

CHAPTER 1

Perspectives on Sexuality

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the many ways in which we are all exposed to messages (good and bad) about sexuality and to get students thinking about these messages in different ways. This chapter explores sex and the media, the history of sex research, and social influences on sexuality throughout history.

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you will

- learn why it is important to consider and critically evaluate different perspectives when studying human sexuality;
- examine how media, culture, religion, and other external factors influence the way we understand sexuality;
- discover how the topic of sex has been approached at different points in history;
- appreciate regional variations in various topics related to sexuality within Canada; and
- begin to think about how key issues related to sexuality are situated within the Canadian context.

List of Key Terms

BDSM A type of role play or lifestyle choice between two or more individuals that includes a wide range of activities involving safe and consensual manipulations of erotic power. The term stands for “bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism.”

Biological Sex A set of biological and reproductive characteristics used to categorize individuals into male, female, or intersex.

Birth-assigned sex (or sex assigned at birth) The categorization of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex usually based on genital anatomy at birth.

Common-law relationship A legally recognized relationship in which two people involved in a romantic relationship and who are not married have lived together for at least 12 months.

Contraception The deliberate use of natural techniques, an artificially created barrier, or hormonal methods to prevent pregnancy as a result of sexual intercourse.

Ethnocentrism The tendency to believe that one’s ethnic or cultural group is the norm and to view other ethnicities or cultures as atypical or different.

Face-to-face position A position for sexual intercourse in which the couple lies face to face with the penetrated partner on their back, underneath and facing the penetrating partner (who is on top).

Gender A set of cultural constructs describing characteristics related to femininity, masculinity, women, men, and gender-diverse individuals, and social norms related to these characteristics.

Gender Expression The physical manifestation of one's gender identity through appearance (e.g., hairstyle), clothing, and behaviour.

Gender Identity The internal experience of femaleness and/or maleness, or neither, or other gender(s).

Hijra A recognized third gender among those of the Hindu faith.

Hysteria A controversial mental illness/disease that was seen as being specific to women and characterized by the conversion of psychological stresses (specifically, sexual frustration) into physical symptoms (e.g., gastrointestinal and nervous system problems), as well as volatile emotions and attention-seeking behaviours.

Masturbation Stimulation of one's own genitals and other parts of the body for sexual pleasure, commonly resulting in orgasm, that is often done manually or using a device or an object.

Menopause The stage of life at which menstruation ceases, usually between the ages of 45 and 55.

Menstruation The shedding of the uterine lining that has built up in anticipation of a fertilized egg.

Monogamy The practice or state of being married to or in an intimate relationship with one person at a time.

Nocturnal emission An involuntary ejaculation of semen during sleep (commonly known as a "wet dream").

Nonconsensual nonmonogamy (NCNM) Any sexual behavior (and sometimes, a deep emotional connection) with another person or persons outside of a monogamous relationship without the agreement of one's partner.

Polygamy The practice or custom of having more than one wife or husband at the same time.

R rating Restricted rating from the Motion Picture Association of America, requiring individuals under the age of 17 to be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian.

Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is the Canadian bill of rights entrenched in the Constitution of Canada, and sets out the rights of all Canadians. Section 15 of the Charter deals with equality rights, such as the right to equal treatment before and under the law as well as equal protection and benefit of the law.

Sexually and gender-diverse (SGD) An all-encompassing term referring to individuals who are diverse in terms of their sexual/affectional orientation and gender expression, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, genderqueer, two-spirit, intersex, queer, questioning, asexual, and pansexual.

Sexually transmitted infection (STI) An illness, disease, or infection transmitted from one person to another by means of sexual behaviour, including sexual intercourse (both vaginal and anal), oral sex, and the use of shared sex toys.

Withdrawal A method of controlling fertility in which the penis is withdrawn from the vagina before ejaculating, the intention being to prevent sperm from entering the cervix.

Discussion and Debate Questions

1. Should Canada encourage the UN to sanction countries that discriminate against people based on sexual orientation?

- Should television producers be forced to depict couples having safer sex (e.g., using condoms, discussing STIs in new relationships?)
- Although considered to be controversial, should the Canadian and Provincial Governments push for better, more comprehensive sex education and curriculum in Canadian schools?

Class Activities

- Explore the result of the 2011 *Playboy Sex Survey* and discuss the results as well as any aspects of the survey that may have made the results turn out one way or another.

Objectives:

- To explore an approach to researching sexual activities among the general American population
- To discuss some of the limitations of using online surveys for sex research, including participants dropping out of the survey and having survey respondents who are not sexually experienced

Materials needed:

- Pen and paper, access to the Internet

Description of activity:

Go on the Internet and research the 2011 Playboy Sex Survey. Read about the research findings and research methods, and then complete this chart.

2011 <i>Playboy Sex Survey</i>	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
A. Frequently reported sexual activities that may be dangerous to people			
B. Frequently reported sexual activities that may benefit people			
C. Aspects of the survey methods and sample that may have affected the results			

- Debate! Sex and Freedom

Objective:

- To explore the rights to sexual freedoms under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Materials Needed:

- Pen and paper, access to the library and/or Internet resources, hand-outs (optional)

Description of Activity:

This activity is designed to help students become more familiar with the polygamy debate and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as it relates to sexual freedom. It is also meant to introduce students to the extent of sexual discrimination based on sexual orientation around the world and encourage them to consider what Canada should or should not do in response to the discrimination. Divide the class into four debate teams: a “yay” and a “nay” team for each topic. Provide students with the topics one week in advance to permit them to prepare. The suggested topics are as follows:

- Polygamy is supported by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- Canada should take action against countries that discriminate against people based on sexual orientation.

Teams will have one week in advance to prepare. Teams will prepare and present a two-minute opening statement, followed by one-minute replies by the other team members. The replies will give each team the opportunity to reply to points raised by the other and add to the comments of their teammates. Each team will present a one-minute closing statement. After the debate, class members and the instructor/seminar leader may ask both teams questions. A vote may be held to decide the winning side in the debate. Points can be awarded for style and clarity, substance of research and argumentation, and the ability to respond to points raised by the other side.

List of Teaching Aids

Films

- *A Surprising History of Sex and Love* is an engaging documentary that shows how sexuality has been intertwined with social history for all of recorded history. It includes meaningful content as well as fascinating trivia.

[Part 1](#)

[Part 2](#)

[Part 3](#)

[Part 4](#)

Questions to Consider:

1. How did our society end up creating sexual repression on a massive scale while at the same time surrounding us with sexual images?
2. In which societies did women experience sexual gender equality. When and where did this change and why?

3. How did sexual repression begin?
 4. How did religion use sex and sexual repression as a tool for power?
 5. How does advertising today use sex to sell products and services?
- [Sexual Minorities and Development: A Short Film](#). A documentary film that looks at human rights issues affecting sexual minorities around the world.

Questions to consider:

1. Describe some of the human rights issues that have plagued the sexual minorities portrayed in this video. Does it vary by country, or are they universal?
 2. Do sexual minorities in Canada face any of the same issues as those portrayed in the video? Explain.
- [Sex Under MRI – Anatomy of Love](#). A video from Rate My Science that shows MRI images and explains findings.

Questions to consider:

1. Do you think that the MRI is a valuable tool for sex research? What are its limitations?
2. How has the MRI advanced our knowledge about what happens during sexual intercourse? What are some of the things that we did not know before the MRI research?

Podcasts

- **The Femtastic Podcast.** Katie Breen interviews feminist activists, researchers, and advocates working to make women's issues...well, non-issues. Katie explores issues of reproductive rights, pay equity, abortion, birth control, sex ed, paid family leave, breastfeeding, periods, reproductive healthcare, domestic violence, sexual assault, and LGBTQ issues—examining topics through the lens of intersectional feminism and reproductive justice.
 - <https://player.fm/series/the-femtastic-podcast>
- **Frisky History.** Humorous, bizarre, and sometimes horrifying side of reproductive history.
 - <https://soundcloud.com/friskyhistory>
- **The Hook Up.** The Hook Up is the Sex-Ed you wish you'd had. Nat Tencic talks all things sex, love and relationships, and hangs out with a team of experts who delve into their love lives and answer all your sexy questions.
 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/nz/podcast/the-hook-up/id1080505022>
- **Not Just a Bystander Podcast.** A CBA podcast on sexual harassment and sexual assault. The implications of sexual harassment and sexual assault reach far beyond criminal law, creating complex and challenging issues that touch upon employment law, governance, policy-making, compliance and human rights.
 - <http://www.cba.org/Sections/Women-Lawyers/Resources/Resources/Not-just-a-bystander>
- **Savage Lovecast.** Dan Savage is a nationally syndicated sex advice columnist and author who answers your sex and relationship questions on this honest and intriguing weekly podcast.

- <https://www.savagelovecast.com/>
- **Secular Sexuality Podcast.** Sex from a secular perspective: the intersection of sex and religion.
 - <https://player.fm/series/secular-sexuality>
- **Sexplanations with Dr. Doe.** Sexplanations is sexedutainment for the universe hosted by Dr. Lindsey Doe. Dr. Lindsey Doe, the host, is also a doctor of human sexuality who runs a private practice in clinical sexology where she works directly with clients on their sexual health goals.
 - <https://soundcloud.com/user-863387665>
- **Sex with Emily.** Leading sex expert Dr. Emily Morse shares insight and advice on sex, relationships, and everything in between.
 - <http://sexwithemily.com/category/podcast/>
- **Sex Nerd Sandra.** Curious about the naughty side of life? Come giggle with Sandra at the cuddly side of the sex pool! Exploring fascinating topics & perspectives on sex & love, join sexuality educator Sandra Daugherty & special guests.
 - <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/nerdist-industries/sex-nerd-sandra>
- **Sexology Dr. Moali.** Sexology podcast untangles the science of sex and pleasure.
 - <http://www.sexologypodcast.com/>
- **The V Word.** Lady bit talks by lady docs. Two badass gynecologists tackling relevant women's health and reproductive policy issues. Vagina, vagina, vagina.
 - <https://player.fm/series/the-v-word>
- **Psychology of Attractiveness.** Science show that covers the most interesting and cutting-edge research on the psychology of attraction and relationships
 - <http://psychologyofattractivenesspodcast.blogspot.com/>
- **Turn Me On.** This podcast is a no holds barred conversation about what it is to be a sexual being in the world. Hosted by Jeremie and Bryde, a married, poly, adventurous couple who love to talk to people about S-E-X, the conversation is geared toward getting real about pleasures of the flesh with intelligence, humour, and maybe a little pillow talk.
 - <https://www.turnmeonpodcast.com/>
- **Where should we begin? With Esther Perel.** Step into iconic couple's therapist Esther Perel's office and listen as real couples anonymously bare the raw, intimate, and profound details of their story. From infidelity, to sexlessness, to loss, it's a space for people to be heard and understood. It's also a place for us to listen and feel empowered in our own relationships.
 - <https://www.estherperel.com/podcast>

Web Links

- The Kinsey Institute
[The History of Sexology.](#)
- *Time Magazine* on the history of sex on television
[A Brief History of Sex on TV.](#)
- Oddee.com on sex in the Middle Ages
[10 Facts about Sex in the Middle Ages.](#)
- Section15.ca on the history of sex education in Canada
[Sex Education in Canada from 1900 to 1950.](#)
- Sexuality in advertising
[Sexuality in Advertising.](#)
- CBC.ca on same-sex rights in Canada
[Timeline: Same-sex Rights in Canada.](#)
- Straightdope.com on the Sin of Onan
[What Exactly Was the Sin of Onan?](#)
- Rand.org on the influence of sex on television
[Does Watching Sex on TV Influence Teens' Sexual Activity?](#)

Further Readings

- Hawkes, G., & Scott, J. (2005). *Perspectives in Human Sexuality*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Examines controversial issues such as sex and age, sex work, and gay, lesbian, and queer sex in a fair and balanced manner. Leading Australian and New Zealand authors in the field of sex and sexuality have contributed to the book.

- Heins, M. (1993). *Sex, Sin and Blasphemy: A Guide to America's Censorship Wars*. New York, NY: New Press.

The author uses her considerable expertise to help provide a sensible, coherent account of some of the most hotly contested issues of the 1990s.

- Heasley, R., & Crane, b. (2002). *Sexual Lives: A Reader on the Theories and Realities of Human Sexualities*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

65 selections combine a range of classic theoretical articles with a large number of original pieces, organized to help students understand the ways sexuality influences every aspect of their lives.

- Horrocks, R. (1997). *An Introduction to the Study of Sexuality*. London, UK: MacMillan Press.

This book examines some of the ways in which sexuality has been described and interpreted in the West.

- Maddock, J. W. (2014). *Sexuality education in post-secondary and professional training settings*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Examines issues and selected topics confronting sexuality educators.

- Maines, R. (1999). *The Technology of Orgasm: Hysteria, the Vibrator and Women's Sexual Satisfaction*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Traces the history of the vibrator from its beginnings as a therapeutic device to treat hysteria in women in the 1880s to its use in the 1960s as a sex aid.

- Roach, M. (2008). *Bonk: The Curious Coupling of Science and Sex*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

The author shows us how and why sexual arousal and orgasm—two of the most complex, delightful, and amazing scientific phenomena on earth—can be so hard to achieve and what science is doing to make the bedroom a more satisfying place.

- Ryan, C., & Jethá, C. (2010). *Sex at Dawn: The Prehistoric Origins of Modern Sexuality*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Press.

The authors attempt to debunk almost everything we 'think we know' about sex while offering a bold alternative explanation for why we live and love as we do.

- Tannahill, R. (1989). *Sex in history*. London, UK: Abacus.

Drawing on art, architecture, literature, theology and numerous scientific disciplines, the author intends to provide a long entertaining look at sexual attitudes, customs and practices in all the world's major civilizations, past and present.

- Tiefer, L. (2004). *Sex Is Not a Natural Act and Other Essays*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

This revised collection of sexologist Leonore Tiefer's essays includes popular and professional writings and lectures on the social construction of sexuality.

- Trees, A. (2009). *Decoding Love: Why It Takes 12 Frogs to Find a Prince and Other Revelations from the Science of Attraction*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Drawing from the latest studies in economics, brain science, game theory, evolutionary psychology, and other fields, this book takes on a topic we all think we understand—how we fall in love—and illustrates that most of our assumptions are wrong.

- Weeks, J. (2010). *Sexuality* (3rd Ed.). New York, NY: Routledge Press.

This book provides a cutting-edge introduction to debates, new concepts and issues about sexualities, gender, and intimate life.