

Chapter 1

Human Sexuality: An Introduction

Sex should be about mutual enjoyment, connection, the borrowing from another's fire at a moment when you want it most.

Alessandra Torre, *Sex Love Repeat*

Chapter Outline

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Objectives

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



- | | |
|--------------|---|
| T / F | 1. Women are more likely to take a college course in human sexuality than men. |
| T / F | 2. The school bus is a context in which peers teach each other about sex. |
| T / F | 3. Women who view their sexual self negatively are more likely to initiate sex activity. |
| T / F | 4. Weight increase is associated with a decrease in reported sex/relationship satisfaction. |
| T / F | 5. A source of great emotional distress on college campuses is the imperative to hook up. |

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

Everyone has a story about their first experience with sex/sexuality. Below are some of the examples provided anonymously by students in the authors' classes:

I was 15 and I did it (intercourse) for my partner—I didn't know it was about my pleasure too.

My partner and I were both 16 in a long-term relationship, we were both virgins, it was awkward and painful.

My partner and I were 14—we didn't know what we were doing.

My partner and I planned our first sex. It was everything we wanted it to be.

With several friends at once. I didn't want to since I thought it would destroy the friendships. It did.

Oral sex: My partner asked if they could give me oral sex and I said yes.

Sex in the back of a truck.

I got access to a laptop, watched porn, and masturbated.

Sexually assaulted at age 9 by my brother.

Each of these reports confirm that we all have different experiences that can impact our attitudes, values, and feelings about sex. As we begin the systematic study of sex, three themes will guide our journey.

1.1 Three Themes Guiding the Study of Sexuality in This Text

The main themes guiding the content of sexuality in this text are: informed sexual decision-making, positive sexuality, and sexual well-being.

1.1a Informed Sexual Decision-Making

Making informed sexual decisions is the central theme of this text. Examples of situations requiring such decisions about your sexuality include the following:

- You have just “matched” on Tinder—do you go for a hookup or a relationship?
- 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 will you decide on?
- Your partner watches a lot of porn. Do you join in? Talk with your partner? Ignore the behavior?
- You have a sexually transmitted infection (STI), have had an abortion, or have engaged in sexual behavior with a high number of partners. How much do you tell your partner? When?

These scenarios reflect the need to make decisions about the goal of being on Tinder, the timing of sex with a new partner, the role of pornography, and whether to reveal sexual secrets. A primary goal of this text is to emphasize the relentlessness and importance of making deliberate and informed sexual decisions.

Your decision will be influenced by the decisions our society makes about social policies on sexuality. These include the availability of abortions, emergency contraception as an over-the-counter medication, and the nature of sex education in the public school system.

1.1b Positive Sexuality

In addition to making informed decisions, positive sexuality permeates the view presented in this text. The specifics of positive sexuality include (Ivanski & Kohut, 2017; Center for Positive Sexuality, 2023):

- *Sex/sexuality is good.* Sex is good as long as no one is harmed and sex is consensual. The “positive” in positive sexuality refers to integrating sexuality to improve well-being and happiness among people.



- *Sex education is valuable*—to be informed of the basic aspects of sex, anatomy, pregnancy, pregnancy prevention, abortion, STIs, etc., is important. Such information must emphasize diversity in gender identity and sexual orientations and be presented in an open, nonjudgmental way. Sources of information include medical, social/behavioral sciences, public health, and arts/humanities, and involve a range of research methods adhering to professional ethics.
- *Health and safety*—individuals take steps to protect themselves and their partners from pregnancy and/or STIs. Sex negativity reflects an agenda of controlling another.
- *Respect for the individual*—includes the belief that sexuality is unique and multifaceted with respect for individual choice, abstinence as a valid option, self-acceptance about one's own choices, and respect for the sexuality/choices of others. Sexuality also implies an awareness of every level of social structure including neighborhoods, families, communities, and societies.
- *Positive relationships with others*—includes being accepting of the diversity in gender identities, sexual orientations, and preferences for sexual activities of others. It is humanizing, inclusive, and affirms the dignity of others.

1.1c Sexual Well-Being

Added to making informed decisions and positive sexuality as themes of this text is an emphasis on **sexual well-being**, which includes the following (Bedree et al., 2020):

- *Behavioral factors*—being assertive about condom use/contraception and one's own sexual values.
- *Mental/emotional factors*—making deliberate choices about sex to ensure positive mental health; not using sex/others as a coping mechanism.
- *Social identity factors*—being comfortable with one's gender identity, sexual orientation, and race.
- *Relationship factors*—having sex in desired relationship contexts and communicating with one's partner. Also, having positive relationships with peers in which one can talk about sex.

Sexual well-being is not evenly distributed/enjoyed throughout the population. Higgins et al. (2022) revealed that higher levels of education, income, and occupation are associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction and sexual functioning.

Throughout the text we will present self-assessments that will allow you to identify your position on a continuum of whatever is being discussed. We begin with an assessment of how important sex is to you.

The importance of sex in relationships was emphasized by a sample of 442 Filipino individuals (average age 38) who had been in a relationship from a few weeks to over 50 years. Analysis of the data revealed sexual satisfaction had a stronger association to relationship satisfaction than emotional intimacy (Cruz & Caringal-Go, 2021).

Sexual well-being

Includes behavioral, mental/emotional, social identity, and relationship factors

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. For each item, place the number that reflects your level of agreement/disagreement on the blank line.

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.

Total Score: ____

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.

In the following sections we begin the basic study of sexuality, including how it is defined.

1.2 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.

1.2a 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 sexual behavior that person is motivated to engage in. The degree to which one experiences sexual arousal is, in part, impacted by the thoughts one has (Pawlowska et al., 2021). One can embrace sexual thoughts and increase one’s own sexual arousal, or conjure up feelings of disgust and squash arousal.

Thoughts can also impact the emotions of how a sexual encounter is experienced. A survey of how 99 respondents viewed their casual sex experiences revealed a range of thoughts/emotions: “stirred, awed, moved, paralyzed, delighted, titillated, and shamed” (Lyons & Sanders, 2020). One can also view a sexual encounter as exploration, experimentation, and self-focused sexual pleasure (McMahan & Olmstead, 2021).

1.2b Body Image

The “ideal” female body in mainstream white US society has changed over time, with the current ideal being “trim” and curvaceous, defined as a body with a small waist and wider hips, such that the waist to hip ratio falls at 70 or below (Hunter et al., 2021). The ideal body for a male is both “trim” and “muscular” for men (Bozsik et al., 2018). Body image also varies by race, with Black women reporting that they have “sexier bodies” than white women (Hilliard et al., 2019a). While television is often criticized for promoting only negative body images, Maes and Vandenbousch (2023) coded 126 characters in 3,151 scenes across 65 episodes of six youth-oriented television series and found that positive references occurred twice each episode.

Are there differences in weight stigmas by sexual orientation?

It may come as a surprise to some of y’all that I’m not working out to have your ideal body type. I’m working out to have my ideal body type.

Lizzo, responding to fat shamers on TikTok

Frederick (2020) found that fewer heterosexual men (26%) than gay men (45%) reported a negative body image. Carels et al. (2022) also analyzed data on 1,179 individuals of different sexual orientations and found significant differences. Regarding weight preference for a romantic partner, heterosexual and gay men were significantly less likely to select a person with higher weight than lesbian and bisexual women.

Enjoyment of sexualization (EoS) is the phenomenon of finding one’s appearance, based on sexual attention from others, to be a positive and rewarding experience. “I love feeling sexy” and “I like showing off my body” reflect the EoS experience. Both women and men report having this feeling (Rollero et al., 2022) and positive outcomes (Visser et al., 2022). Since most of the research has been on white people,



Lizzo emphasizes self-determination in body-image acceptance.

“Lizzo @ SXSW2022” by Daniel Benavides, available under a CC 2.0 license via Wikimedia.

Enjoyment of sexualization (EoS)

The phenomenon of finding one’s appearance, based on sexual attention from others, to be a positive and rewarding experience

Grower (2023) focused on the views of 493 Black women regarding enjoyment of sexualization and found that self-motivated sexualization in contrast to male sexualization was associated with positive outcomes, including self-esteem.

In contrast to EoS, **self-objectification** refers to seeing one's body as an object for use, which is associated with negative outcomes—eating disorders, appearance anxiety, and a desire to have a different body size (Visser et al., 2022).

1.2c Sexual Self-Concept

Your **sexual self-concept** is the way you think or feel about your body, while your **sexual self-efficacy** or **sexual self-esteem** is how you feel about your own competence to function sexually and be a good sexual partner. The average score from a national data set on a five-point scale for self-esteem was 3.66, with separated/divorced individuals in living apart together (LAT) contexts having the highest score, 3.96 (Kislev, 2020). Having positive sexual self-efficacy/esteem is associated with ease in talking about sex with one's partner (Evans et al., 2020) and the absence of sexual dysfunction (O'Sullivan et al., 2022). Being older is also associated with a more positive self-esteem (Camp et al., 2022). Kotiuga et al. (2022) also noted that adolescent males had higher self-esteem than adolescent females. Having a negative view of one's sexual self as a woman was associated with a lower likelihood of initiating sex (Hill & Silber, 2020).

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. Heerteen-Rodriguez (2020) interviewed 60 individuals who self-identified as having a larger than normative body size about their sexual experiences. The respondents were aware of the sexualized oppression that they experience and blamed themselves, others, and the culture for the stigma.

Fox et al. (2021) provided additional data on the impact of weight on one's romantic and sexual relationship. Analysis of data from a 61-item internet questionnaire completed by 379 undergraduates revealed that 84.1% and 84.3% reported that weight gain had an impact on their romantic and sexual relationships, respectively. Increases in weight were associated with decreases in one's body image, life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction with one's partner. In contrast, Parchomiuk and Kirenko (2021) defined sexual satisfaction as low discrepancy in desired and actual sex frequency as well as sexual pleasure, compared to obese and nonobese individuals, and found no significant differences.

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, skin care, or surgery. When actress Jane Fonda, now in her late 80s, was asked how she could look so young, she replied, “A lot of money.”

1.2d Values

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

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 16,604 undergraduate students surveyed on sexual values. Absolutist sexual values were reported by 13% of 3,987 male students and 14% of 12,617 female students queried (Hall & Knox, 2023).

Self-objectification

Refers to seeing one's body as an object for use; associated with negative outcomes such as eating disorders, appearance anxiety, and a desire to have a different body size

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 or sexual self-esteem

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

Sexual values

Moral guidelines for making sexual decisions

Absolutism

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



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 (partner, alcohol/substances, peer influence)? How did you feel about your decision then, and how do you feel about it now (guilt, regret, indifference, joy)?

Virginity is a concept that is often muddled. Rather than dichotomous—you are or are not a virgin—a three-part view of virginity is more accurate: vaginal, oral sex, and anal sex. But heterosexuals often equate virginity with not having engaged in penile-vaginal intercourse. Huang (2018) confirmed that homosexual males refer to experi-

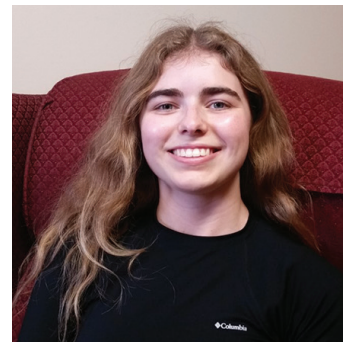
It's so screwed up, the standards. . . . You should like it, but you shouldn't like it too much or talk about how much you like it. You should do it, but you shouldn't do it with too many people or talk about how much you're doing it. It's like there are so many rules, but none of them make sense.

Kody Keplinger, *Shut Out*

encing 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).

Typically, one “remains a virgin” until one’s sexual debut (the first time one has sexual/anal intercourse). What are the primary reasons for delaying one’s sexual debut? 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.

Believers are asked to sign a commitment to God, themselves, their family, their friends, their future mate, and their future children that they will be “pure,” which means sexually abstinent, until they enter a “biblical marriage relationship.” In a sample of 961 undergraduates, 39% of women and 21% of men (34% total) reported having taken this abstinence pledge. To what degree did they end up breaking their commitment? Sixty-five percent of the women and 52% of men (62% total) reported breaking their pledge (Barnett et al., 2018).



This absolutist is looking forward to being sexual with her husband. As a heterosexual single female, she has never had vaginal, oral, or anal sex. She identifies religion as the source of her absolutist values.

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 54% of the male respondents and 59% 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 situation. For example, a relativist might feel that sex between casual dating

I honestly feel that being traditional is being the minority in this new society we have found ourselves in.

Ben Stevens, social worker

Relativism

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

partners is wrong in some situations, such as when one partner pressures or lies to the partner 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.

Table 1–1 Sexual Values of 16,604 Undergraduates

Respondents	Absolutism	Relativism	Hedonism
Male students (N = 3,987)	13%	54%	34%
Female students (N = 12,617)	14%	59%	27%

Data Source: Hall, S., & Knox, D. (2023). Relationship and sexual behaviors of a sample of 16,793 university students. Department of Early Childhood, Youth, and Family Studies, Teachers College, Ball State University and Department of Sociology, East Carolina University. Unpublished data collected for this text.

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 3,987 undergraduate males studied, 34% reported having hedonist sexual values, as did 27% of the 12,617 undergraduate females.

When I'm good, I'm very good. When I'm bad, I'm better.

Mae West

Hedonism is sometimes contextual. Berdychevsky and Son (2020) surveyed 254 emerging adults and found that touring/backpacking/leisure traveling alone created an indulgent context in which the respondents reported higher openness to sexual permissiveness, living in the moment, and sexual sensation seeking. The slogan, “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” is a commercial for hedonism that connects with this freedom on the road. Similar research was reported by Falconer (2020) who conducted interviews and focus groups of women (typically white, heterosexual, college educated) who had traveled/backpacked alone for a minimum of three months in India, Thailand, Malaysia, Australia, and New Zealand. Many kept sexual diaries and were eager to talk about their experiences. Three excerpts follow:

Because we were drinking all the time, and you are meeting new people all the time, and so it's kind of like the excitement of “Oh you're new! Ooh actually you're great! Oh, let's shag let's shag. Get in the hut!”

It's the wild, novel adventure of it all. Doing things you would never normally do. Like we got on a boat with guys who were coked up to their eyeballs and had mad sex I don't even remember! I mean it's all a bit much when I think back and thank goodness I'm now home with my boyfriend—he's a doctor and so nice. But I do love talking about these sorts of adventures with other girls, we just howl with laughter at the madness of it all.

I have always been a bit of a whore-bag! . . . but I think it's . . . yeah, it's great! I think it's easier when you're travelling because everyone's up for it generally. And you don't give a shit really.

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

Table 1–2 shows sexual values by race, revealing that Black students are more likely to report absolutist values, which reflects the influence of conservative religion. Hispanic students were more likely to report hedonism as a sexual value.

Table 1–2 Sexual Values of Undergraduates by Race

Race	Absolutionism	Relativism	Hedonism
White students (N = 13,664)	14%	57%	29%
Black students (N = 1,381)	18%	7%	56%
Hispanic students (N = 690)	60%	26%	32%

Data Source: Hall, S., & Knox, D. (2023). Relationship and sexual behaviors of 16,793 undergraduates. Department of Early Childhood, Youth, and Family Studies, Teachers College, Ball State University and Department of Sociology, East Carolina University. Unpublished data collected for this text.

Other researchers examined racial differences in college students at a “party school” in regard to drinking alcohol, attending parties, and engaging in casual sex (all of which could be associated with hedonism). The researchers collected data at 6-month intervals from 197 college students ages 19–27 at a large southeastern university. They found no racial differences (Hayes & Boyle, 2021).

Finally, we look at sexual values by sexual identity (Table 1–3). The data reveal that compared to heterosexual males, gay and bisexual males reported significantly higher frequencies of hedonism. Similarly, when heterosexual females are compared to lesbians and bisexual females, the latter two categories reported significantly higher frequencies of hedonism. Research by Waldis et al. (2021) revealed that being gay was associated with sociosexuality—sex without commitment.

Table 1–3 Sexual Values of Undergraduates by Sexual Identity

Sexual Identity	Absolutionism	Relativism	Hedonism
Heterosexual male (N = 3,372)	14%	16%	55%
Heterosexual female (N = 10,456)	16%	62%	22%
Gay male (N = 343)	3%	41%	55%
Lesbian (N = 763)	1%	43%	55%
Bimale (N = 216)	3%	38%	59%
Bifemale (N = 1,221)	2%	45%	53%

Data Source: Hall, S., & Knox, D. (2023). Relationship and sexual behaviors of 16,793 undergraduates. Department of Early Childhood, Youth, and Family Studies, Teachers College, Ball State University and Department of Sociology, East Carolina University. Unpublished data collected for this text.

The hedonist’s sexual values are reflected in the creed, “If it feels good, do it.” Hedonists are sensation seekers (see insert, “I Am a Hedonist”). They tend to pursue novel, exciting, and optimal levels of stimulation and arousal, and their goal is pleasure. Who one is hedonistic with may also vary by race. Of 3,453 white British participants, there was a preference by both women and men to have casual/hedonistic sex with racial minorities and have committed sex leading to marriage with a white person (West, 2020). While hedonistic sex may be exciting, there is a downside. Wade (2021) observed that sex on college campuses has emerged as a source of emotional distress for students; hooking up, or to be casual about

sex, has become an increasingly normative imperative. Based on 101 interviews, to act out the script, students must hook up only when drunk, refrain from tenderness, be unfriendly afterward, and avoid “repeat” hookups. In reality, students both break and follow these rules. Breaking them is a primary way they form romantic relationships.

“I Am a Hedonist”

The undergraduate responding to the questions below is a 20-year-old female.

What does being a “hedonist” mean to you?

To me, being a hedonist is feeling more sexual urgency than does the typical person. This also means that I do not need to experience an emotional connection to engage in sexual activity with someone.

At what age did you become aware of your interest in sex?

I began masturbating at about 8 or 9 years old and became sexually active at about 16 or 17. I would say my interest in sex happened somewhere between those ages, but likely closer to age 9.

To what degree do you feel stigmatized due to your sexual interest/assertiveness?

I understand that people have different sexual values, as well as different views of others’ values. However, I don’t feel any level of stigmatization because I am extremely comfortable with my lifestyle, and I know that I am not harming anyone.

What is your ideal sexual menu (for one week) in terms of number of sexual encounters with how many partners of what sexual orientation?

Ideally, I would be having sex once a day, possibly a different partner every day, though I would likely cycle through previous partners, and I am open to all genders and sexualities.

To what degree is emotional involvement desirable in your sexual encounters?

I absolutely do not need an emotional connection with someone in order to be sexually involved with them. In fact, I would prefer to leave emotions out of all of my sexual encounters, including relationships, because a relationship does not necessarily constitute better sex for me if there is an emotional connection.

To what degree is fidelity a sexual value for you and to what degree would you expect this in a partner?

I appreciate fidelity if the expectation is communicated between partners. I am open to my partners being sexually involved with someone else if there are clear boundaries and communication.

What are your interests in marriage/children?

I am not planning on being married or having children, though I would not be opposed if the situation presented itself. Personally, I do not think that a lifestyle of marriage and children is for me, but again, I could be okay with it.

What are your feelings about an open marital relationship?

I would be more than interested in an open marital relationship. I am aware of the idea of satiation, and I would rather my partner have their sexual needs fulfilled, if I am not doing this for them, rather than them “get bored” with me and leave. I would also appreciate if my partner felt the same way about giving me sexual freedom.

To what degree are your friends aware of your hedonism and to what degree do they share your value/they are hedonistic too?

My friends are aware of my sexual lifestyle and my experiences; however, I am not sure if they are aware of the proper terminology. I have not had any friends express the same values that I have . . . I gather that a majority, if not all of my friends, are relativists.

What was not asked that is important to understand about you as a hedonist.

My focus in life, education, and career, is to let young women know that it is okay to want to experience certain things, sexually. There is no wrong way to feel, especially if it occurs naturally. Though it may be difficult to express our sexuality because of stigmatization, there is no reason to feel ashamed.



This woman rejects the stigma associated with a woman’s choice to enjoy her sexuality. She does not need a love or committed relationship to enjoy sex.

Name withheld by request.

What is the impact of one's sexual history on subsequent 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. Hence, it is not that virginity before marriage leads to a lower divorce rate but the fact that someone may be a virgin due to religion and it is the religious beliefs which may suppress divorce. Aside from the association between virginity and lower divorce, having multiple or a few sexual partners does not seem to make a significant difference in the divorce rate.

Great sex is all about freedom and being everything you've always wanted to be. Know now that the only limits you have in regard to your own sexuality are the ones you impose on yourself.

Roberto Hogue, *Real Secrets of Sex: A Women's Guide on How to Be Good in Bed*

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%. Explanation for the finding that higher numbers of sexual partners are associated with lower levels of reported marital satisfaction may involve comparing one's partner to previous lovers. Comparing one's spouse with zero or 20 previous lovers may produce different outcomes. On the other hand, one may have married the top lover. One spouse noted, "I married the best possible lover."

The double standard is particularly intense in the Arabic, Muslim world. Women who have sex with men become unmarriageable and some will seek corrective surgery for their hymen to "prove" that they are a virgin. (Slimani, 2017)

The **sexual double standard**—the view that encourages and accepts the sexual expression of men more than women—is reflected in Table 1–1 (higher hedonism percent among males). In addition, eight focus groups of Portuguese college students confirmed the existence of the sexual double standard "with regard to casual sex and multiple partners, legitimized by the accepted/recognized existence of sexual gender roles and stereotypes" (Delgado et al., 2021).

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 several partners, while women are more vulnerable to gaining a bad reputation. McKeen et al. (2022) acknowledged that while the double standard may be decreasing, it is still very much in evidence.

1.2e Emotions

Love and intimacy are contexts that influence the expression of sexual behavior. Intimacy is a multidimensional 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.

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.)

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 regarding becoming more liberal. Specifically, respondents who were absolutist became more relativistic and those who were relativistic became more hedonistic (Hilliard et al., 2019b).

1.2f Behaviors

The term *human sexuality* implies a variety of behaviors. Hille et al. (2020b) identified 22 sexual behaviors, from deep kissing to penile-vaginal intercourse. Definitions of what constitutes having had sex vary, with most heterosexuals agreeing that vaginal (5.9 on

If sexuality is one dimension of our ability to live passionately in the world, then in cutting off our sexual feelings, we diminish our overall power to feel, know and value deeply.

Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*

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 heteronormative model. The “gold standard” for sex to gay men is anal sex, with no clear standard for lesbians (Sewell, 2017).

What is sexual behavior and what is affectionate behavior is dependent on the definitions of the parties involved. Cuddling is typically defined as affection, not sex. Indeed, <https://www.cuddlecomfort.com/> is a website where practitioners offer affection, not sex.

The Decline of Sexual Behavior: Some Reasons

Numerous scientific (Herbenick, Rosenberg et al., 2022) and lay writers (Heller, 2022; Noyce, 2022) have reported a continued decline in sexual behavior in both partnered and solo masturbation for individuals ages 18–49. This decline began prepandemic and still continues. Several factors have contributed to this phenomenon:

- Internet. With sex at one’s fingertips, one need not leave one’s dorm room, apartment, or house to tap into an unlimited menu of sexual content. The internet also facilitates sexting so that bodies don’t touch. Computer games, which can consume (easily) one’s weekends, have been suggested as a reinforcing distraction.
- New cultural meanings associated with sex have included a focus on consent, pressure to hook up, being politically correct/woke, so that individuals feel overwhelmed dealing with the plethora of issues surrounding sex.
- Female agency has increased the assertiveness of women to say no to sex not to their liking and to increase the requirements of what they want and require.
- Independent female orgasm via vibrators has become normative, obviating the need to put up with sexual partners who are inattentive and unwilling to learn.
- Living with parents, which has become the most frequent housing context for youth ages 18–34, has reduced the private context for sex.
- Men as partners may be less reinforcing—they are also less educated, have lower incomes, and are more often unemployed, such that they may bring little to the table. The TikTok stories of single women reporting that they would rather be with themselves have increased.
- Rough sex in the form of choking, facial ejaculation, and aggressive fellatio add to the avoidance of seeking intimate sex.
- Inflation/rising cost of living making eating out/partying more expensive resulting in less “dating” and relationship contexts for flirting/sex.

- Pandemic outcomes included closing bars and restaurants, which were the contexts in which individuals met and hooked up.
- Environmental climate changes. Testosterone levels, which are the engine of sexual arousal/desire, have decreased. Is it the air, water, food? Plastic has now been discovered in our bloodstreams. Need we wonder that our biochemistry of sexuality has been altered?

1.2g Anatomy and Physiology

The idea of sex often recalls 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.

1.2h 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.

1.2i Interpersonal Relationships

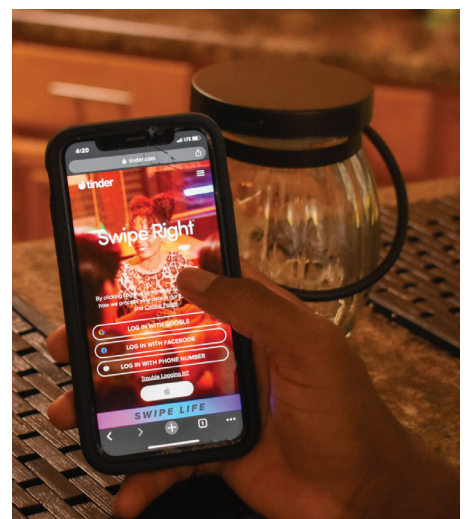
Although masturbation and sexual fantasies can occur outside the context of a relationship, much of sexuality occurs in the context of interpersonal relationships. Such relationships vary—gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, heterosexual, including nonmarital, marital, or extra-marital; casual or intimate; personal or business-related (as in webcam sex or sex work); and brief or long-term. Not being in a relationship also has an impact. Indeed, being single/not in a relationship is associated with reporting lower sexual satisfaction than being in a relationship (Brouillard & Houlihan, 2022).

For those in a relationship, the type of relationship a couple has affects the quality of their sexual relationship. Uhlich et al. (2022) studied Iranian couples and found that low sexual satisfaction was associated with increases in relationship conflicts for both women and men. When conflict is high, women report a decline in relationship satisfaction. Partners in committed relationships report the highest sexual satisfaction/pleasure (Milstein et al., 2020).

Dating apps are sometimes used to find a partner to have fun with for romance and for sex. Struckman-Johnson, Larson, et al. (2020) analyzed data from 125 college students, 64% of whom said that they had used a dating app. Almost half (45%) reported that one outcome was a relationship that lasted at least a month. For 16%, there was a transition from a hookup to romance; 12% reported a transition from a relationship focused on romance to one focused on sex. The primary advantage of app dating was learning to become more sociable and finding a platonic friend; the primary downside was that people misrepresented themselves (80%) and almost half (48%) ended up being ghosted. Tinder was the app most frequently used by these respondents.

The physical union of a man and a woman, in essence, is a supernatural act, a reminiscence of paradise, the most beautiful of all the hymns of praise dedicated to the Creator by the creature; it is the alpha and the omega of all creation.

Samuel Aun Weor,
The Mystery of the Golden Blossom



Tinder is a frequently used app for facilitating hookups.

Technology and Sexuality 1–1: Enhancement or Detriment?



Involvement in **sextech** (sexually focused technologically mediated experiences) marries sexuality and technology and includes sex toys, wearable devices, virtual reality, and robots (Bernstein, 2021). Technology has been criticized as replacing human relationships/interactions with substitutes. Kaufman et al. (2020) challenged this deterministic view by exploring how sextech use (e.g., visiting a camming website) may facilitate—and in some cases, enhance—emotional intimacy. Using a nationally representative sample ($n = 7,512$), the researchers found that two-thirds to three-fourths of the respondents reported that the interactions with videocam models resulted in feelings of emotional closeness and social support. There were also no significant differences between respondents who visited cam sites and those who did not in perceptions of social support outside online relationships. This research challenges claims that sextech interactions substitute, rather than supplement, real-world relationships. Related is **digi-sexuality**, the use of radical new sexual technologies (e.g., teledildonics, virtual sex, sex robots), which is increasing. The first wave of digisexuality was online dating, sexting, and online porn. The second wave of digisexuality is virtual sex, sexbots, and body hacking technologies, including organic-synthetic relationships (Twist & McArthur, 2022).

Dube and Anctil (2020) suggested a theoretical framework (Human-Erobot Interactions and Co-Evolution Model) to conceptualize the interface of technology into human relationships. They hypothesized that erobots will become an increasing choice. Positives include liberation, de-isolation, and therapy. Negatives include that such use may exclude interaction with humans and be a source of perceived infidelity (Twist, 2020). 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. In Chapter 18 we discuss the use of virtual reality in pornography and how individuals report feeling intimately connected with the actors.

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.

The internet may also have a downside by encouraging our obsession with the constant, intense, novel stimulation, which may render real sex with an actual person a bit less all-compelling than it used to be. We must remember to pay attention to our partners during sex offline.

Has the internet changed anything about sexuality? Yes. Some benefits to sex apps include that they list local health clinics providing free condoms, which might help to reduce the transmission of STIs. Other apps 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. In countries around the world, women may be using apps as a method of empowerment because they can use them to increase their knowledge about sexuality (Gesselman et al., 2020). Since 93% of the global population has access to mobile devices, technology can be used to spread information (Galper, 2022).

1.2j Sexual Health/Sexual Authenticity

One's sexual health is also tied to the concept of sexuality. Having a positive view of one's sexuality, managing and limiting exposure to STIs, guilt, and force are all part of one's sexual health.

Related to sexual health is sexual pleasure. According to the World Association for Sexual Health, the first three of six 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. (Ford et al., 2021)

Sextech

Sexually focused technologically mediated experiences

Digisexuality

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

The World Health Organization (WHO) also emphasizes the importance of personal sexual knowledge as contributing to one's sexual well-being and knowledge of one's individual sexual preferences (Seifen et al., 2022).

Books I've got, copulation I need.
John Berryman, poet

Sexual health is also about being sexually authentic. **Sexual authenticity** is defined as an individual's level of congruence between what they think and feel and how they actually behave in sexual contexts (Prine & Humphreys, 2020). A person who takes pride in making wise choices about sexual partners and contexts reflects this value in actually carrying out these wise choices—the person is authentic. Someone who presents a façade of care and fidelity but has a “double” life is inauthentic.

1.2k Pleasure

Milstein et al. (2020) reported on data from 307 undergraduates who had had at least one sexual experience with a partner. Analysis revealed that being committed and

What we learn with Pleasure, we never forget.
Irene Smith, *Goddess of Compassionate Touch*

emotionally involved, having a high libido, experiencing an orgasm, and being open with one's partner about one's level of pleasure were significantly

related to self-reported sexual pleasure.

There are new studies coming out about pleasure. Some research suggests that pleasure may be increased with exposure to subjective fear, such as the stress associated with COVID-19 (Rodrigues & Lehmler, 2022).

1.3 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.

I felt that if he touched me, I'd die. and then the thought crawled into my brain that if he didn't touch me, I'd die.
Kitty Thomas, *The Auction*

1.3a 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.

1.3b 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 may 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

Sexual authenticity

An individual's level of congruence between what they think and feel and how they actually behave in sexual contexts

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.

Hatz et al. (2020) surveyed 257 men and women about their sexual decision-making and noted that most decisions were rational. Clark et al. (2020) also emphasized that making decisions about what to do sexually can be very complicated: “In relationships, decisions are often based on multiple objectives, such as getting pleasure, avoiding pain, pleasing one’s partner, strengthening the relationship, etc.” The researchers noted that there are some occasions in which an individual will prioritize pleasing their partners above avoiding pain.

1.3c 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.

1.3d 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.

1.3e 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. Having sex (e.g., oral sex, sexual intercourse) while driving a car is another example. Oviedo-Trespalacios (2021) identified 106 such experiences reported by 76

Ambivalence

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

males and 30 female drivers. Forty percent resulted in serious incidents that involved a crash, with 21% involving a fatality and fewer incidents resulting from masturbation.

1.4 Sexuality as Growth

One's sexual relationship need not be left to chance but can be the focus of one's sexual growth.

1.4a 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. The alternative belief is that some individuals just seem to click sexually and that their doing so is more about destiny and luck.

Taking a course in human sexuality also reflects the belief in sexual growth. In-depth interviews with men about why they did or did not enroll in a college sex education course revealed a gender bias that men view sex as fun and casual, not worthy of serious scientific study. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to take sexuality courses seriously and more likely to enroll (Burke, 2022).

1.5 Influences on Sexual Decisions

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

But when a woman decides to sleep with a man, there is no wall she will not scale, no fortress she will not destroy, no moral consideration she will not ignore at its very root: there is no God worth worrying about.

Gabriel García Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*

1.5a Culture

Syed and McLean (2022) emphasized the importance of culture in providing access or constraints to "the good life" in terms of sexual self-discovery and environmental mastery. They note that individuals may be marginalized due to race, gender, and sexual orientation in such access.

The culture in which individuals grow up and live also impacts their ideas about sex and interpersonal behavior. For example, although sexual behavior among sexual minorities has struggled for acceptance in the United States, in some 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

In our culture it is a woman's body which is considered important while it is a man's mind or his activities which are valued. A woman is sexy. A man is successful.

Alleen Pace Nilsen

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). The insert on *Cultural Diversity* reveals how culture impacts the sexuality of women in Arabic, Moroccan, and Muslim communities.

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

Sexual growth

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



Cultural Diversity

“Don’t forget,” said the mother to her daughter, Soraya, as she said goodbye; by “don’t forget,” what the mother meant was, “Don’t forget to stay a virgin.” This is the mantra of female socialization in the Moroccan Muslim world. Formal law in Article 490 of the penal code states that the penalty for “fornication” or “zina” (having sexual relations while unmarried) is imprisonment for up to a year (Slimani, 2017).

Moreover, there is the concept of *hshouma* which means “shame” or “embarrassment” to befall the woman who transgresses; men are exempt. Indeed, the woman is always to display modesty and restraint. If she has sex while not married, she becomes unmarriageable and subject to imprisonment. If she becomes pregnant, an abortion is not an option, and her child will have no legal status. Since there is no father to give the child his name, the state requires the mother to register the child and to select a name from a preapproved list, all of which will have the prefix *abd* which mean “servant,” “slave,” or “subordinate.” The child will be a societal outcast and subject to social and economic exclusion. Faced with arrest for sex while not married and no recognition for her baby, many women abandon their babies to an orphanage (9,000 annually in Morocco alone) or throw them in a public bin to die (Slimani, 2017). The culture also scripts the degree of sexual pleasure available to different genders in a society and provides a way to interpret the scripting. Seddigh (2021) emphasized that the Iranian woman’s sexual passivity, which results in lack of pleasure/orgasm, is a product of the cultural scripting that includes a sense of female power and authority—the Queen’s passivity allows her to view the interactional scripts positively.

In the United States, Williams (2021) noted how women are subjected to unique patterns of cultural repression. “Slut-shaming” refers to the practice of policing women based on their gender or sexual expression. And this may vary by social class in that it may “bolster the social capital of some girls at the expense of others, often those of perceived lower status. I find that middle class women are afforded sexual liberty, particularly if they display agentic practice.” The researcher found that “working class women occupy more precarious positions of sexual respectability which depend on narratives of relationships and love to ameliorate the potential for slut-shaming.”

The Supreme Court striking down *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 created a new cultural context of apprehension about control over one’s own body. Were a woman to get pregnant, her options may be limited, which is a major cultural change.

Another issue related to culture and sexuality is the issue of boredom. Given the cultural script that one is to be interested sex, engaging in sex, and enjoying sex, what is the reality of those who report that they are “sexually bored”? A team of researchers (de Oliveira et al., 2022) analyzed data on 1,021 18–70-year-olds (72% women) who provided scores on various levels of sexuality. Results revealed that those with high scores for sexual boredom were more likely to be married or cohabiting with a partner, to have a boredom-prone personality, to lack sexual sensation seeking behavior, and experienced low sexual pleasure/satisfaction.

1.5b The COVID-19 Pandemic

What about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sex lives and relationships? When the pandemic first started, much of the media predicted a baby boom in nine months and a large increase in sexual behavior as people were locked in together. Research focused on discovering the impact of the pandemic on people’s sex lives has shown a wide variety of outcomes.

Based on data from 8,419 undergraduates from 34 universities beginning in Fall 2019 and continuing, about 60% of the participants in 2019–2022 reported ever having hooked up (an average of 4.53 hookups). When asked about ever having dated, the percent increased from 58% in 2019 to 66.5% in 2022. And, regarding having been in a long-term relationship, the percentage of respondents affirming increased from 42% in 2019 to 52% in 2022. Hence, dating and long-term relationships increased over the period with the shift due to online dating (Kuperberg et al., 2023). Data on 6,654 British adults (18–59) revealed no change in sex life quality (22%) and no change in relationship quality (60%) (Mitchell et al., 2023). Falconer, Milhausen, et al. (2022) reported on a sample of 1,504 Canadian undergraduates, 22% of whom reported that the pandemic was associated with an increase in sexual satisfaction, 31% a decrease, and 47% no change. Those in casual relationships were more likely to report a decrease in sexual satisfaction. Those in stable relationships were more likely to report an increase.

Masks have replaced the condoms of the '80s, just wear one.

Roseanne Sanagra

Lehmiller et al. (2020) analyzed data on 1,559 adults who completed an anonymous online survey. Almost half of the respondents reported a decline in their sexual activity. In the United Kingdom, Cascalheira et al. (2021) also documented general decreases in sexual behavior during social lockdown. Those who continued sexual activity were more often men. The decreases were notable during COVID-19 but had begun to slide pre-COVID (Curtis, 2022) with multiple explanations, from the toxic climate and medications used to treat depression to increased agency of women (Heller, 2022). Wignall et al. (2022) also analyzed data on the sexual behavior of 565 British young adults during the COVID-19 lockdown. A higher proportion of men and LGB individuals reported increases than did women and heterosexuals. Harkness et al. (2020) studied Latinx sexual minority men and found that they tired of the quarantine. A quote from a respondent follows:

. . . During the first half of the quarantine, it was definitely a massive reduction in like meeting up with people, or hooking up, or hanging out with people. In the middle of May, I kind of like started increasing again as you know everyone started getting tired of quarantine . . . (p.954)

Rodrigues and Lehmiller (2022) noted that, while there were disruptions in sexual quality during COVID-19, relationship quality was not affected.

Sexual behavior, which continued during the pandemic, included sexting, sending nude photos, sharing sexual fantasies, watching pornography, and having cybersex. Those who were younger, living alone, a minority (sexual or racial), and feeling stressed or lonely were more likely to try new things (which was associated with improving one's sex life) (Lehmiller et al., 2020).

Beyond the US, a study of 3,357 participants from Croatia, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Portugal, Sweden, and Turkey revealed three themes in regard to how the pandemic altered their intimate, sexual relationships (Löfgren et al. 2023). These included no change (41%), positive change (25%), and negative change (21%). The previous intimate and sexual relationship before the pandemic was predictive of the future impact.

Most of the research on sexuality changes during COVID has been conducted on singles. Regarding sexual changes among married couples during the COVID-19 lockdown, half of the spouses in Falconer's (2021) qualitative study of 1,051 reported no changes. The other half reported both increases (due to more time together) and decreases (due to added stress or the presence of kids in the house) in sexual behavior.

1.5c Media

Bossenger (2020) revealed that emerging adults turn to social media (books, magazines, television, internet) as sources of information about sex, to satisfy curiosity, or to find practical advice. Toudeka et al. (2022) reported that Toga teens turn to media and social networks rather than to their parents (who view the discussion of sex as taboo) for information about sex. Dajches and Aubrey (2020) examined sexual



behavior in television programming for young adults and found that depictions of sexual intercourse occurred most frequently in the context of a hookup or casual sex context. A review of the three scripts permeating television programming included: the double standard (sexuality is equated with masculinity, women's virtue is tied to their sexuality), commitment (men avoid commitment, women seek it), and homophobia (men must avoid homosexuality) (Aubrey et al., 2020). Ward et al. (2022) found that adolescents exposed to reality TV and music videos showed higher support for traditional gender scripting. Infidelity is also a theme in television programming. Alexopoulos and Gamble (2022) revealed that one-third of 100 programs

on mainstream and cable TV referred to themes of infidelity, defined as a sexual or romantic activity that violates the established boundaries of a relationship. Sexual infidelity was often associated with positive consequences, romantic infidelity with negative consequences.

Media also includes music. Couto et al. (2022) found in a content analysis of 781 stanzas of songs in the Hot 100 Billboard chart through 2017 that 84% had sexual content. Regarding American commercial rap, Dankoor et al. (2023) identified the messages reported by Black and Dutch adolescent men as it's OK for men to be "playas" and young women can be categorized as sexually freaky or wifey material.

Regarding self-concept, Tumbling (2023) focused on the influence of exposure to media and one's sexual self-concept. Data on 1,228 Black identified women ages 18 and older showed no significant relationship between the variables. Some evidence suggests that social media may be dysfunctional for mental health. Twenge (2022) reported its association with depression. Lambert et al. (2022) confirmed in a sample of 154 participants (age 29.6) who gave up social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok) for a week a significant improvement on well-being, lower depression, and lower anxiety compared with using social media as usual.

1.5d Peers, Parents, and Extended Kin

Peers are 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 often mirror your own values. Black, Lewis, et al. (2023) revealed that 31% of over 300 undergraduates who rode the school bus reported talking with peers about sex and 5% reported touching outside the clothes. Ten percent of the females regarded the touching as nonconsensual. Nogueira Avelar E Silva et al. (2020) observed that adolescent communication with peers was associated with increased sexual behavior and the belief that peers were engaging in higher levels of sexual behavior.

As for parental influences, Brisson et al. (2023) revealed how Colombian adolescents wished they could view their parents as sources of sex education but how parents were viewed as inadequate/lacking in knowledge. However, in a sample of 353 emerging adults, 57% reported that their parents had been an influence in their sexual attitudes

and behavior (Quinn et al., 2020). Canadian women report that their parents were a major source of sex education. (Charest & Kleinplatz, 2022). Analysis of a national sample of 2,556 adolescents revealed that close family of origin relationships were associated with a delay in the debut of vaginal sex, oral sex, and anal sex (Astle, Leonhardt, & Willoughby, 2020). Similarly, Jankovich and Padilla-Walker (2020) identified in a sample of 2,081 parents of adolescents that open, warm, and confident were the characteristics associated with positive sexual outcomes for their children. Astle et al. (2022) emphasized that while parents are aware of the importance of their being sex educators for their children, they often lack the knowledge and self-efficacy to initiate conversations.

Astle, Anders, et al. (2020) asked a sample of 212 college students how they wanted their mother, father, and friends to support them in making healthy sexual decisions. Their responses were coded, and 14 categories emerged including “advise me and monitor me,” “ask me and talk more about my life,” “accept me,” and “be open-minded.” Extended kin are also important sources of sex education and are sometimes regarded as easier to talk to (Grossman et al., 2021).

Family influences are sometimes muted by new cultural experiences. Hilliard et al. (2018) found that 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).

1.5e 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. For many American teenagers, their school sex education ranges from nonexistent to limited in scope. Most public sex education is devoid of LGBT content. Indeed, Bible et al. (2022) investigated the sources of sex education of LGBT youth and found two sources: 1) the formal education source (e.g., school and parents), which was heteronormative emphasizing abstinence and pregnancy/STI prevention, and 2) informal sources. Sondag et al. (2022) confirmed that there were 30% fewer LGBT sex education topics in their high school sex education class and that teachers noted their lack of training and professional development.

Since the traditional pathways to sex education are heteronormative, LGBT individuals must look elsewhere for relevant information (Bible et al., 2022). The second source of sex education for LGBT youth was members of the LGBT community, who gave more specific information regarding LGBT issues (e.g., lesbian/gay sex).

Since most parents are reluctant to talk about sex, schools have tried to fill the gap. In America, when we decide to ignore a subject, our favorite form of denial is to teach it incompetently. Familiarity without true understanding is not only the basis of our families but of our educational system as well.

Bob Smith, *Openly Bob*

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 and/or HIV education in the United States is mandated in only 32 states and the District of Columbia (SIECUS, n.d.). Kentucky is an example of a state that requires abstinence focused sex education; the state also has the sixth highest teenage birth rate in the US (Savage & Hargons, 2022).

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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. Depending on the values of the existing presidential administration, the emphasis of the curricula is on abstinence (Trump) or safety, which means the inclusion of content on contraception/other means of pregnancy protection (Biden). The latter is referred to as **comprehensive sex education programs** and has been mandated (including instruction on consent) by the Biden administration.

Lindberg et al. (2022) reported on the sex education of adolescents in a national sample from 2011 to 2019. During this period about half of the adolescents received sex education. Black and Hispanic males were less likely than white males to receive formal instruction on STIs (including HIV), birth control, or where to get birth control. Many of the contexts for instruction were religious, which emphasized abstinence, and almost none received instruction about birth control from those settings. The researchers concluded that many adolescents are not provided with critical sex education, suggesting the need to provide national sex education.

In practice, abstinence only until marriage (AOUM) has been promoted and funded more often for the past 40 years. Santelli et al. (2019) noted that a comparison of the sexual AOUM program to comprehensive programs revealed that the former resulted in an increase in state adolescent birthrates, whereas the latter resulted in a decrease in those rates. Indeed, young people benefit when provided accurate and comprehensive sexual health information to protect their health and lives. Data on the effectiveness of the Missouri Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) was evaluated and revealed that youths' scores on intentions, knowledge, and attitudes rose from pre- to post-survey. Hence, youth reported higher intentions to use condoms prior to sex (Lowrey et al., 2021).

Existing sex education programs also generally exclude content relevant to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning youth, and intersexuality (Walters & Laverty, 2022; Pasley, 2021). This deficit disenfranchises these populations by ignoring LGBTQ issues, such as emphasizing STI prevention and addressing healthy relationships (Bishop et al., 2021). There are currently six states that require sex education that discriminates against sexual minorities (SIECUS, n.d.).

Sexual decision-making is absent from most high school textbooks (Fuller et al., 2020). Tordoff et al. (2021) also called for increased content on trans and non-binary topics in the curricula. Finally, Van Ouytsel et al. (2022) emphasized the need to include how to resist sexting pressure in adolescence in the sex education content.

Parental approval of sex education is variable. Wood et al. (2021) surveyed 2,000 parents with children attending elementary and/or secondary school in Canada. Most parents (85%) agreed that sexual health education should be taught in the schools. In the United States, many school districts require parents/guardians to allow their child to take sex education.

1.5f Religion

Religion has a profound influence on one's experience in life. According to the Baylor Religious Study, individuals who attended religious services at least once a week at age 12 were found as adults to be happier, less depressed, and more involved in their communities than those who attended church services less frequently (Wilcox, 2022). In regard to religion and sex life satisfaction, Peri-Rotem and Skirbekk (2023) analyzed national British data that confirmed not only higher religiosity of women than men (16% vs. 11%) but higher reported sex life satisfaction among the religious due to religion identifying the marital context as the most approved context for sexual intercourse. As might be expected, being religious is associated with being less open to same-sex marriage and polyamorous marriage (Kaufman et al., 2022) as well as the delay of first sex/having fewer sexual partners (Longest & Uecker, 2018), feeling shameful about sex/reporting lower sexual satisfaction (Marcinechovia & Zahorcova, 2020), disapproval of hooking up/cohabitation/abortion (Hall et al., 2020), sexual anxiety (Jayne et al., 2021), and guilt (Pearson, 2018). Religion specifically targets women and teaches them to inhibit sexual passion expression (Bohmer & Myers, 2022).

Evangelical Protestant Christianity is the most prevalent religion in America, with women being the dominant practitioners. Estrada (2022) noted that while the intent of the movement was to provide moral structure in decision-making (abstinence until marriage was emphasized) research has revealed negative effects on females including physical, emotional, and sexual dysfunction and sexual dissatisfaction.

Positive outcomes of religion and sex are in reference to sanctification—having a divine character and significance. Leonhardt et al. (2020) found an association of sanctification with sexual satisfaction. Rose et al. (2020) also found that, for African American couples, religious couples felt that God was a part of their sexual relationship, which had a positive impact on their overall relationship satisfaction.

Comprehensive sex education programs

Programs that discuss abstinence as well as the use of contraception

1.5g Alcohol/Substance Use

Alcohol is the drug most frequently used by emerging adults. Black, Lewis, et al. (2023) revealed that 14% of 406 undergraduates reported that their partner “drank too much/ could not handle alcohol.” Longo and Neighbors (2020) found that for 956 heavy drinking undergraduates (average of 8.5 drinks a week), their motive for drinking was associated with outcome—drinking for enhancement (feel better) and coping (relieve anxiety/depression). Smith et al. (2021) noted that individuals seek an altered state in which to have sex due to having low self-esteem, reducing guilt about having sex, or mitigating concerns about same-sex behavior. Similarly, Bird et al. (2022) analyzed data on the drinking patterns of 383 US college women and found that some may drink alcohol to cope with sex-related stress and that doing so is associated with more negative sexual consequences (e.g., sexual victimization). Men also drink in reference to sex. Goodyear et al. (2022) noted in a study of 76 men that alcohol was used as a social lubricant to try out new forms of play during sex. Alcohol also complicated consent issues and increased the risk of STIs.

Ganson et al. (2022) noted the use of performance-enhancing substances (PES) by US men and found its association with the number of one-time sexual partners as well as higher odds of having multiple partners. Finally, McCormack et al. (2021) reported on the drug use and sexual behavior of 966 festivalgoers and found that polydrug use was associated with nontraditional sexual behaviors, including sex with a friend and anal sex.

Locus of control

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

1.5h Psychological Factors

Various psychological factors are associated with positive outcomes for one’s sexuality. Analysis of nationally representative data on 8,004 American adults revealed that general self-esteem, emotional intelligence, extraversion, and openness were all significant predictors of sexual self-esteem (Bennett-Brown et al., 2022).

Psychological factors 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.

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

Table 1–4 Who Controls Our Decisions? Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Views

Are you wondering if taking a human sexuality course will influence your sexual attitudes 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, threesomes, enjoyment in BDSM)?
- Do I disclose to my partner that I have fantasies about sex with other people?
- To what degree is my judgment about when and who to have sex with impacted by my use of alcohol/other substances?
- 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.

Rather than viewing sexual decisions as an either/or situation, each view contributes to a broader understanding. Biological/genetic factors interact with one's social context to create decisions.

Chapter Summary

Study of Human Sexuality

This chapter identified the themes of informed sexual decisions, positive sexuality, and sexual well-being. Human sexuality was also discussed in terms of its various components, aspects of decision-making, and 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. COVID-19 impacted sexuality by reducing personal access to others and instigating greater use of technology.

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

Nature of Sexual Decisions

We are continually making decisions, many of which are difficult because they involve tradeoffs—disadvantages as well as advantages. Some 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 decided to risk contracting and transmitting an STI.

Influences on Sexual Decisions

Although we like to think we make our own sexual decisions and have free will to do so, we are strongly influenced by several factors. These influences include culture, media, peers and family, technology, education, religion, and mind-altering substances, such as alcohol.

Web Links

College Sex Talk

<https://collegesextalk.com/>

Go Ask Alice

<https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/>

Make Love Not Porn

<https://makelovenotporn.tv>

SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States)

<https://siecus.org>

Sexual Health Network

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

World Association for Sexual Health

<https://worldsexualhealth.net/>

Key Terms

Absolutism	8	Relativism	9
Ambivalence	18	Self-objectification	8
Comprehensive sex education programs	24	Sextech	16
Determinism	26	Sexual authenticity	17
Digisexuality	16	Sexual double standard	13
Enjoyment of sexualization (EoS)	7	Sexual growth	19
External locus of control	25	Sexual self-concept	8
Free will	26	Sexual self-efficacy or sexual self-esteem	8
Hedonism	10	Sexual values	8
Internal locus of control	25	Sexual well-being	5
Locus of control	25		