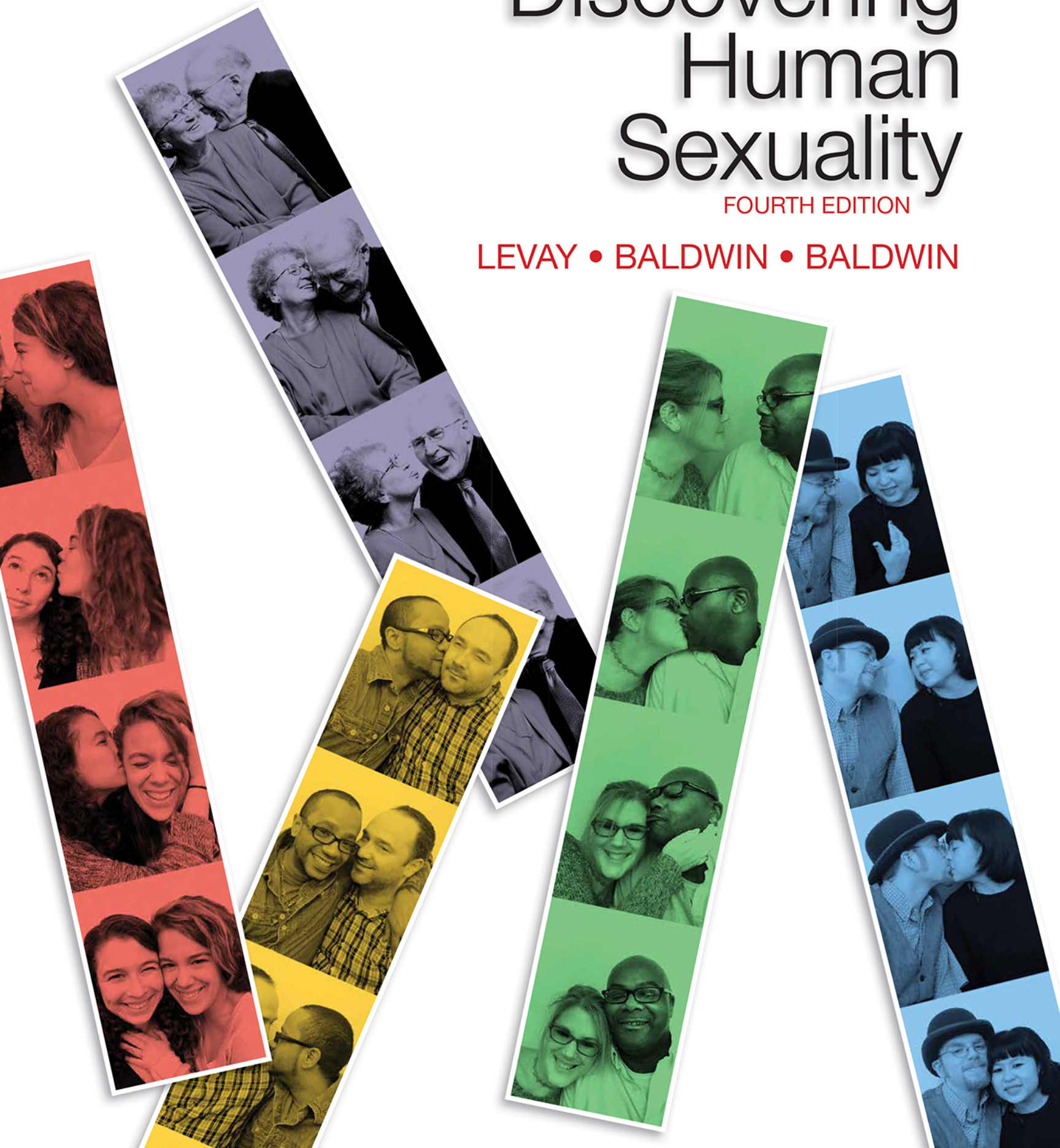


Discovering Human Sexuality

FOURTH EDITION

LEVAY • BALDWIN • BALDWIN



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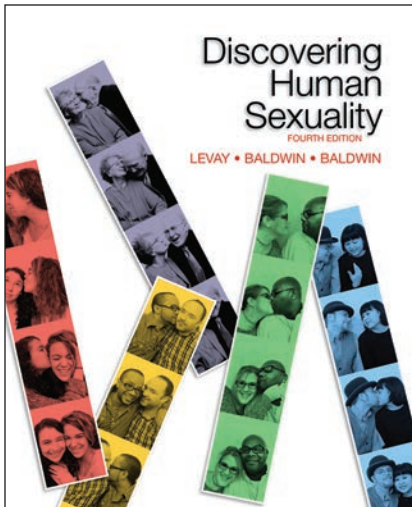
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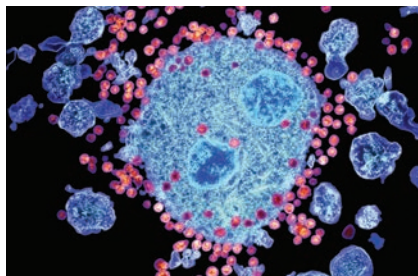
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Preface

This past year was tough, making the switch to LeVay et al., but I'm glad I did it. Discovering Human Sexuality is unique in both approach and content. The authors have a point of view, but still provide balanced coverage of controversial issues. The boxes are wonderful. One of the things I like about it is the inclusion of historical and cross-cultural detail in the boxes. It's a very readable and beautiful book. The illustrations and diagrams are excellent—the best of any text I have ever used.

Josephine Caldwell-Ryan
Southern Methodist University

Discovering Human Sexuality, Fourth Edition, is the continuation of a textbook that originated in 2003 with the publication of *Human Sexuality* by Simon LeVay and Sharon Valente. Since then, the book has gone through several changes of authorship, format, and title. One consistency, however, has been the identity of the lead author. Another has been the book's high academic and pedagogical standards, which have earned it a prominent place in the market and broad praise from reviewers and users, including the kind words cited above.

The Second Edition of *Human Sexuality* appeared in 2006 with the same two authors. For the 2009 edition, however, Janice Baldwin replaced Sharon Valente. Also, we decided to produce two distinct versions of the book. One of them—*Human Sexuality*, Third Edition—continued the approach pioneered in the earlier editions. The other, which we titled *Discovering Human Sexuality*, was a somewhat shorter and more accessible version that demanded less prior knowledge on the part of the students, especially in the area of biology. John Baldwin joined LeVay and Janice Baldwin as third author of this version. In 2012 we continued with the same two versions (*Human Sexuality*, Fourth Edition, and *Discovering Human Sexuality*, Second Edition).

For the 2015 edition we decided to merge the two versions into one, which we titled *Discovering Human Sexuality*, Third Edition. It was a difficult decision to make because both versions had been successful in the marketplace and each served a somewhat different need. However, the workload involved in producing two different textbooks at the same time was excessive. In addition, we realized that we could incorporate the best features of *Human Sexuality* into *Discov-*

ering Human Sexuality by judicious changes to the text and by the addition of two appendices containing more advanced “optional” material.

Thus the present, Fourth Edition of *Discovering Human Sexuality* is in fact the sixth edition overall. We are very gratified that the text has remained so popular with instructors, some of whom have been with us since 2003.

Features of *Discovering Human Sexuality*, Fourth Edition

Important features of *Discovering Human Sexuality* distinguish our book from competing texts:

EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH We believe that human sexuality is an academic subject like any other, meaning that it should be grounded in reason. Throughout the book, we have sought to present statements that are supported by data, ideas that are tested or testable, and recommendations that are based on research. There are many unanswered questions in sexuality, of course—questions about how abnormal modes of sexual expression (paraphilic disorders) develop, for example, and how best to treat them. In dealing with these controversies, an evidence-based approach demands a nondogmatic style and a willingness to admit that not everything is known. Some students may feel challenged to enter the field of sex research themselves in order to help fill those gaps in our understanding.

Some human sexuality texts contain a great deal of advice to students, especially in the area of relationships. Much of this advice has no objective basis and seems designed more to transmit the authors' values than to foster an authentic learning experience. In *Discovering Human Sexuality*, we keep the total quantity of advice down and try to ensure that the advice we do give has been “field-tested.”

Literature citations are, of course, an important element of an evidence-based book. We have been surprised by how cavalierly some competing books deal with this issue—quite commonly, citations in the text are not matched by any corresponding entries in the bibliography. In *Discovering Human Sexuality* we have made every effort to ensure that references are fully documented. Another common practice that we consider unacademic is referring to original research studies by citing magazine or newspaper articles that mention

them, rather than the journal articles in which the research was presented. Our policy has been to cite original sources wherever possible, and to use magazine and newspaper references for the kinds of topics they excel at, such as news stories, cultural trends, and the like.

EMPHASIS ON DIVERSITY Today's college students come from a wide range of backgrounds, and in their adult lives they will have to deal with people very different from themselves. Our text presents this diversity in a detailed and non-judgmental fashion. For example, with regard to sexual orientation, we go far beyond "gay," "bisexual," and "straight": We talk about the ever-changing history of the butch-femme dichotomy in lesbian culture, women whose self-identity is too fluid for one-word labels, gay men who are "bears" or "bear cubs" or into the leather scene, what it's like to be gay and Asian-American or Native American, how the gay experience differs for different generations of Americans and for gay people around the world, and so on. Similarly, we take pains to discuss racial, ethnic, and religious diversity, as they affect sexuality, and of course diversity in the actual modes of sexual behavior—including some of the more unusual forms of sexual expression such as "adult babies" and men whose partners are (literally) dolls.

PRESENTATION STYLE Simon LeVay, Janice Baldwin, and John Baldwin are all experienced authors of college textbooks. In creating *Discovering Human Sexuality*, we have pooled our writing skills to ensure that the text is fully accessible, engaging, and relevant to students of diverse backgrounds. The result of these combined efforts is, we believe, the most readable and student-friendly human sexuality text on the market.

ART PROGRAM Another way that we have striven to maintain both comprehensibility and interest is through the illustrations. One might think that it would be a simple matter to illustrate a book on human sexuality, but in reality it is a significant challenge. Illustrating some of the concepts discussed in this book, especially in its more biologically oriented sections, requires a great deal of thought and design skill. Sinauer Associates, our long-time publisher now operating as an imprint of Oxford University Press, is an industry leader in the use of art as a pedagogical medium. Thanks to our publisher's efforts, many complex topics, such as the regulation of the menstrual cycle, have been given a visual representation that gracefully parallels and clarifies the accompanying text. Nearly every two-page spread in the book offers one or more illustrations—photographs, drawings, diagrams, graphs, or charts—relevant to the text on that spread. Besides their informative value, illustrations offer important visual relief. Some of our competitors' texts contain sequences of up to ten pages without a single illustration—a definite challenge to the average student's attention span.

BOXES The 74 boxes are an important feature of the book. They attempt to broaden the reader's horizons with a more in-depth look at specific questions than is possible within the main text: Is there more than one kind of female ejaculation? What's it like to be a rubber fetishist? Why do some Amazonian peoples believe that a child can have several fathers? In tackling these and many other questions, the boxes provide breaks from the steady flow of the text and allow students to consider specific issues in a more relaxed and informal way.

Other aids to learning and revision include key terms (indicated by boldfaced type and defined in a running glossary), FAQs (frequently asked questions), discussion questions, chapter summaries, Web resources, and recommended reading materials.

Discovering Human Sexuality's student companion website (oup.com/us/levaydhs4e) is an invaluable learning aid. This site parallels the text with a thorough set of study questions, animations, activities, Web topics, quizzes, and other resources. Website activities are linked to the text and are referenced in teal type in the printed text. In addition, a complete set of instructor supplements is available to qualified adopters of the textbook. See the section on Media and Supplements for details on the full range of material that accompanies *Discovering Human Sexuality*.

The Fourth Edition

Although we have kept the overall structure of the textbook unchanged from the previous edition, we have taken the opportunity of the new edition to make some significant changes and additions:

- We have added discussions of many topics that were not covered, or only briefly covered, in earlier editions. One example is the role of power and fame in enabling sexual harassment and assault, a topic that has come to urgent public attention in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein and Larry Nassar scandals. We have also expanded our coverage of online data-mining as a source of information about sexual desires, behaviors, and attitudes. Conversely, we have deleted or abbreviated numerous passages that seemed less interesting or instructive than they were a few years ago.
- We have added 19 new boxes on a wide range of topics, including "When Tampons Aren't an Option" (Box 2.5) (a look at how women around the world deal with menstruation), "Tempest in a Toilet" (Box 4.5) (about the controversy over which toilets should be used by transgender individuals), "Beyond Gay and Straight" (Box 12.4) (a personal account of one man whose sexual orientation defies categorization), "Crush Fetishes" (Box 13.2),

“The Superstar Harasser” (Box 16.5), and “Sugar-ing” (Box 17.2) (about sugar daddy/sugar baby relationships). Existing boxes have been updated: For example, the box on “Rape and War” (Box 16.4) now includes a personal account by a woman who was raped during the 2017 ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people in Myanmar. Unlike previous editions, the Fourth Edition does not assign the boxes to categories (Biology of Sex, Controversies, etc.). Those categories were somewhat artificial; omitting them has allowed us greater flexibility in selecting and writing the boxes.

- We have of course taken the opportunity to update the book with the latest research, surveys, statistics, laws, medical advances, contraceptive techniques, and cultural happenings.

Acknowledgments

Producing a modern college textbook such as this one requires the combined efforts of a much larger team of professionals than the three of us who are privileged to have our names on the front cover. The staff members of Sinauer Associates have produced, with great efficiency and good humor, a textbook of outstanding visual quality and educational value. Those with whom we have had the most enduring contacts are editor Sydney Carroll, production editor Alison Hornbeck, and photo researcher Mark Siddall, but many others labored behind the scenes to ensure the book’s high quality and timely production. We are especially grateful for the production oversight of Donna DiCarlo and Christopher Small, and for the creative cover design by Joan Gemme. We also thank Lou Doucette for her skillful copyediting; Carrie Mailler, Zan Carter, Tom Friedmann, Nate Nolet, and Jason Dirks for their work on the media and supplements package; Marie Scavotto, Nancy Asai, and Susan McGlew for their effective work promoting the book; Johanna Walkowicz for obtaining outside reviews; and Jeannine LeBlanc for sending us our checks on time!

Reviewers

We acknowledge with gratitude the extensive and constructive comments made by the people who reviewed chapters of *Discovering Human Sexuality* for the new edition. These reviewers are listed below. Helpful comments have also come from the Baldwins’ students at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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Media and Supplements

to accompany *Discovering Human Sexuality, Fourth Edition*

For the Student

Companion Website (oup.com/us/levaydhs4e)

The *Discovering Human Sexuality, Fourth Edition* Companion Website includes a variety of study and review aids—all available at no cost to the student. The site includes the following:

- *Chapter Outlines* provide an overview of each chapter.
- *Chapter Summaries* give the student a thorough review of each chapter's content.
- *Learning Objectives* help focus the student on the important concepts and topics in each chapter. Each is referenced to specific textbook headings.
- *Activities* (for selected chapters) include animations, dynamic illustrations, and labeling exercises that help the student learn and understand complex concepts and anatomical (and other) terms.
- *Flashcards* help the student master the hundreds of new terms introduced in the textbook.
- *Web Links* provide a set of online sites and resources relevant to each chapter.
- *The Glossary* provides definitions for all textbook bolded terms.

Dashboard (www.oup.com/us/dashboard)

Dashboard delivers a wealth of automatically-graded quizzes and study resources for *Discovering Human Sexuality*, along with an interactive eBook, all in an intuitive, web-based learning environment.

For the Instructor

Ancillary Resource Center (oup-arc.com)

The Ancillary Resource Center provides instructors using *Discovering Human Sexuality* with a wealth of resources for use in course planning, lecture development, and assessment. Contents include:

- *Textbook Figures & Tables*: All of the figures and tables from the textbook, formatted for optimal legibility when projected. Complex images are provided in both a whole and split version.
- *PowerPoint Resources*: Two ready-to-use presentations are provided for each chapter:
 - A lecture presentation that includes text covering the entire chapter, with selected figures.
 - A figure presentation that includes all of the figures and tables from the chapter, with titles on each slide, and complete captions in the Notes field.
- *Instructor's Manual*: The Instructor's Manual provides instructors with a variety of resources to aid in planning their course and developing their lectures. For each chapter, the manual includes a chapter overview, a chapter outline, the complete chapter summary, class discussion questions, teaching resources, and suggested readings.
- *Media Guide*: The Media Guide includes extensive lists of suggested video segments (and full-length titles) that are ideal for use as lecture starters or other in-class activities. Video suggestions (with links and sources) are provided for topics across all chapters, and suggested discussion questions are included.
- *Test Bank*: The Test Bank consists of a broad range of questions covering all the key facts and concepts in each chapter. Each chapter includes multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questions. Also included are all of the Dashboard quizzes (multiple-choice and essay), the textbook end-of-chapter questions, and the Media Guide discussion questions. All questions are keyed to Bloom's Taxonomy and referenced to specific textbook sections.

- *Computerized Test Bank*: The entire test bank is provided in Blackboard's Diploma software. Diploma makes it easy to assemble quizzes and exams from any combination of publisher-provided questions and instructor-created questions. In addition, quizzes and exams can be exported to many different course management systems, such as Blackboard and Moodle.

Dashboard (www.oup.com/us/dashboard)

Dashboard by Oxford University Press delivers a wealth of study resources and automatically-graded quizzes for *Discovering Human Sexuality* in an intuitive, web-based learning environment. A built-in color-coded gradebook allows instructors to track student progress. Dashboard includes:

- *Interactive eBook*: A complete eBook is integrated into Dashboard and includes in-text links to Activities.
- *All Student Companion Website Resources*: Activities, Outlines, Summaries, Learning Objectives, Web Links, Flashcards, and Glossary.
- *Study Questions*: A set of self-review questions designed to give students the opportunity to test their understanding of each chapter's material.
- *Online Quizzes*: Two sets of questions are available for each chapter:
 - Multiple-Choice Quizzes test student comprehension of the material covered in each chapter.
 - Essay Questions challenge students to synthesize and apply what they have learned.

To learn more about any of these resources, or to get access, please contact your local OUP representative.

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Discovering Human Sexuality

FOURTH EDITION

Chapter

1



Sexuality includes both performance and relationships. These are tango dancers in Buenos Aires, Argentina. (Karol Kozlowski/ AWL Images/Getty Images.)

Sexuality: Pathways to Understanding

Sexuality is a central and all-pervasive theme of human existence. At its best, sexuality charges our lives with energy, excitement, and love. It offers a deep sense of connectedness, capable of spanning and healing social divisions. It creates family, the primary unit of society and the cradle of future generations.

At its worst, sexuality brings prejudice, anguish, violence, and disease.

To begin our exploration of this powerful and mysterious force, we first ask what the terms “sex” and “sexuality” mean and why sexuality is a topic worth studying. We go on to review some of the ways in which human sexuality has changed between the origin of our species and the present day. Our purpose is to make clear that, even though there may be some eternal truths about sexuality, it is not static: It changes slowly as a result of evolutionary forces, and much faster under the influence of culture.

Over the last few decades, research has affected people’s sex lives in important ways, usually for the better. In this chapter we describe the variety of methods by which sexuality can be studied and give examples of the impact such research has had.

To do it justice, we must approach human sexuality with open minds, with respect for diversity, and with all the modes of inquiry that have been used to illuminate human nature. Approached in this way, the topic is not just another step in your college career; it is a personal voyage of discovery that will help you enjoy the best that sexuality has to offer—and avoid the worst.

sex A person's identity as female or male, or sexual behavior.

sexuality The feelings, behaviors, and identities associated with sex.

Sexuality Is a Broader Concept than Sex

The term **sex** has two meanings. First, it means the distinction between female and male—a distinction that, as we'll see in later chapters, is not as clear-cut as you might imagine. Second, it means engaging in sexual behaviors. These behaviors may be very obviously sexual because they involve genital phenomena such as vaginal lubrication, penile or clitoral erection, orgasm, and so on. But they also include activities that do not directly center on the genitals, such as courtship, as well as behaviors such as kissing that may or may not be sexual depending on context. Both meanings of "sex" are central to this book.

The term **sexuality** includes the two meanings of "sex" but also goes beyond them to encompass the entire realm of human experience that is more or less closely connected with sex. It means, for example, our gendered traits—the psychological traits that differ, to a greater or lesser extent, between women and men. It means our sexual and romantic attractions and relationships—who we find attractive or fall in love with and how we establish, maintain, or dissolve sexual partnerships. It means becoming a parent (or preventing that from happening). It also includes the two-way relationship between our personal sexual identities and behaviors and social structures such as the law, religion, medicine, and politics. We touch on all these aspects of sexuality in this book, but even in 594 pages we cannot do all of them the justice they deserve.

Studying Sexuality Has Practical Benefits

There are many possible reasons why you have chosen to take a course on human sexuality. Maybe you're simply curious about a topic that is often treated with embarrassment, evasion, or flippancy. Maybe you are looking for ways to improve your own sex life, or you think you have sexual problems that need to be solved. Maybe you are planning a career that requires an understanding of human sexuality.

Regardless of your specific motives, many practical benefits are to be gained from taking this course and reading this textbook. Here are some examples:

- Improving your understanding of the structure and function of your genitals and those of your partners will help you give and receive more pleasure from sex.
- Learning more about how people communicate on sexual topics will increase your chances of forming and maintaining satisfying relationships and avoiding abusive ones.
- Learning about sexual diversity will encourage you to be more understanding of unusual sexual desires and behaviors—whether in others or in yourself.
- Educating yourself about contraception and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) will lessen the chance that your sexual behavior may end up harming you or your partners.
- Becoming knowledgeable about sex will be an asset to you in your future career—most especially if you enter the medical or helping fields, but also in any career that brings you into contact with other people.
- Educating yourself about sex will enable you to educate others—including your friends and your own children, if you plan to have them.
- By learning to think critically about research, you will become a more discriminating consumer of media reports and advertising relating to sexuality.

Sexuality Has Changed over Time

Most—but not all—women and men experience sexual desire and engage in sexual relationships at some point in their lives. This has likely been true across the

course of human history and prehistory, and it is true around the world today. But the ways in which these desires and relationships express themselves have been extraordinarily varied. Here we sketch some of the changes that have occurred over time.

Sexuality has been influenced by evolution

Humans evolved from the common ancestors of humans and non-human primates, who lived about 7 million years ago. You might think that we could get some idea of early human sexuality by studying the sexual behavior of our closest relatives, the great apes (chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, and orangutans), on the assumption that these animals have changed less over time than we have.

It turns out, however, that there is a great deal of sexual diversity even among these closely related species. Among chimpanzees, for example, most sexual behavior is between males and females and has the potential to lead to pregnancy. Among bonobos, which look very similar to chimpanzees, sexual contact between individuals of the same sex is common. The function of such behavior is clearly not reproductive; rather, it serves the purposes of conflict resolution and alliance formation (Parish & de Waal, 2000). Among orangutans coercive sex—analogueous to rape in humans—is common (Knott et al., 2010), but that’s not true for bonobos. Some of these species differences are described in Appendix A.

One general characteristic of sexual behavior among our primate relatives is that more of it takes place than is strictly necessary for reproductive purposes—sometimes a great deal more. Another is that individuals *compete* for sex partners: Males often compete for access to the most fertile females, while females often compete for the attention of high-ranking males. You don’t have to be a sex researcher to know that these kinds of competition are prevalent in our own species today. It’s likely that competition for partners has characterized sexuality throughout human history and prehistory and that this competition has driven the evolution of sex differences in appearance and behavior.

Early in the evolution of our species, humans probably lacked understanding of the connection between **coitus** (penile-vaginal intercourse) and reproduction. Even today, there are human cultures where people are unaware of biological facts that seem obvious to us, such as the fact that a child has just one father or that pregnancy and childbirth result from a single act of coitus (**Box 1.1**).

Over the course of human history the trend toward an increasingly conscious understanding of how sex “works” has influenced human sexuality in directions that seem counterintuitive in evolutionary terms. For example, the knowledge that the release of semen (the male ejaculate) in the vagina is what causes pregnancy led to the introduction of contraceptive practices. These included withdrawal of the penis prior to ejaculation—a practice known already in Old Testament times—and the use of various kinds of barriers placed in the vagina. Similarly, methods intended to interrupt an established pregnancy—by use of certain herbs or poisons, or by black magic—were widely used in the Middle Ages, with varying success. As methods for contraception and abortion have improved over the centuries, so has it become increasingly possible to enjoy the pleasures of sex without its natural consequences. This has undoubtedly increased people’s—especially women’s—willingness to engage in sex both within and outside of established relationships.

Society has changed sexuality

Human sexuality has been greatly influenced by the development of social controls. The transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to one of settled agriculture took place



Male primates, such as these golden snub-nosed monkeys, often fight over access to females. (© Ma Xiaobo Photography China/Corbis.)

coitus Penile-vaginal intercourse.

Box

1.1

Meet My Dads

No matter how many men a woman has sex with, any child she bears has only a single biological father—the man whose sperm fertilized the woman's ovum. In most cultures around the world, people accept this reality of single paternity. Yet anthropologists have discovered an exception among many of the indigenous tribal societies of lowland South America (Amazonia and nearby areas). Here people believe that a man's semen remains in the woman's body indefinitely after sexual intercourse, so if several different men have sex with her before she delivers a child, then all of them contribute to the making of that child (Beckerman & Valentine, 2002).

This belief is called **partible paternity** ("divisible fatherhood"). By studying language relationships among the societies where partible paternity is found, anthropologist Robert Walker of the University of Missouri and his colleagues have traced it back to the distant past, probably to the time when the lowlands were first settled and the settlers spoke a common language (Walker et al., 2010).

What benefit does the concept of partible paternity confer? Anthropologists such as William Crocker of the Smithsonian Institution have found that the societies that believe in partible paternity engage in distinctive sexual practices (Crocker & Crocker, 2003). They may participate in rituals in which women engage in sex sequentially with multiple men. And unlike in other cultures, where men typically guard their wives from sexual contact with other males, men in these Amazonian tribes may freely offer their wives to male relatives as well as to powerful men who are actual or potential allies.

Partible paternity, and the practices associated with it, benefit women's efforts to raise children. That's because the



This Araweté woman of Brazil may believe that two or more men fathered her son.
(© Sue Cunningham Photographic/Alamy.)

multiple "fathers" of a given child may give gifts in exchange for sex, may support or protect the child, or may at least refrain from killing the child. (The killing of infants and children by men has traditionally been a significant cause of mortality in Amazonian cultures.) The men with whom a woman chooses to have sex are often related to each other and often live together, so women are choosing men who are both motivated and able to help support her child (Ellsworth et al., 2014).

What about the men? On the face of it, the notion of partible paternity seems to disadvantage them, because they may end up supporting children who are not biologically theirs. On the other hand, they are "hedging their reproductive bets" by spreading their semen widely. This may be of particular value to high-status men, who gain disproportionate access to other men's wives, thanks to partible paternity. In addition, partible paternity gives men some assurance that their biological children will have male support in the event of their own premature death—something that's all too common in Amazonia.

This still leaves unanswered the question of why partible paternity is common in lowland South America but rare elsewhere. The answer may be related to the importance of kinship and alliances in those societies, combined with a general absence of material wealth. In such circumstances paternity may be used as a unit of wealth that can be traded, as it were, in social networks.

partible paternity The belief that two or more men may be fathers of the same child.

in the Middle East roughly 10,000 years ago. This transition led eventually to the formation of city-states, which required governments and the regulation of social behavior. Nudity was restricted, in part with the aim of reducing sexual arousal, preventing the sight of sexual arousal in others, and eliminating sexual conflicts. (Some present-day hunter-gatherer cultures still permit nudity.) Marriage was formalized, and nonmarital sex was discouraged to a greater or lesser degree.

Organized religion played a role in these changes (Endsjo, 2011). Although teachings have varied greatly among the major religions (such as Christianity, Hinduism,

Judaism, and Islam), they have often fostered procreative **heterosexual** sex within marriage while labeling other forms of sexual expression as sinful. For example, for most of the two millennia since the foundation of Christianity, its teachings forbade all nonmarital sex, **homosexual** sex, masturbation, contraception, abortion, and polygamy. Even marital sex was restricted to coitus in certain positions, and it was forbidden on certain days of the week and during Lent (Ranke-Heinemann, 1990). Priests were commonly barred from marriage or any kind of sexual activity. This changed to some extent after the Reformation, when western Christianity splintered into numerous denominations, some of which have become much more liberal in the area of sexual ethics compared with the Catholic Church.

The development of large-scale societies led to the emergence of class structures, with the rich and powerful at the top and the masses below them. What class you belonged to greatly influenced your sex life. Take India: The *Kama Sutra*, compiled around the 2nd century, describes innumerable ways for men to obtain sexual pleasure and give sexual pleasure to women (Vatsyayana, 1991) (Figure 1.1). It also describes sex between women and between men. But the *Kama Sutra* was written for and about the idle rich. (What to do between breakfast and lunch? Teach your parrot to talk.) If the sex lives of low-caste Indians were anything like they are today, they involved hasty, fully clothed couplings with the minimum of pleasure or romance (Nath & Nayar, 1997).

Another way that class influenced sexuality had to do with **polygamy**. Most human cultures have permitted men to have more than one wife. In early Islam, polygamy was legitimized for an entirely beneficent purpose—to provide for the many women whose husbands died in warfare. In general, though, polygamy has benefited rich and powerful men, because they had sufficient means to engage in the practice.* Polygamy reduced the numbers of available women and thus made it harder for poor men to afford even one wife. What’s more, polygamy has often been connected with the idea that women are men’s property—if a rich man has many cattle, why shouldn’t he have many wives? By banning polygamy, the Christian religion attempted to promote a more gender-equitable society.

Across history, large numbers of men have been deprived of a sex life altogether by being **castrated**—that is, by having their testicles removed, and sometimes the penis also. Such men were called **eunuchs**. Castration was carried out as a punishment among criminals or prisoners of war or, if done before puberty, to produce asexual male slaves who could serve certain roles, such as court attendants, harem guards, dancers, or singers. Some eunuchs achieved powerful positions in imperial courts across Asia. In India, some men were (and still are) voluntarily castrated as an initiation into the **transgender** religious caste known as *hijras*, who are described further in Chapter 4 (Nanda, 1998).

* King Solomon, for example, is said to have had a thousand wives, each of whom prepared a banquet every night in the faint hope that he would dine with her.

heterosexuality Sexual attraction to, or behavior with, persons of the opposite sex.

homosexuality Sexual attraction to, or behavior with, persons of the same sex.

polygamy Having more than one spouse at the same time, as a social institution.

castration Removal of the testicles or testicles and penis.

eunuch A man who has been castrated.

transgender (or trans) Identifying with the other sex or rejecting a conventionally gendered identity.



Figure 1.1 The *Kama Sutra* describes a wide variety of sexual positions.

In general, castration has served the interests of noncastrated men, especially powerful men, and it therefore represents another way in which class and sexuality interact. Today castration by surgery or “chemical castration” by drugs is performed voluntarily on some men with prostate cancer in an effort to prolong their lives—perhaps a quarter of a million American men are in this situation (Wassersug et al., 2014).

Urbanization has been a curse and a blessing

An important effect of cultural change has involved sexually transmitted infections. When people lived in small groups and stayed in restricted areas, they tended to reach a biological accommodation with the infectious agents (bacteria and viruses) present in that population such that their effects were not especially severe. Increases in population density and long-distance travel changed this picture: The organism that causes syphilis, for example, was present in the native populations of the Americas long before the arrival of Columbus and other explorers, but when these men returned to Europe, bringing the organism with them, it unleashed a devastating epidemic (Rothschild et al., 2000). Potentially fatal infections such as HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) spread primarily in cities, and in the process they made sex itself seem frightening and sinful. The Zika virus is only the most recent disease agent to be imported to the Americas and to be transmitted (in part) by sexual contact (see Chapter 15).

A more beneficial effect of urbanization has been the strengthening and validation of sexual diversity. When you were “the only gay in the village,” you were unlikely to find a sex partner or even to have any clear understanding of who you were. City life, on the other hand, facilitated the development of communities where being gay is normal and gay relationships flourish. The concept of “the homosexual” as a distinct kind of person only really took hold in the 19th century, as cities like Berlin, London, and New York attracted thousands of migrants from rural areas and from overseas. By the time of the 1880 census, New York had passed the million mark, and soon thereafter a thriving gay culture established itself (Chauncey, 1994). Most Americans didn’t approve, and gay people suffered a great deal of oppression, but at least their existence became known.

The media and the internet have facilitated a kind of “virtual urbanization,” which in some ways is even more influential than simply living together in a city. Television, because it is such a passive experience, encourages millions of people to imitate the same role models, in sexuality as in other matters (Box 1.2). The internet promotes more active participation. Thus, however uncommon your sexual identity or your sexual desires, a few keystrokes will tell you all about them, and a few more will put you in contact

with others like you, whether in your home town or across the globe. As a result, the concept of “normality” has expanded explosively, such that very few sexual kinks are still stigmatized as shameful or named as mental disorders. Pedophilia—sexual attraction to prepubescent children—is the great exception, understandably so, considering the problematic nature of adult-child sex. Still, even pedophiles now have access to online communities. These groups alleviate pedophiles’ isolation and in many cases help them resist the urge to act on their desires (Virtuous Pedophiles, 2016).

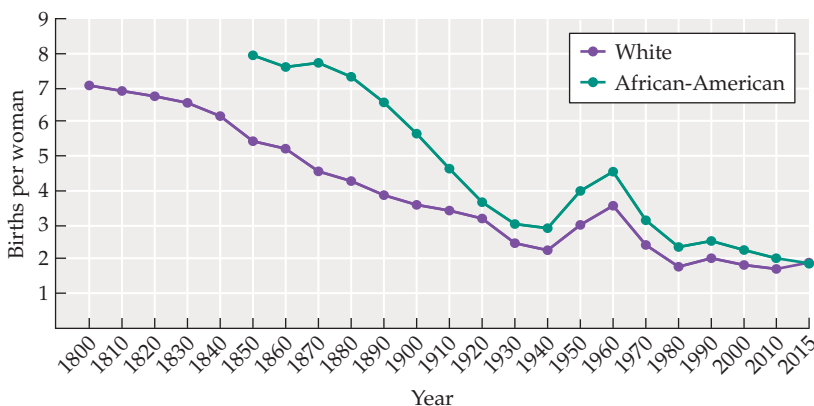


Figure 1.2 Declining birthrates This graph shows the average number of children born to American women between 1800 and 2015. The data for white and African-American women are plotted separately. (After Haines, 2008 and Centers for Disease Control, 2017.)

Marriage has been transformed

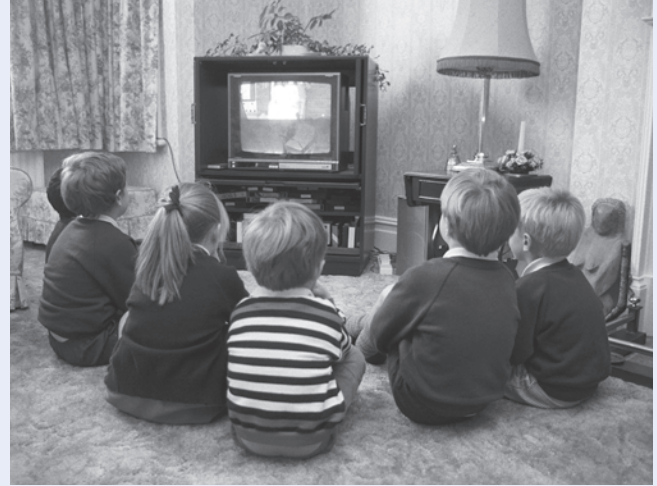
Yet another important change has been the radical decline in birth rates that has taken place in most countries, starting in the late 18th century. By 2010 the number of children born to the average American

Box

1.2 The Media: TV or Not TV?

A classic study conducted in the 1970s took advantage of a unique opportunity to examine the effects of the media—specifically, television—on the psychological development of girls and boys. Up until 1973 the residents of a certain small town in British Columbia were unable to receive television broadcasts, on account of the mountainous terrain, but in that year the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation agreed to install a transmitter in the community. A group of faculty and students at the University of British Columbia, led by social psychologist Tannis MacBeth Williams, decided to study the effects of the new medium on the residents of the town, to which they gave the fictitious name “Notel” (Williams, 1986a).

The researchers interviewed and tested children in Notel before broadcasts started, and again 2 years later. They did the same in two “control” towns—towns that were similar to Notel in most respects but that had received television broadcasts for many years previously. The part of the study that concerns us had to do with children’s ideas about appropriate sex roles. Before the broadcasts began, Notel’s children had attitudes that were significantly more flexible than those of children in the two comparable towns that already had television. By 2 years after the beginning of television transmissions, the attitudes of Notel’s girls and boys had become much more distinct from each other, and comparable to those of children in the other towns. The girls had particularly marked changes in their attitudes toward peer relationships, while the boys showed marked changes concerning future occupations—both in the



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direction of what is traditionally expected of girls and boys. All in all, the Notel study demonstrated a powerful effect of television in promoting stereotypical sex roles. Of course, it’s possible that television promotes more flexible attitudes today than it did in the 1970s, but some more recent studies suggest that television and other media have been slow to move beyond traditional stereotypes (Collins, 2011).

For good measure, television also made Notel’s children less creative, poorer readers, more aggressive, and dumber—at least, they scored slightly lower on IQ tests.

woman had fallen from 7 or 8 to about 2 (Figure 1.2), and by 2015 it was 1.84 (National Vital Statistics Reports, 2017). Today, there are plenty of people who choose to have no children at all—something that used to be quite unusual, except for those in religious orders. This decline has not been accompanied by any decline in people’s interest in sex. Thus the idea has gained currency that sex has a legitimate emotional or recreational function, quite distinct from the desire for children.

The institution of marriage has changed over time (Witte, 2012). In many traditional societies marriage signified the transfer of ownership of a woman from her father to her husband; marriages were negotiated and often involved large bridal payments. People fell in love, but they were lucky if they married the people they fell in love with. In Europe and America, even as late as the 19th or early 20th century, a suitor was expected to ask the girl’s father for permission to propose to her, and if permission was refused—because the young man had insufficient means, for example—the young couple’s only recourse might be to run away (elope) and marry at some distant location.

A woman was expected to be a virgin when she married, but a man could be forgiven or even admired for “sowing his wild oats.” (This was an example of the **double standard**, by which males and females were, and still may be, held to different

double standard The idea that acceptable behavior is different for men than for women.