

# Chapter 1: Perspectives on Human Sexuality

## Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of Chapter 1, students should be able to do the following:

1. Recognize why we study human sexuality.
2. Explain natural and normal sexual behavior and sexual variations.
3. Understand sexual interests, sexual orientation, and gender across cultures and time.
4. Understand the relationship between sexuality, popular culture, and the media.

## Chapter Outline

### 1. Taking a Course in Human Sexuality

Students study sexuality for a variety of reasons. Examining the multiple aspects of this fascinating topic can help students understand, accept, and appreciate their own sexuality and that of others.

### 2. Sexuality, Popular Culture, and the Media

Much of sexuality is influenced and shaped by popular culture, especially the mass media.

#### A. Media Portrayals of Sexuality

The media are among the most powerful forces in people's lives today. Mass-media depictions of sexuality are meant primarily to entertain and exploit, not to inform.

The Internet's contributions to the availability and commercialization of sex have made it easy to obtain information, solidify social ties, and provide sexual gratification.

#### B. Television and Digital Media

Television and digital media are the most prevalent and pervasive media. At the same time, the risks and responsibilities that accompany this programming remain disproportionate to the sexual images that are portrayed.

Sexuality is often heavily portrayed in streaming and gaming platforms. Games often promote sexist and violent attitudes. An additional concern centers on game chat features that allow children and adults to interact.

#### C. Feature-Length Films

From their very inception, motion pictures have dealt with sexuality. Movies are not that dissimilar from television in their portrayal of the consequences of unprotected sex, such as unplanned pregnancies or STIs, including HIV/AIDS.

## **D. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer People in Film and Television**

Gay men, lesbian women, and bisexual and transgender individuals are slowly being integrated into mainstream films and television. However, when gay men and lesbian women do appear, they are frequently defined in terms of their sexual orientation or gender identity. “Coming out” stories are now standard, including teen coming-out stories.

## **E. Social Media**

The Internet and mobile technology have expanded the ways in which people meet and interact with others. The use of online dating sites as a means to meet and/or matchmake has become widespread. Additionally, social media allow member users to communicate with others in innovative ways such as posting profile information, sending public or private online messages, or sharing photos instantly.

### **Key Terms:**

- media literacy
- sexualization
- Me Too movement
- sextortion
- ghosting
- sextech
- sexting
- cyberbullying

## **3. Sexuality Across Cultures and Times**

Culture molds and shapes our sexual interests, sometimes celebrating sexuality and other times condemning it.

### **A. Sexual Interests**

All cultures assume that adults have the potential for becoming sexually aroused and for engaging in sexual intercourse for the purpose of reproduction. But cultures differ considerably in terms of how strong they believe sexual interests are. These beliefs, in turn, affect the level of desire expressed in each culture.

The Mangaia of Polynesia and the Dani of New Guinea represent cultures at the opposite ends of a continuum, with the Mangaia having an elaborate social and cultural framework for instructing adolescents in sexual technique and the Dani downplaying the importance of sex.

Middle-class Americans in the nineteenth century believed that men had strong sexual drives but that women had little sexual desire. Because sexuality was considered animalistic, the Victorians separated sex and love.

The sexual revolution brought significant changes to previous assumptions about sexuality. Many traditional sexual beliefs and attitudes continue to influence us, however.

### **B. Sexual Orientation**

Sexual orientation is a complex, multidimensional construct composed of sexual identity, attraction, and behavior. Some people who have same-sex attractions or relationships may identify as queer, gay or lesbian, or for a range of reasons may choose not to identify with those or any labels, while those who experience romantic and sexual attraction between persons of the

other sex are referred to as straight. Bisexuality involves emotional and sexual attraction to more than one gender.

In ancient Greece, same-sex relationships between men represented the highest form of love.

Among the Sambians of New Guinea, boys have sexual contact with older boys, believing that the ingestion of semen is required for growth. When the girls to whom they are betrothed reach puberty, adolescent boys cease these same-sex sexual relations.

### C. Gender

The socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society assigns to a person.

A two-spirit is a person of one sex who identifies with the other sex; in some communities, such as the Zuni, a two-spirit is considered a third gender and is believed to possess great spiritual power.

In a few non-Western cultures, males may cross gender normative categories to assume roles that are usually associated with females. Androphilic males are those who are attracted to and aroused by adult males. Gynephilia refers to sexual attraction to and arousal by adult females.

#### Key Terms:

- sexual interests
- sexual orientation
- queer
- gay
- lesbian
- straight
- bisexuality
- heteroflexible
- asexuality
- same-sex marriage
- gender
- transgender
- two-spirit
- androphilic
- gynephilia

## 4. Societal Norms and Sexuality

Sexuality tends to be evaluated according to categories of natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal, and moral/immoral. These terms are value judgments, reflecting social norms rather than any quality inherent in the behavior itself.

### A. Natural Sexual Behavior

There is no commonly accepted definition of natural sexual behavior. Normal sexual behavior is what a culture defines as normal. Heteronormativity is probably the most pervasive view of sexuality: the belief that heterosexuality is normal, natural, and superior to all other expressions of sexuality.

### B. Normal Sexual Behavior

Human sexuality is characterized by sexual variation. Researchers believe that the best way to examine sexual behavior is on a continuum. Many activities that are considered deviant sexual behavior exist in most of us to some degree. These include exhibitionism, voyeurism, and fetishism.

### C. Sexual Behavior and Variations

Behaviors are not abnormal or unnatural; rather, they are more or less typical or atypical of the group average. Many of those whose behaviors are atypical may be regarded as sexual nonconformists rather than as abnormal or perverse.

#### Key Terms:

- heteronormativity
- normal sexual behavior
- sexual intercourse
- reproduction
- sexual variation

### Connect

#### Videos

- 6 Weird Facts About the History of Birth Control
- History of the Word “Gay”

### Lecture and Discussion Ideas

**Textbook Themes:** Significant themes for discussion include (1) biopsychosocial orientation, (2) sexuality as intimacy, (3) gender roles, (4) sexuality and popular culture, (5) commonality of sexual variation, and (6) significance of ethnicity. What are your reactions to these themes?

*Note to the instructor:* Some students may have especially strong feelings about traditional gender roles and gay and lesbian relationships. Some may feel uncomfortable about discussing ethnicity because of the taboos surrounding the topic, especially when it is linked to sexuality.

**Early Socialization:** What are your earliest memories about sexuality either as a participant or observer? Which were positive and which were negative? How do you relate to similar scenarios today?

**Studying Versus Celebrating Sexual Behaviors:** Some students mistakenly believe that objectively studying a sexual behavior is the equivalent of celebrating the behavior, especially if they have moral objections. Ask students to identify the differences among “studying,” “understanding,” “advocating,” “condoning,” “tolerating,” “accepting,” and “celebrating” diverse sexual activities, values, and orientations.

**Gender/Sexual Orientation/Biological Sex:** Discuss the differences among gender, sexual orientation, and biological sex. Some students mistakenly believe that homosexuality is a form of gender confusion or that gay males or lesbians want to be the other sex. Some believe that gay

males are “feminine” and lesbians “masculine,” mistakenly confusing gender and orientation issues.

**Our Body and Gender:** What is the relationship between our body and gender? Does one grow out of the other? Are they related at all? Can you think of any examples of possible true differences between cisgender men and women that are simply exaggerated by gender? Can you think of any examples of possible true differences that are ignored by society or reversed by gender roles?

**Nature and Nurture:** What are some ways that we see nature and nurture interact in a romantic, companionate, or passionate way? Other than procreation, what other evolutionary mechanisms does sexuality serve?

**Bonobos and Sex:** Human sexual behavior is most similar to that of the bonobo, one of the great apes. The argument is that few if any other species have sex face-to-face, and both humans and bonobos use sex as a pair-bonding mechanism. What other similarities exist between these two species?

**Sexual Scripts:** Sexual scripts tell us how sexual interaction occurs, but what else do they tell us? Imagine a typical sexual encounter. Would you do this with your Uncle Harold? Would you have done this at age 5? Would you do this in a classroom while the professor was lecturing? Are you more likely to do this at 10 A.M. or 10 P.M.? How are sexual scripts useful for an individual and for society? How can they be oppressive or restrictive?

**Culture and Bonding:** Have students discuss to what extent human culture affects individual ways of bonding between people.

**Taboo:** What are some of the taboos that we see in the United States? Ask if students from other cultures feel comfortable talking about what taboos exist in their culture. Are there any universal taboos?

**Our Culture:** Is it meaningful or useful to speak of the U.S. culture as a single entity? If so, when can such instances be considered true? Is U.S. culture exclusively comprised of Western culture? What other traditions have influenced the U.S. culture? When is the oversimplification of U.S. culture a problem? Why? When is it crucial to talk about the U.S. culture as more than a single entity?

**Sex Approving or Disapproving Over Time in the United States:** Times have changed with regard to attitudes toward sex. Do students think that the United States has made any gains from being a more sex-approving society? How are attitudes toward nudity tied to attitudes about sex?

**Changing Norms:** Within a culture, sexual norms and behaviors change considerably over time. How have Western sexual norms and behaviors changed? Can you give some examples of both positive and negative changes? Do you all agree on the changes? Do you all agree regarding which changes are positive and which are negative? How do you decide if the changes are negative or positive? Are some changes both positive and negative?

**Script Theory and the Sambia:** Could script theory be used to explain the pattern of homosexual and heterosexual behavior of Sambian males? How?

**Socially Desirable Responding:** In survey data, one of the issues is that people respond in a socially desirable manner. To what extent do you believe that people “lie” when asked about their religious behaviors (e.g., “Do you often go to church?”) and to what extent do you believe people “lie” about their sexual behavior (e.g., “What is the number of sexual partners you’ve had?”). How does this relate to sexual norms within a religious context?

**Social Institutions and Female Sexuality:** From a sociologist’s point of view, how have the social institutions of family, health care/insurance, work, religion, and government controlled female sexuality? Give an example of each. How might each institution be reconstituted to be less restrictive of female sexuality?

**Symbolic Boundaries:** Some have argued that symbolic boundaries like divorce and homosexuality often serve to divide people in the United States, especially where religious teachings are involved. Do you agree? What other factors may actually be causing a divide?

**What’s in a Word?** Biblical Hebrew uses the verb “to know” to mean sexual intercourse (as in “Adam knew Eve and she conceived a child”). What does this imply about sexual intercourse? How does it compare with the words we use today? Why do we no longer use this term? Is sexual intercourse considered less intimate today? Can self-disclosure be physical as well as emotional?

**Sex and Nation:** The Hebrew scriptures see sexual behavior as an aspect of national and religious loyalty. Are normative prescriptions for the expression of sexual behavior ever couched in these terms today? Is it described in other terms? List some examples to support your answer.

**Media Portrayals of Sexuality:** What purpose is served in the depiction of sexuality in the media? How do different television programs (comedy, drama, commercials, reality shows, music videos, and so on) portray sexuality? Provide examples and analyze the target audience for each show. Analyze your favorite television program. How is sexuality portrayed?

**Online Dating:** Why do people engage in online dating? Is it safe? Should it be regulated? By whom?

**Norms of Homosexuality Over Time:** The chapter notes changing attitudes toward homosexuality over time. What are some of the influences that affect homosexuality if it is perceived as socially normative?

**Learning Theory and Sexual Orientation:** Learning theory makes sense out of what appears to us to be a puzzling sexual behavior pattern among the Sambia of Papua New Guinea. What assumptions do we have about sexual orientation that makes the behavior pattern appear puzzling, and in need of explanation, in the first place? How would learning theory explain American sexual behavior patterns?

## Lecture Extension

### Thinking Sociologically About Sexuality

Because classes in human sexuality are often offered as interdisciplinary courses, it is sometimes difficult to ascertain the foundations students may have in the different disciplines involved. The field most often unknown to students prior to college is sociology. This introductory chapter provides an excellent opportunity to acquaint students with some of the fundamental tenets of this academic subject. As behaviors related to sexuality are often the most regulated in any society, sexual norms are of particular interest to sociologists. Identify for students the following:

- *Norms*: the expected behaviors in a given society
- *Sanctions*: positive or negative reactions to an actor's behavior that operate in accordance with norms
- *Sociological imagination*: C. Wright Mills's (1959) term for analyzing the prevailing norms and social issues of a given social structure from a sociohistorical perspective

Ensure that students understand the connections of norms and sanctions with regard to the concept of ethnocentrism—which will be covered in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Discuss with students the challenging role of the sociologist as a somewhat dispassionate observer of humans and the societies in which they live, as well as the ways in which societies coexist. The task from this perspective is to consider the ways in which geography and social forces have influenced human behavior. In other words, what factors shaped the direction in which a specific society moved to adopt the particular norms that it did?

*Source:* Mills, C. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford University Press.

## Polling Questions

### Polling 1: Pair Bonding and Sex

Bonobo sexual behaviors include the only nonhuman example of face-to-face genital sex, tongue kissing, and oral sex known in the wild. How many of you have used sex to cement a bond between yourself and your partner?

### Polling 2: Ethnic Identity and Sex

Do you think that someone's ethnic identity affects their sexual behavior? Do you think that your ethnic identity affects your sexual behavior?

### Polling 3: Trading Sex for Goods and Services

How many of you think that having sex with someone after a nice dinner is the same as receiving money for sex? How many of you have had sex with someone because they had bought you expensive things?

#### **Polling 4: Sex Approving or Disapproving?**

Do you think the United States is a sex-approving or sex-disapproving culture? Do you think it has become more approving in your lifetime? Do you think it will continue to become more accepting, or will it swing back to become more disapproving?

### **Activities**

*Note to the instructor:* Any classroom activity requires careful ethical reflection by the instructor before assigning the exercise. Some of the principles involved parallel those in human subject research. Students should have a basic right to privacy about their own sexuality. They should not be coerced into revealing private information if it is identifiable.

**Introductory Activity:** Have students make a list of sexual topics that they think might be covered during the entire course. Ask them to shout out their topics. You can list each topic on the board or have students write them up. Note the degree to which students use the word “sex” or “sexual” (e.g., do they say “dysfunctions” or “sexual dysfunctions”). Note any topics that students might be forgetting—or topics/words that they might be avoiding. After you have a good list, ask students to indicate what emotions might arise when discussing these topics. List these emotions on the board and analyze the emotions listed. Note that two people can have different emotions to the same topic. Explain to the class how this can make a class in human sexuality challenging.

**Thinking About Sexuality:** The first three handouts provided with this chapter can stimulate students’ thinking about sexuality. Assign them to complete on their own; then ask them to share their observations and conclusions in class discussion.

- Handout 1: OBSERVATION: Sex, Lies, and Music Videos
- Handout 2: REFLECTION: “Firsts” in Growing Up
- Handout 3: GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITY: The Impact of Media

**What Students Want to Learn:** Pass out  $3 \times 5$  cards and ask students to anonymously write what they want to learn in the class and why they are taking the class. Collect the cards and then randomly distribute them to groups to discuss; have groups exchange cards every few minutes. Then ask class members to identify what students most want to learn and their reasons for taking the class.

**Anonymous-Question Cards:** Have students write anonymous questions about male and female sexuality on  $3 \times 5$  cards. Fold them in half and give or pass them to the instructor. Take 10–15 min of class time to answer and discuss the questions. You may do this at the end of class or earlier if you need to break up your lecture. This activity can be done at each class session or as time permits. (This is a popular activity that can wake up a sleepy class.)

**“Discussing Sex”:** Ask students to suggest reasons why it is difficult to discuss sexuality. List the reasons on the board and ask students to prioritize the list. This exercise can also be done in discussion groups.

**Personal Reflections on Sexual Learning:** Have students anonymously answer the questions in Handout 5: Personal Reflections on Sexual Learning. Ask them to disclose their answers and discuss them with the class. Alternatively, completed handouts can be collected and then redistributed at random; this helps preserve anonymity.

**Sexual Autobiography:** This exercise is designed to encourage students to think thoughtfully and critically about their own sexual development. Begin with students' earliest recollections of sexual experiences and progress to the present. Attempt to find connections between events or behaviors at one period of development with those at other periods of development. Advance one or more theories to explain the occurrence or the effects of phenomena. This can be assigned as a semester-long paper, or it can be completed in a brief format and used as material for group discussion.

**What Are Your Attitudes About Human Sexual Nature?** The following are several statements that reflect different attitudes about sex. For each statement, have students indicate how much they agree or disagree with that statement. Some of the items refer to a specific sexual relationship, while others refer to general attitudes and beliefs about sex. Whenever possible, have them answer the questions with their current partner in mind. If they are not currently with anyone, have them answer the questions with their most recent partner in mind. If they have never had a sexual relationship, have them answer in terms of what they think their responses would most likely be.

For each statement:

- A = *strongly agree* with the statement
- B = *moderately agree* with the statement
- C = *neutral*—neither agree nor disagree
- D = *moderately disagree* with the statement
- E = *strongly disagree* with the statement

*Permissiveness:*

I do not need to be committed to a person to have sex with them.

Casual sex is acceptable.

I would like to have sex with many partners.

One-night stands are sometimes very enjoyable.

It is okay to have ongoing sexual relationships with more than one person at a time.

Sex as a simple exchange of favors is okay if both people agree to it.

The best sex is with no strings attached.

Life would have fewer problems if people could have sex more freely.

It is possible to enjoy sex with a person and not like that person very much.

It is okay for sex to be just a good physical release.

*Birth Control:*

Birth control is part of responsible sexuality.

The female in a male-female couple should share responsibility for birth control.

The male in a male-female couple should share responsibility for birth control.

*Communion:*

Sex is the closest form of communication between two people.

A sexual encounter between two people deeply in love is the ultimate human interaction.

At its best, sex seems to be the merging of two souls.

Sex is a very important part of life.

Sex is usually an intense, almost overwhelming, experience.

*Instrumentality:*

Sex is best when you let yourself go and focus on your own pleasure.

Sex is primarily the taking of pleasure from another person.

The main purpose of sex is to enjoy oneself.

Sex is primarily physical.

Sex is primarily a bodily function, like eating.

**Anthropologist's Perspective:** Ask students to imagine they are anthropologists from another culture studying American sexual behavior. What “curious” customs and behaviors might they find? Ask them to provide descriptive names, such as “exchanging saliva” (kissing) and “sex with the hand” (masturbation).

**Bonobos and Sex:** There are several videos on YouTube as well as at the BBC that look at sexual activity in Bonobos. Sex is being used to make peace, gain status, and bond with mates. This is a great way to illustrate the many uses of sex.

**Guest Speakers/Panels:** One of the most powerful experiences in a classroom can be had when the students have the opportunity to listen and talk with a person who embodies the facts and issues at hand.

- Contact a local (perhaps university-affiliated) evolutionary psychologist, sociobiologist, psychoanalyst, social learning theorist, psychologist, or sociologist to explain their perspective on sexuality.

**The Sexual Script:** On pieces of 8-in. by 10-in. paper, separately write possible actions that fit into a sexual script (e.g., they learn each other’s name; they go out to dinner; they talk; they kiss; one person receives oral sex; the other person receives oral sex; one touches the other’s chest, and then vice versa; one touches the other’s genitals, and vice versa; they tell their sexual histories; they have intercourse; they say “I love you”) and go on a series of dates (e.g., Date 1, Date 2, Date 3). Pass out one piece of paper to each student and ask students to line up in a typical order. How much agreement is there? Where is the order contentious? Why? What would happen if we moved “they tell their sexual histories” to before “they kiss”? What would happen if we moved “they touch genitals” to before “they touch chest”? How rigid is the sexual script? Does the sexual script apply to a dating situation, or to every time two people come together? Has the sexual script changed over history? How?

**Critical Thinking—Validity:** Learning to evaluate theories/ideas by using the concept of validity rather than truth/falsity is important for this chapter and for Chapter 2. Validity is assessed by deriving a research question or testable hypothesis from the theory, collecting empirical evidence, and evaluating the consistency between the data and the hypothesis. Script

theory states that our culture teaches us an elaborate script for sexual activity, including a specific sequence in which each activity in a sexual interaction should occur. Have the class participate in the above activity, “The Sexual Script.” When everyone is in place in the line, list the sequence they are in on a board/screen. The theory predicts that most (all?) of the students will agree with that sequence. Ask the group how many of them believe the sequence describes a typical sexual interaction. Collect the data by a show of hands. Evaluate the data by discussing extent of agreement versus points of disagreement. How much consistency do the students believe is necessary to validate the hypothesis?

**A Problem for Sociobiology?** Some have argued that many characteristics we see as attractive indicate health and therefore good genes. In groups or as a class, brainstorm a list of characteristics that signal attractiveness to your students and/or bring in a contemporary magazine and examine it for characteristics that are thought to be attractive. Then, evaluate each characteristic as a signifier of health. Are some of the requirements for attractiveness less than healthy? Unhealthy? What are the most important requirements? Are these requirements signifiers of health? What else might such characteristics signify?

*Note to the instructor:* The thinness requirement for women is an excellent example of an unhealthy characteristic that is a signifier of attractiveness in our culture. What else might smallness, weakness, and fragility suggest about a woman? Are those things valued as feminine in our culture? The positive value placed on tanned or bronze skin is another example of an unhealthy characteristic.

**Sexual Ideologies of Institutions 1:** Social institutions influence our sexuality. Arrange your students into groups and assign each group two of the following institutions: religion, economy, family, medicine, and law. Ask each group to debate the dominant sexual ideology of their assigned institutions. Then, ask them to think about how the dominant sexual ideology of their assigned institutions has changed throughout history. Finally, ask your students to discuss how the two institutions interact and affect each other in powerful and consequential ways.

**Sexual Ideologies of Institutions 2:** Arrange your students into groups and assign each group a major social institution (religion, economy, family, medicine, and law). Ask each group to discuss the following questions: What is this institution’s sexual ideology or ideologies? How does the institution promote its ideology? Is its ideology in conjunction with or in contrast to popular ideologies of sexuality? What other institutions does it interact with, and how?

**Sexual Ideologies of Institutions 3:** Have students research one major social institution (religion, economy, family, medicine, and law) and write a short essay. Have them address the following questions: What is this institution’s sexual ideology or ideologies? How does the institution promote its ideology? Is its ideology in conjunction with or in contrast to popular ideologies of sexuality? What other institutions does it interact with, and how?

**Cultural Sexual Norms Over Time:** Place students in small groups. Assign them a time period. Then have each group perform research on connotations of sexuality/fertility in that time period. If you have a small enough class, you can have them present their findings to the class; otherwise, you can have them write a short wiki entry or paper as a group.

**Sex Depicted in Art Over Time:** Place students in small groups and assign them a time period. Then, have each group perform research on artistic portrayals (can be drawing, painting, literature, dance, or any other medium) of sexuality/fertility in that time period. If you have a small enough class, you can have them present their findings to the class; otherwise, you can have them write a short wiki entry or paper as a group.

**Sex-Approving or Sex-Disapproving Cultures:** Place students in small groups. Assign them a country. Have each group investigate if they think that culture is sex-approving or sex-disapproving. What evidence can they find to support their views? If you have a small enough class, you can have them present their findings to the class; otherwise, you can have them write a short wiki entry or paper as a group.

**Health Considerations Discussion—Twenty-First-Century Issues:** Have students discuss some of the sexual issues confronting health care providers in the twenty-first century, such as the relationship between sexual well-being and health, new reproductive technologies, HIV/AIDS, risk-taking behaviors, and the sexual rights of patients.

**Health Considerations Activity—Sexuality Course for Physicians:** Although many people turn to physicians for sexual advice and counseling, physicians often do not have training in human sexuality. In fact, medical schools rarely offer courses in human sexuality. As an assignment, have students design a human sexuality course for physicians; have them decide what would be included in the course.

**Health Considerations Activity—Behaviors:** Have students make a list of healthy and unhealthy sexual behaviors. On what basis did they decide to classify behaviors as healthy or unhealthy?

**Generational Changes:** Have students develop a questionnaire that they could use to ask members of two different generations about the impact of religion on the development of their sexuality. Then have them interview members of two different generations by using these questionnaires. Later, ask them to write a detailed report on the similarities and differences between the answers provided by the members of the two generations while providing possible reasons for the same.

**Moral Nonmarital Sex:** Many people now engage in sex outside of marriage. Although some people consider it immoral, others would like to think that nonmarital sex could be morally good or neutral. Have students brainstorm the criteria for judging the morality of nonmarital sex: What might be the basic criteria for morally neutral nonmarital sex? Morally good nonmarital sex?

**Sexuality and Your Favorite TV Program:** Ask students to utilize Handout 4: Sexuality and Your Favorite TV Program to analyze their favorite television program. After the students have completed the assignment, make a list of the five most popular TV shows and ask students to comment on their portrayal of sexuality. (This activity can be done either in groups or in the class as a whole.)

**Sex and Popular Culture Discussion—Current Stories in the Media:** Ask students to identify current media stories, talk shows, or specials relating to human sexuality. Relate this to the appropriate chapter in the textbook or lecture. How accurate is the material? This exercise may be done during each class session or occasionally, as time permits.

**Sex and Popular Culture Discussion—Portrayals of Sexuality:** Ask students to describe how sexuality is portrayed in TV, movies, commercials, popular music, and music videos. Are there differences in what is portrayed in different media?

**Sex and Popular Culture Discussion—Parental Guidelines:** Ask students if they think the TV Parental Guidelines are useful. How do they think children are affected by exposure to scenes of sex, violence, sexual dialogue, and adult language? Would they trust the judgment of the coders who classify shows as TV-G, TV-PG, or TV-14?

**Sex and Popular Culture Discussion—LGBTQ+ in TV and Film:** Ask students to describe recent portrayals of gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered people and relationships on TV or in film. To what degree are the portrayals stereotypical?

**Sex and Popular Culture Discussion—The Internet:** Ask students how the Internet can shape people's perceptions of sex and affect sexual interactions. How does the information people find on the Internet compare to the information gleaned from movies and TV? Do online encounters help people learn how to conduct live interactions?

**Music Video Activity:** Make a recording of a music video or commercial in which sexuality plays an important role. Show the recording to the class and ask them to discuss the use of sexuality.

**Magazine Activity:** Have each student bring a magazine in that targets them as the audience. In small groups, ask them to analyze the content of the front page. How many of the headlines address sexuality explicitly or implicitly? What is the proportion of sexual content to nonsexual content on the cover? How is the front cover model or celebrity positioned and dressed?

**Internet Activity—Sexuality on the Internet:** The Internet has provided a new arena for the presentation of sexual material. Have students list as many ways as they can how the Internet serves as a purveyor of information related to human sexuality. Have them present a website that represents an example of this type of information. They should include answers to the following questions:

1. What is the URL of the site?
2. What is the title of the site?
3. Who is the author?
4. If an organization sponsors the site, what organization is it?
5. What keywords did you use in your search engine? Or what link did you follow to find this site?
6. What made you select this website to present?
7. Summarize the contents of this website.

8. What two things did you learn from this site that are different from or reinforce the lectures and/or the textbook?

## Suggested Media

*Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community* (1984, 1 hr 27 min, The Cinema Guild). Using filmed recollections and archival material, this program traces the social, political, and cultural development of the gay and lesbian community.

*The Clios 2000* (2002, 1 hr 28 min, Films for the Humanities & Sciences). A compilation of the Clio-award winning commercials of 2000.

*The Diary of Adam and Eve by Mark Twain* (1978, 15 min, Indiana University Audio Visual Center). Retells and embellishes the story of Adam and Eve using separate diaries that comment on the same situations to point out the differences in the sexes.

*The Kids Are All Right* (2010, 1 hr 46 min, R drama/comedy/romance, Focus Features). Available on DVD, or streaming on a variety of providers. Lesbian couple Jules (Julianne Moore) and Nic (Annette Bening) have been together for almost 20 years and have two teenage offspring named Joni and Laser, who were conceived via artificial insemination. Unbeknown to their mothers, Joni and Laser seek out their biological father, a restaurateur named Paul (Mark Ruffalo). Complications arise when the teens bond with Paul and invite him into their lives.

*Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women* (2010, 46 min, Media Education Foundation). “At once provocative and inspiring, *Killing Us Softly 4* stands to challenge yet another generation of students to take advertising seriously, and to think critically about its relationship to sexism, eating disorders, gender violence, and contemporary politics.”

*Miss Representation* (2011, 1 hr 25 min, Girls’ Club Entertainment). Available on DVD and from The Representation Project (<https://therepproject.org>). Explore how the mainstream media’s often disparaging portrayals of women contribute to the underrepresentation of females in positions of leadership.

“Too Sexy, Too Soon” *Nightline* | ABC News

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMyBUIEY-yo>

Do tween fashion trends push girls to mature too fast? Parents share their concerns about their daughters’ sexy attire, marketing to young girls even before they hit puberty.

## Internet Resources

See also the “Suggested Websites” listed in the book.

### APA

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

## **APA: Sex**

<https://www.apa.org/topics/sex-sexuality>

## **Behavior Genetics Association**

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

## **Cornell University Library: Human Sexuality Collection**

<http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/HSC/>

“The Human Sexuality Collection seeks to preserve and make accessible primary sources that document historical shifts in the social construction of sexuality, with a focus on U.S. lesbian and gay history and the politics of pornography.”

## **The Kinsey Institute: Exploring Sexuality, Relationships, and Well-Being**

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

Established in 1947, The Kinsey Institute is the trusted source for critical issues in sexuality, gender, and reproduction.

## **Naked News**

<http://nakednews.com>

This website actually presents the news, but as the news is being presented the broadcasters take their clothes off. You might want to consider what this website is all about and how it represents sexuality in the media and in popular culture.

## **PBS: Chimps and Bonobos**

[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/evolution/library/07/3/1\\_073\\_03.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/evolution/library/07/3/1_073_03.html)

*Evolution: Why Sex?* segment on bonobos and chimpanzees. Includes current research as well as video.

## **SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change**

<http://www.siecus.org>

## **Additional Readings**

See also the “Suggested Reading” list in the book.

Dines, G., & McMahon, J. M. (Eds.). (2015). *Gender, race and class in media: A critical reader* (4th ed.). Sage. An analysis of media entertainment culture.

Francoeur, R. T., & Noonan, R. (Eds.). (2004). *The continuum complete international encyclopedia of sexuality*. Continuum. The foremost reference work on sexual behavior throughout the world.

Rosewarne, L. (2016). *Intimacy on the Internet: Media representations of online connections*. Routledge. Media representations are categorized and analyzed to explore what they

reveal about the intersection of gender, sexuality, technology, and the changing mores regarding intimacy.

Sales, N. J. (2016). *American girls: Social media and the secret lives of teenagers*. Vintage Books. Although limited by its single-gender focus, the author discusses the ways in which the sexual behavior of teenagers is being changed and shaped by new technology, including the influence of online porn.

Strasburger, V. C., Wilson, B. J., & Jordan, A. B. (2014). *Children, adolescents, and the media* (3rd ed.). Sage. Explores mass media, including the sexual messages the media convey and their impact on adolescents.

Tiefer, L. (2004). *Sex is not a natural act and other essays* (2nd ed.). Westview Press. A revised collection of provocative essays on sex and its many meanings in our culture.

## **Handout 1: Observation: Sex, Lies, and Music Videos**

It is no secret that many people absorb hours of music videos and other formats of music each day. What effect does this medium have on their sexuality?

### **PART 1**

Visit YouTube and search for top music videos for the week. Watch at least three and record the following:

1. What were the titles of the songs?
  
2. What were the artists' names?
  
3. What was/were the message(s) in each song?
  
4. What images helped to convey or reinforce the message?
  
5. What apparel was worn by each gender represented in the video?
  
6. What kind of body language was used? How did it reinforce the messages?
  
7. What else did you notice?
  
8. Did the videos have any content related to sexuality? If so, was its view sex-positive, sex-negative, or neutral?
  
9. What did you learn as a result of watching music videos?

## PART 2

Commercials may employ tactics that reinforce sex role stereotypes and provide calculated images of men, women, sex, and relationships. Turn on prime-time TV and observe three advertisements while recording the following information:

1. What product was the advertiser trying to sell?
2. What images were provided to encourage vulnerability and/or desire for the product?
3. How were the people dressed? Were there wardrobe differences for each gender?
4. What poses or images were used by the characters to sell the product?
5. What kind of background music was used?
6. Did the commercials have content related to sexuality? If so, were their views sex-positive, sex-negative, or neutral?
7. If a narrator or voice over the scene was used, was it male, female, or other? How did that influence what is being advertised?
8. As a result of this advertisement, would you buy this product? Why or why not?

## **Handout 2: Reflection: “Firsts” in Growing Up**

Throughout the course you will be asked to recall your own experiences and feelings about sex, growing up, relationships, and so on. The following statements are intended to give you the opportunity to explore your own sexuality and to begin processing the information from this course into a context that makes sense to you.

Use the following statements as a guide but don’t feel constrained by them:

- I first recall being a girl, boy, or other when . . .
- What my parents told me about sex was . . .
- The first time I was made to feel shame about my body was . . .
- For me, the experience of approaching adolescence was . . .
- When I learned about menstruation my reaction was . . .
- My family’s reaction to my budding sexuality was . . .
- I began noticing the same or other sex (or both) when . . .
- The first experience I ever had that I would define as sexual was . . .
- My attitudes about sex differed from my friends when it came to . . .
- I think my sexual experiences have affected me by . . .
- What I’ve learned about my sexuality from recalling my history is . . .

## **Handout 3: Gender and Sexual Identity: The Impact of Media**

The influence of the media, for some, is overwhelming, dramatic, and profound. Try to recall how movies, TV, computer-age technology, and other forms of media have affected your attitudes and behaviors as you respond to the following statements:

The types of media that influenced my sexual identity the most were . . .

- The persons I admired the most included . . .
- The images I tried to achieve included . . .
- The media portrayed love relationships to be . . .
- This affected me . . .
- The media portrayed family relationships to be . . .
- This affected me . . .
- The most positive effect the media have had on my sexuality is . . .
- The most negative effect the media have had on my sexuality is . . .
- As a result of the media, my self-image and/or self-esteem was affected . . .
- I became aware of the impact of the media on my sexuality when . . .

## **Handout 4: Sexuality and Your Favorite TV Program**

Name of program:

Description of content:

What underlying message or stereotype about sexuality did the program present?

How do portrayals of the sexuality of females and males and others differ? Consider the use of language, props, camera angles, spoken lines, and time given to different characters.

Did it present its message or stereotype visually or verbally? How? Was it effective?

Comments:

## **Handout 5: Personal Reflections on Sexual Learning**

Please write an answer to each question. Do not write your name on the survey.

1. What is your first memory of learning about sexuality? How might these first experiences have affected your behavior or thinking about sexuality now?
2. What sort of modeling have your parents provided? Has their relationship(s) affected how you view love, marriage, or monogamy?
3. Describe your first sexual interaction. After your first sexual interaction, how did you feel about yourself? Your sexuality? Did you seek out more? Why or why not?
4. What are your strongest beliefs about sexuality? What is the source of these beliefs? What evidence comes to mind to justify these beliefs? What is the source of this evidence?