

CORE HUMAN SEXUALITY CONCEPTS



This brochure provides insight into four key concepts of human sexuality. All of the concepts are interdependent since sexuality is complex and integrated into every aspect of life. Sexuality shapes how one views the world, such as friendships, family affiliations, parenting, relationships, and most importantly understanding one's authentic and true self.

Often times it is difficult to discuss sexuality concerns with others, especially with intimate partners due to fear. This brochure is intended as an educational resource but can also lead one to opening the discussion about sexuality.

Biological/Physiological/Biochemical Aspects of Human Sexuality

Human sexuality begins with anatomy. Anatomy is not just the physical parts of a person but also the bio-chemical and physiology aspects.

Male Anatomy Highlights

- ◆ The penis in ancient times was celebrated as a source of fertility. In modern time it is viewed as vulgar.
- ◆ The penis is made of fibrous tissues and blood vessels. There is no bone in the penis in contrast to other animal species.
- ◆ The penis consists of the root, shaft and glans. The root is internal and connects to the pubic bone while the shaft and glans being visible. The glans is the top of the penis. The scrotum contains the testes which produce semen.
- ◆ The shape of the glans may have evolutionary benefits that ensure any other semen is disposed of prior to ejaculation.
- ◆ Slight curvatures of an erect penis is normal.
- ◆ Average size of a flaccid penis is 3.5 inches and 6 inches for an erect penis.

Female Anatomy Highlights

- ◆ The vagina in ancient times was seen as a source of life and given status above all fertility symbols. In modern time it is viewed as vulgar.
- ◆ The vulva describes all external parts of the female genital. The mons veneris (mons pubis) protects the internal genital structures during intercourse and contains any sensitive nerve endings that when pressure is applied feels pleasurable.
- ◆ The labia are the folds of tissue that covers the vaginal and urethral openings. The labia majora are the outer lips while the labia minora are the inner lips that sit under the outer lips. Both labia have nerve endings and blood vessels which are sensitive and responsive to stimulation.
- ◆ The clitoris can be likened to a penis as it has similar structure (shaft and glans) and increases in size during stimulation but is unique in that it's only purpose is pleasure.
- ◆ Breasts are also highly sensitive and enlarge during arousal.

Biochemical and Physiology Highlights

Hormones are pervasive in humans.

- ◆ Testosterone is produced by both men and women with women being more sensitive to the hormone thus needing less produced. Testosterone is vital both prenatally and as a child develops into adulthood in terms of development of sexual organs and characteristics. For both men and women testosterone is linked to sexual desire and libido.
- ◆ Oxytocin is vital for breast-feeding to occur but also is key to bonding in relationships.

Psychological Factors Associated with Human Sexuality

Common to Both Males and Females

Essentially life can have an impact on sexual behaviors. Psychological states such as mood, sleep patterns, age, stress levels, job responsibilities, family expectations, parenting and attitudes regarding sex and relationships all affect sexual behaviors. Often times psychological states can be short term experiences or long term concerns and both affect sexual behaviors.

Personality can also bring it's own set of challenges in relationships. For example a person who is oriented to the external world and thrill seeking will be prone to sexual experiences that satisfies the thrill seeking propensity. Likewise a person who is oriented to the internal world and is risk averse will seek sexual experiences that are safe. These dynamics shape a person's view and attitude towards sexual behaviors.

Finally some consider sexual behavior and attitudes linked to biology and evolution while others link it to how society shapes one's view of sexual behaviors. Regardless, one's outlook of sex, sexual behaviors and relationships are rooted in the many facets of individual and societal psychology

A Closer Look

Life patterns create a psychological construct of one's world. Within this construct lies all the specific factors one uses to determine their attitudes and thoughts on sex, sexual behaviors and relationships. For example if one grew up in a household with little to no affection and parental figures working sixty or more hours a week, one may develop the attitude that affection is not important and thus transfer that attitude to their own sexual behavior. The important aspect to consider is what has influenced your attitude to sex, sexual behavior, and relationships. Here are a few questions to ponder.

- ◆ What messages did you receive from the males in your life regarding sex, sexual behavior, and relationships?
- ◆ What messages did you receive from the females in your life regarding sex, sexual behavior, and relationships?
- ◆ How was sex and sexual behavior considered in your home?
- ◆ What feelings did you have with your first sexual experience (either alone or with others)?



Tips

1. List current stressors you are experiencing and how those stressors affect your attitudes towards sex, sexual behavior or relationships.
2. Identify what specifically you learned from your parental figures about sex, sexual behavior, and relationships.
3. Describe your ideal relationship and your view on sex and sexual behavior in your ideal relationship.
4. Analyze any medical conditions that could interfere with sex or sexual behavior.
5. List the feelings you experience during sex, sexual behavior, and relationships. Where did those feelings first surface for you?
6. List any societal or cultural concerns that affect how you view sex, sexual behavior, and relationships.

Love and Intimacy

The Need For Relationships

At the basic core of humanity exists a need to be in relationships with others. This need centers on the fact that humans have a deep drive and desire to belong. Now this drive and desire to belong does not mean that one has to be in a committed long-term relationship. How one belongs varies between individuals due to their own psychological, cultural and biological factors. But the simple fact is that everyone in their own way needs to feel a sense of belonging. When that sense is lost it can be devastating to both the individual and those that know her/him. In other words humans need love and intimacy in some form!

Being Single

Being single means a person is neither co-habiting or in a legally recognized relationship. In addition being single may mean exploring options for a long-term committed relationship. So being single can have an element of intimate relationships or not. Those who are single have friends and therefore regardless if they are in a relationship, they are meeting their need to belong. For many however, being single can be viewed as unsatisfying regardless if someone experiences it as satisfying or unsatisfying.

Sex or sexual behavior as a single person can be expressed in celibacy or having sexual relations with others. There are a variety of ways sexual relations occur with being single, but the important aspect is that the relationship has sex more central than forming a lasting bond.

Being In A Committed Relationship

In a committed relationship sex is just one component to the emotional bond the individuals create, develop, maintain and enhance with each other. In this type of relationship the concept of *love* is central. In English love is difficult to define as it is a catch all phrase that can mean love as friends or a deeper more intense emotional love with just one person to the love one has for a child. As a side note, the Greek language has multiple words for love with each word expressing a different dimension of love. Since love is difficult to consistently define in English in a committed relationship, one needs to realize their own sense of love in a committed relationship may be different than others.

Sex or sexual behavior in a committed relationship can be expressed in monogamy to polyamory. There are a variety of ways sexual relations occur with those in committed relationships, but the important aspect is that the relationship has the emotional bond more central than sex or sexual behavior.



Attraction

- ◆ Attraction is difficult to accurately describe. Research finds we make first impressions within seconds which suggests attraction can occur within the context of first impressions. This type of attraction may be considered *love at first sight*.
- ◆ Attraction is also connected to how one is feeling and how other's make them feel.
- ◆ Attraction can also occur based on how frequently individuals interact and participate in the same activities. This type of attraction is not the *love at first sight*.
- ◆ Attraction has also been linked to the more one shares in common with someone else the more attracted they can become.
- ◆ Attraction can also be due to the fact the individual is not available and that unavailability creates attraction.

Sexual Orientation

Defining Sexual Orientation

Defining sexual orientation is complicated since there is not a common universal model to describe it. Some view it based on who someone is attracted to, others view it based on who the person has sex with, and others view it based on how they identify themselves as being gay, straight, bisexual or something else. An inclusive way to describe sexual orientation is to suggest that it is a combination of attraction, behavior and self-identification.

The various sexual orientations are hard to capture using current scales or ways of creating categories. A traditional approach is to categorize using three groups of homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual. Other approaches creates a fluid scale from homosexuality to heterosexuality with categories such as mostly heterosexual with incidental homosexuality and mostly homosexual with significant heterosexual experience. These common ways of creating descriptive categories fail to describe asexuality (no interest in sexual activity) or pansexuality (attraction to all sexes and gender identities).

Theories of Sexual Orientation

One of the first theories posited by Freud, was that bisexuality is the norm with homo- and heterosexuality being abnormal. Modern times have used science to ascertain a biological or human physiological connection to one's sexual orientation such as certain hormones or brain structure size. Some have also considered any evolutionary reasons for sexual orientation such as family size may evolutionally create that not all offspring will reproduce. Evolutionary reasons seem to be the hardest to research.

Other researches suggest that sexual orientation is based on the biological hormones and genetics at birth and then shaped through society, family and social conventions a child experiences throughout development.

Finally, one researcher suggests that men are more hard-wired to be attracted to one size while women may be more fluid with their attraction to both sexes. This researcher coined the term sexual fluidity which means that you adapt your sexual attraction towards a person not an entire gender.

Regardless of the theory, it is evident that sexual orientation is a complex concept that can't be described easily.



Sex Differences: Expressing Sexual Orientation

- ◆ High sex drive in women is correlated with attraction to more than the opposite sex.
- ◆ High sex drive in men is correlated with attraction to only their desired sex.
- ◆ Women are more comfortable with variability in their sexuality such as identifying bisexual or something else where men tend to not do this.

Unfortunately sexual orientation continues to be a point of contention in society and a place of anxiety for individuals. Realizing that there is no right or wrong, but that attraction is complicated, will help to allow individuals to express who they are without fear of prejudice or retaliation.