serious but noncohabiting romantic relationships (not hookups), penile-vaginal intercourse/genital touching were the most common sexual behaviors, and the back seat of a standard car was the most frequent context. Most respondents regarded the experience as positive both sexually and romantically, however 2.5 percent of the men and 4.3 percent of the women reporting being coerced.

1.4 Influences on Sexual Decisions

Whether sexual decisions operate at the micro (individual) or macro (societal) level, various cultural, social, and psychological influences are involved.

1.4a Culture

The culture in which individuals grow up and live impacts their ideas about sex and interpersonal behavior. In Japan, Rorikon, is an abbreviation for “Lolita Complex.” In a sex shop in Tokyo, life-size models of girls, their breasts at various stages of puberty, are for sale. Young Japanese females learn early that to be sexual is to be wanted.

Rickman (2018) noted the degree to which being interested in celebrity culture has an impact on romantic relationships. The ratio of females to males in one’s high school is also influential. Harknett and Cranney (2017) analyzed the behavior of 12,617 high school students and noted that when female classmates were more numerous than male classmates and boys have the upper hand from a bargaining standpoint, the males are less likely to express desire for a romantic relationship (hence less commitment).

There are also cross-cultural variations in sexuality. For example, while premarital sex is increasing in India, it is still not widespread (Majumdar, 2018). And, although homosexual behavior has struggled for acceptance in the United States, in some other cultures, same-gender sexual behavior is regarded as a pathway to heterosexuality. Among the Sambia people of New Guinea’s Eastern Highlands province, preadolescent boys are taught to perform fellatio (oral sex) on older unmarried males and to ingest their sperm. They are told that it enables them to produce their own sperm in adulthood, thereby ensuring their ability to impregnate their wives (Mead, 1928).

1.4b Media

Media projects images of all types of genders, relationships, and sexuality. And these may have negative associations. Ward et al. (2018) found that undergraduate women who reported heavy exposure to women’s magazines, lifestyle reality TV, and situation comedies also reported greater self-sexualization, which in turn predicted more use of alcohol to feel sexual and more negative sexual affect. Similarly, social media has been criticized for contributing to women’s negative body images and self-concepts. Social media, specifically Snapchat®, conveys messages about sexuality. In a content analysis of 394 screenshots (“snaps”) involving sexuality, 87% were of females ... and mostly (78%) selfies (consensual). Forty percent were nudes, mostly of the breasts and buttocks (Yockery et al., 2019). Use of Facebook® can also be a source of negative emotions about

body image and consciousness. In a survey of 467 undergraduate women and 348 undergraduate men, Manago and colleagues (2015) found that Facebook involvement predicted objectified body consciousness, which in turn predicted greater body shame, particularly for women. For women, looking at images of peers and celebrity images on Instagram has been linked to dissatisfaction with their own bodies (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016).

Modern media also creates and reflects sexual norms. Lulu & Alkaff (2018) conducted a content analysis of the content of 60 articles in women's magazines from three contexts—Malaysia, the US, and Egypt—and found that empowerment of the female was the main theme but always in the context of traditional male-female roles in heterosexual relationships. Jozkowski et al. (2016) reported on how consent and negotiation of sex was reflected in 50 PG-rated films. Nonverbal cues predominated and previous penetrative sex made future sexual intercourse more likely.

Talk shows such as *Jerry Springer* regularly broadcast programs on infidelity, acquaintance rape, and porn addiction. And on MTV®, college students are shown on spring break amid a frenzy of alcohol and sex. Music videos often convey questionable sexual messages. Bleakley (2017) found an association between adolescent media exposure and combining alcohol and sex. Wolfe (2016a) also emphasized how the media creates dread and fear among those who have genital herpes.

1.4c Peers and Parents

Peers and parents are major influences on sexual behavior. Regarding peers, Montes et al. (2017) found that the perceived hookup attitudes of one's friends is associated with one's own hookup attitudes. Researchers have also confirmed that the perception of peer approval of hooking-up behavior influenced engaging in the behavior for both sexes (Napper et al., 2015). While peer approval is operative on both sexes, it is more often a motive for hooking up for male rather than female college students (Snapp et al., 2014). Peers are also a major source of sexual knowledge and sexual values. Your first source of information about sex was likely to have been your peers, and the sexual values of your closest friends are probably very similar to your own.

Quinn et al. (2019) emphasized the power of peers operative in gang contexts. They conducted 58 interviews with adolescent members of six gangs and identified the unspoken norms and expectations, including “sexing-in” (female gang members expected to have sex with members of the gang) and “running trains,” whereby members would line up and have sex with one female. Despite the prevalence of such practices, many gang members felt regret and remorse over their participation but noted it was just part of “the life”—confirming the power of context and group norms.

Various family factors—including parental behavior, family composition closeness/relationships, values, and economic resources—influence sexual decisions. For example, Weiser & Weigel (2017) found that parental infidelity is associated with an individual's own infidelity. How parents treat adolescents also impacts sexual behavior—adolescents who report child maltreatment or neglect also note higher numbers of sexual partners, casual sexual behavior, and being younger at first intercourse (Thibodeau et al., 2017). Also, a family's economic resources may influence one's decisions about what type of birth control to use, whether to seek sexual health care (such as Pap smears and mammograms), and whether to continue an unplanned pregnancy.

Communication is also important. “Clear communication between parents and their youth about sex is associated with higher rates of sexual abstinence, condom use, and intent to delay initiation of sexual intercourse, which can prevent STIs and unintended pregnancy” (Coakley et al., 2017b). An example of what a father said to his son follows:

We had this talk about how sex is like jail. I said, “You can do something for 10 seconds and be in an orange suit before the night is over if the condom breaks—hole in the condom—something happens. And you hope that she’s not pregnant.” (Coakley et al., 2017a, pp. 355–368)

Klein et al. (2018) found that adolescent females displaying sexual agency (making decisions and being assertive) reported parents who discussed sexuality with them and provided emotional support and encouraged autonomy. Grossman et al. (2018) reported that delay of first sexual intercourse and avoiding pregnancy are the primary topics messaged by parents. The researchers also noted the importance of extended kin as sources of sex education and that they are sometimes perceived as easier to talk to.

New cultural experiences also impact family values. Bacchus (2017) confirmed that second-generation South Asian American women were in conflict between tradition and current social forces. Often they would engage in premarital sexual behavior, lie to their parents, and live a double life. Hilliard et al. (2018) also found that the acquisition of new cultural values can strain family relationships. About a quarter of the 111 international students in their study who became involved in a romantic relationship with someone who they met in the United States did not tell their parents (e.g. they feared disapproval).



(Stacy Huff)

Texting permeates the lives of couples, often to the point of ignoring each other.

1.4d Technology

Digisexuality, the use of radical new sexual technologies (e.g. teledildonics, virtual sex, sex robots), is increasing (McArthur & Twist, 2016). Knox et al. (2017) surveyed 345 undergraduates about their attitudes toward the use of a sex doll. About 1 in 5 (17%) reported that they understood how someone could use a doll for sex. Cindy Gallop is an advertising consultant who emphasizes that the major impact of technology today (through its distribution of pornography on the internet) undermines young people’s capacity to connect emotionally and sexually with a partner. Her YouTube™ discussion (<http://bvtlab.com/8v88M>) exposes the atrocious myths that youth are buying as reality (such as the fallacy that all girls love to have their partner ejaculate on their faces) and the associated behaviors and lies some women feel are obligatory in order to maintain their relationships. Even “benign” pornography that is devoid of degradation or rape scenarios can set up unrealistic expectations that make real-life intimacy seem a diminished or “less than” experience for both sexes.

Has the internet changed anything about sexuality? Only this: Our obsession with the constant, intense, novel stimulation of the internet has rendered real sex with an actual person a bit less all-compelling than it used to be. We actually have to remember to pay attention during sex now.

Abbasi and Alghamdi (2018) noted how social media impacts relationship fidelity. Not only does spending a lot of time on social media decrease the amount of time available to one’s partner, such time is spent looking at and even considering alternatives available to the current partner.

A man cannot really be called (sexually) confident if he has never bought his woman a vibrator.

Mokokoma Mokhonoana,
“On Masturbation: A Satirical Essay”

Digisexuality

The use of radical new sexual technologies (e.g. teledildonics, virtual sex, sex robots)



National DATA

Ninety-six percent of Americans 18–29 own a smartphone.

Source: Pew Research Center. (2019, June 12). Mobile Fact Sheet: Who owns cellphones and smartphones? Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/mobile>.

Döring et al. (2017) compared the online activity of college males and females in four countries—Canada, Germany, Sweden, and the United States (N = 2,690). Finding sexual information (90%) and sexual entertainment (77%) were the most common behaviors. Browsing for sexual products (49%) and cybersex (31%) were also popular. Men showed both higher prevalence and frequency of use of sexually stimulating material online than did women. Students in all four countries were similar in their online sexual activity experiences.



Wolfe (2016b) noted that while daters on OKCupid® may start out seeking one partner, they are soon overwhelmed with a variety of partners. “Swiping through the Tinder® app fills the respondents’ brains with multiple possibilities.”

1.4e Education

Education level is a demographic that can help predict sexual behavior. Over 65 years ago, Alfred Kinsey and colleagues (1948) observed that college-educated men reported higher masturbation rates than those with only a high school education. The following *Social Policy 1–1* feature emphasizes the controversy over sex education in the public school system and the outcome of sex education for students. (The efficacy of human sexuality instruction at the college level has already been demonstrated by Angel et al., 2016).

Before the child ever gets to school it will have received crucial, almost irrevocable sex education and this will have been taught by the parents, who are not aware of what they are doing.

Mary Calderone, sex educator

1.4f Religion

Religion has a profound influence on one’s experience with sexuality. Longest and Uecker (2018) found that religious salience in individuals was related to delayed first sexual intercourse and fewer sexual partners. Similarly, Fox and Kuck (2018) found that undergraduates who reported higher levels of religiosity reported having fewer sexual partners in the last year. High religiosity is also associated with disapproval of the following: homosexuality, being involved in a “friends with benefits” relationship, cohabitation, hooking up, cheating, abortion, and using the internet to find a partner (e.g. internet partners would not be “heaven sent”) (Fox et al., 2019). Sexual guilt is also associated with higher religious attendance (Pearson, 2018). In this regard, Grubbs and Perry (2019) noted that religious individuals reported the most distress in viewing pornography. Langlais & Schwanz (2018) examined the degree to which couples

We tried ignorance for a very long time and it’s time we try education.

Joycelyn Elders, former surgeon general of the United States

All religions have something to say about sex, and it rarely coincides with scientific knowledge about sex and sexuality.

Darrel Ray, *Sex & God: How Religion Distorts Sexuality*



Religion typically emphasizes the restraint of sexual behavior.

were involved in religion. They used the term “centrality of religiosity of relationship (CRR)” and found that greater CRR was related to lower intimate touching, oral sex, and vaginal intercourse.

Religion may also be associated with unsuccessful repression of sexual thoughts and urges. Efrati (2019) found that religious adolescents reported higher episodes of compulsive sexual behavior (fantasies, urges), distress in coping with these intrusive thoughts, and lower mental health. In effect, their biological urges were at odds with their religious teachings that such urges and thoughts were sinful.

Williams et al. (2018) also observed three ways in which Muslim, Hindu, and Protestant Christian groups influence the sexuality of their youth, including: (a) prescribed avoidance, in which young men and women are segregated in many religious and educational settings and encouraged to moderate any cross-gender contact in public; (b) self-restraint supplemented with peer surveillance, in which young people are repeatedly encouraged not only to learn to control themselves through internal moral codes but also to enlist their peers to monitor each other's conduct and call them to account for violations of those codes; and (c) “classed” disengagement, in which highly educated, middle-class families do little to address sex directly, but treat it as but one aspect of developing individual ethical principles that will assist their educational and class mobility (e.g. avoid premarital pregnancy).

Finally, religion can dictate one's sexual behavior in reference to a spouse. Hernandez-Kane and Mahoney (2018) emphasized that religion sanctifies marital sex suggesting that it has a divine quality, is a deeply spiritual experience, holy, and reflects a sacred sexual bond. Spouses who have greater perceived sanctity of marital sexuality also report higher frequencies of sex, sexual satisfaction and marital

satisfaction. In another study of interviews with 15 married Iranian women, they reported that it was their sacred duty to be a frequent and willing sexual partner for their husbands. Indeed, they believed that their status with God depended on their being a good wife (pleasing their husband sexually). The researchers summarized the interviews with the Iranian wives as follows:

Most women mentioned that satisfying their husband's sexual needs was a divine rule. They also believed that rejecting such desires was a sin. They claimed they met their husband's sexual needs to save themselves from hell and sinfulness; ... pleasing God meant pleasing their husbands, especially their sexual needs. If their husbands desired to have sex, their wives could not refuse without any acceptable reason. They believed it was a sin not to follow God's rules. In some cases, the husbands misused such beliefs to force their wives to have sex. (Ravanipour et al., 2013, p. 185)

Sanjakdar (2018) noted that religion is often thought of as intolerant and incompatible with today's progressive and modern society but argued that inclusion of religion in a national conversation about sex education can be used to create a more inclusive learning experience.



Social Policy 1-1

Sex Education in Public Schools

While comprehensive sex education in the UK is mandated from primary school through high school, sex education in the US is required in only 24 states and the District of Columbia, and in many states is not required to be medically accurate (SIECUS, 2018b). Sex education was introduced in the US public school system in the late 19th century with the goal of combating

STIs (sexually transmitted infections) and instilling sexual morality (typically understood as abstinence until marriage). Over time, the abstinence agenda became more evident. The Trump administration has been in favor of abstinence-only teaching in the nation's public schools and sought to defund any federal programs to the contrary. Valerie Huber, the Department of Health and Human Services official overseeing this effort, explained, "As public health and policymakers, we must normalize sexual delay" (Hellman, 2017). Hence, programs that discuss contraception and other means of pregnancy protection (in addition to abstinence), referred to as **comprehensive sex education programs**, such as the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program set up by the Obama administration in 2010, have been targets for defunding.

Comprehensive sex education programs

Programs that discuss abstinence as well as the use of contraception

Santelli et al. (2017) emphasized that the abstinence-only-until-marriage (AOUM) theme continues to be promoted and funded (for the past 35 years) even though the weight of scientific evidence finds that these programs are not effective in delaying initiation of sexual intercourse or changing other sexual risk behaviors (use of condoms). AOUM programs threaten fundamental human rights to health, information, and life. Santelli et al. (2019) noted that a comparison of the sexual AOUM program to the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) revealed that the former resulted in an increase in state adolescent birthrates, whereas TPP resulted in a decrease in those rates. Indeed, young people need access to accurate and comprehensive sexual health information to protect their health and lives, which are not being provided by the federal government.

A majority of 560 undergraduates noted approval for all 18 topics (including sexual pleasure) typically included in sexual health education programs (Canan & Jozkowski, 2017). However, existing sex education programs generally exclude content relevant to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning youth. This deficit disenfranchises these populations by ignoring LGBTQ issues, such as emphasizing STI prevention and addressing healthy relationships (Gowen & Winges-Yanez, 2014). Research has revealed that exposure to transgender issues for only 3–4 hours in a sexuality class reduced anti-transgender prejudice (Green, 2014). Online education has also been an effective educational medium, particularly for LGBTQ individuals (Mustanski et al., 2015).

Levin (2016) emphasized that it is sometimes the impact of a particular teacher that is more influential than the content. Beyond the public school system, Butler et al. (2014) reported in a national survey of 1,101 colleges and universities that 86% made male latex condoms available to their students via the student health center. However, only 27% advertised condom availability.

International sex education is lacking, particularly in LGBT issues. In 2018, Scotland became the first county in the world to include LGBT issues in its curriculum.

1.4g Alcohol/Substance Use

Alcohol is the drug most frequently used by college students. Alcohol and other substance use are associated with reducing inhibitions, resulting in higher frequencies of casual sex encounters. Bleakley et al. (2017) found that 21% of their adolescent respondents reported drinking alcohol before their most recent sexual intercourse. In a study of 7,020 students, 35% of those who said that they agreed to unwanted sex during their most recent sexual experience also noted that they were drunk or high (Fishburn et al., 2016). Women who had been drinking were particularly vulnerable to unsafe, unplanned sexual behavior that they regretted (Haas et al., 2017). In addition, alcohol use is associated with lower condom use in that men use it to get the woman to have sexual intercourse without a condom (George, 2019). The lower the substance use, the higher the self-regulation (Moilanen & Manuel, 2018).

Locus of control

An individual's beliefs about the source or cause (internal or external) of his or her successes and failures

Internal locus of control

The belief that successes and failures in life are attributable to one's own abilities and efforts

External locus of control

The perspective that successes and failures are determined by fate, chance, or some powerful external source

1.4h Psychological Factors

Many psychological constructs are believed to influence sexuality, including sexual self-concept, self-esteem, attachment style, and personality characteristics such as impulsiveness, sensation seeking, and dependency. They also affect the **locus of control**, an individual's beliefs about the source or cause of their successes and failures. A person with an **internal locus of control** believes that successes and failures in life are attributable to their own abilities and efforts. A person with an **external locus of control** believes that successes and failures are determined by fate, chance, or some powerful external source, such as other individuals. See *Personal Decisions 1-1* to determine what factors control sexual decisions.

TABLE 1-2 | Who Controls Our Decisions? Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Views

Are you wondering if taking a human sexuality course will influence your sexual attitude and behaviors?

Views	Advantages	Disadvantages
View 1: We control our decisions.	Gives individuals a sense of control over their lives and encourages them to take responsibility for their decisions	Blames individuals for their unwise sexual decisions and fails to acknowledge the influence of social and cultural factors on sexual decisions
View 2: Other factors influence our decisions.	Recognizes how emotions, peers, and cultural factors influence individuals' lives and decisions; implies that making changes in the social and cultural environment may be necessary to help people make better decisions	Blames social and cultural factors for sexual decisions and discourages individuals from taking responsibility for their behaviors and decisions

PERSONAL DECISIONS 1-1

Do You or Other Factors Control Your Sexual Decisions?



What do the following questions have in common?

- Is sex with an attractive stranger worth the risk of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted infections?
- How and when do I bring up the issue of using a condom with a new partner?
- Can I find partners who will honor my value of being abstinent until marriage?
- How much do I tell my new partner about my previous sexual experiences (including masturbation, number of sexual partners, gender of past partners)?
- Do I disclose to my partner that I have fantasies about sex with other people?
- Can I make a thoughtful decision about having sexual contact with a partner if I've been drinking alcohol?
- What type of birth control should my partner and I use?

Each of these questions involves making a sexual decision. One of the main goals of this text is to emphasize the importance of making deliberate and informed decisions about your sexuality. The alternative is to let circumstances and others decide for you. Informed decision-making involves knowledge of the psychological, physiological, and social components of sexual functioning and personal values and of the interaction between cultural values and sexual behaviors.

Decisions may be the result of **free will**. The belief in free will implies that although heredity and environment may influence our decisions, as individuals we are ultimately in charge of our own destinies. Even when our lives are affected by circumstances or events that we do not choose, we can still decide how to view and respond to them.

An alternative and competing assumption about making deliberate decisions is **determinism**—the idea that human nature is largely determined by heredity and environment. Being born with a particular sexual orientation reflects determinism in the sense that sexual orientation may have a biological or genetic base. Determinism may also have a social basis. Sociologists emphasize that social forces—such as the society in which one lives, one's family, and one's peers—all heavily influence decisions. This is the social-context view of decision-making. Hence, some homosexuals do not feel free to be open about their sexual identity for fear of social disapproval.

Rather than viewing sexual decisions as an either/or situation, each view contributes to a broader understanding.

Free will

Belief that individuals are ultimately in charge of their own destinies

Determinism

Belief that one's nature is largely determined by heredity and environment

Chapter Summary

Defining Human Sexuality

THIS CHAPTER DEFINED human sexuality in terms of its various components, delineated the nature of sexuality, identified the steps in sexual decision-making, and reviewed the influences on sexual decisions.

Human sexuality can best be defined in terms of its various components: thoughts, sexual self-concept, values, emotions, behaviors, anatomy and physiology, reproduction, and interpersonal relationships. The key to sexual satisfaction is a positive interpersonal relationship.

Interdisciplinary Nature of Sexual Decisions

WE ARE CONTINUALLY MAKING DECISIONS, many of which are difficult because they involve tradeoffs—disadvantages as well as advantages. Such decisions can produce ambivalence or uncertainty. Decisions that result in irrevocable outcomes, such as becoming a parent, are among the most difficult choices individuals may face. However, we cannot avoid making decisions, because not to choose is itself a decision. For example, if we have oral, vaginal, or anal sex without using a condom or dental dam, we have made a decision to risk contracting and transmitting HIV.

Another factor involved in sexual decision-making is that we can always choose a positive view (“Contracting an STI has taught me to use a condom in the future.”) Some ambivalence and uncertainty are inherent in making most decisions.

Influences on Sexual Decisions

ALTHOUGH WE LIKE TO THINK we make our own sexual decisions and have free will to do so, we are actually strongly influenced by a number of factors. These influences include culture, media, peers and family, technology, education, religion, and mind-altering substances, such as alcohol.

Web Links

Go Ask Alice

<http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/>

Make Love Not Porn

<http://makelovenotporn.com/>

SIECUS

<http://www.siecus.org>

Sexual Health Network

<http://www.sexualhealthnetwork.co.uk>

World Association for Sexual Health

<https://worldsexualhealth.net/>

Key Terms

Absolutism	8	Internal locus of control	24
Ambivalence	15	Locus of control	24
Comprehensive sex education programs	23	Relativism	8
Determinism	25	Sexual double standard	10
Digisexuality	20	Sexual growth	16
External locus of control	24	Sexual self-concept	6
Free will	25	Sexual self-efficacy	6
Hedonism	9	Sexual values	7