

THE PURSUIT OF SEXUAL PLEASURE

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While people engage in sexual activities for a variety of reasons, one primary motivation is pleasure. Rather than disentangle the various complications of human sexuality, this paper will focus on sexual pleasure. We begin with definitions of sex and sexuality, and a consideration of the nature of sexual pleasure. To this end, we will discuss a wide variety of activities that result in sexual pleasure. These include solitary behaviors (i.e., fantasy and masturbation) as well as partnered activities (i.e., kissing, touching, oral sex, intercourse, anal sex, and techniques of same-sex couples). A section on “spicy sex” considers activities that some people might consider risqué while others might consider quite bland. Employment of sex toys, erotica, Internet sexuality, sadomasochism, and sexual tourism are used as exemplars of sexual activities which a subset of the population views as highly arousing, pleasurable, and desirable. These demonstrate how the adage “different strokes for different folks” applies (quite literally) to sexual behavior. We end with a discussion of how “acceptable” forms of sexual pleasure can change depending on the culture and the environment in which the individual finds herself/himself and how a continuing dialogue about sexual pleasure could change current sexual scripts.

Sex and sexuality are surprisingly difficult terms to define. In one sense, sex can be seen as a collection of behaviors related directly or indirectly to stimulation of the genitals; our bodies then respond to this stimulation with a reflex that is pleasurable and

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tension-releasing (i.e., orgasm). This essentialist definition does not, however, provide much insight into the role that sexuality plays in our lives. Rather, sexuality can be thought of as an institution defined by shared social meaning that is constructed around the simple stimulation of genitals; sex, in this sense, is what we make it (e.g., DeLamater & Hyde, 1998; Foucault, 1976/1978). At the individual level, human sexuality is subjective and represents how we experience and express ourselves as sexual beings. At a cultural level, sexuality can be constructed to serve a variety of needs: sex is a means of procreation, an intimate bonding ritual, even a form of social control (Foucault, 1976/1978; Hawkes, 1996; Weeks, 1981). For some, sex is work (e.g., prostitution, “spousely duty”). For others, sex is play. Some theorists argue that any other purpose of sex is secondary to the primary purpose of pleasure (Abramson & Pinkerton, 1995). Rather than disentangle the social complexities of human sexuality, this paper will focus on the “playful” aspect of sex. In particular, we will discuss the more physical gymnastics involved in the pursuit and attainment of *sexual pleasure*—“sex for fun.” We hope to show how pleasure is a primary motivator for sexual activity and how social constructions of sexuality are built around this fundamental desire for sexual pleasure.

While we intend to focus predominantly on the importance and the pursuit of sexual pleasure, we do not ignore the complexity of human sexuality. The constructions around sexuality are very complex and often serve vital needs. For example, the unrestrained pursuit of sexual pleasure at the individual or societal level can result in violence, rape, and/or harassment. Attempting to prevent these negative outcomes is one of the primary purposes of social constructions around sexuality. One of us has been involved in the design and teaching of a course called the “Dark Side of Sexuality” (*the dark side of sexuality*, n.d.), which explores the negative aspects of sexuality in great detail. We feel, however, that much of the existing literature concerning sex and sexuality addresses these issues already and that a fresh, positive perspective will enhance and complement the existing literature. Our intent, then, is to present a perspective on how sexuality can be seen as a pursuit of pleasure.

Our perspective on sexual pleasure is constructed from a review of mainly Canadian and U.S. literature concerning sexual activity and sexual behavior. We supplement this review from our own ongoing survey of Canadian university students (see the Appendix for a description of our survey). While some studies from other developed countries were included as well, our perspective necessarily reflects a North American construction of sexual pleasure. An examination of sexual pleasure using different data might yield a very different picture, but the process of construction is similar across time and place (see Foucault, 1976/1978, for a discussion). A cross-cultural comparison of the construction of sexual pleasure would be a fascinating project, but is far beyond the scope of this paper. We have decided, therefore, to focus our discussion on a very North American version of the pursuit of sexual pleasure.

The Pursuit of Sexual Pleasure

What Is Sexual Pleasure?

Broadly defined, sexual pleasure involves the positive feelings that arise from sexual stimuli (Abramson & Pinkerton, 1995). Sexual pleasure may result from a variety of activities that involve sexual arousal, genital stimulation, and/or orgasm. Some theorists argue that sex *is* pleasure (Abramson & Pinkerton, 1995)! While it may seem self-evident, people are more likely to engage in sexual behaviors they consider pleasurable than sexual behaviors that they find less pleasurable (Browning et al., 2000; Pinkerton et al., 2003).

It is seldom overtly stated, but sexual pleasure is very important in our society. Achieving sexual arousal and orgasm is significant enough to people that manuals of sexual technique have been compiled—such as the venerable *Kama Sutra* (trans., 1994), *The Joy of Sex* (Comfort, 1972), and *Sex for Dummies* (Westheimer, 1995). There are university courses, television shows (e.g., *The Sex Files*, Colby, 2006), web sites (e.g., www.sexualityandu.ca), sex stores, and shows (e.g., *The Stag Shop*, see www.stagshop.com; *The Everything to do with Sex Show*, see www.everythingtodowithsex.com) devoted to human sexuality and the attainment of the highest level of sexual

satisfaction possible. Clearly, people have a great interest in sexual pleasure. This pleasure can be pursued in many forms—and can occur in solitary and/or partnered contexts. Perhaps the simplest sexual activities are those in which an individual can engage alone, such as masturbation and sexual fantasy.

Solitary Sex

Fantasy. Sexual fantasy has the appeal of being the safest form of sexual enjoyment: One can fantasize any time, one can have total control, and there are no (direct) consequences (Doskoch, 1995). Sexual fantasy is difficult to research, especially because it is difficult to define exactly what constitutes fantasy (see Byrne & Osland, 2000). Leitenberg and Henning (1995: 470) define sexual fantasy as “almost any mental imagery that is sexually arousing or erotic to the individual.” Byers and colleagues (Byers, Purdon, & Clark, 1998; Little & Byers, 2000; Renaud & Byers, 1999) prefer the term *sexual cognitions*, which may have positive or negative connotations. Sexual thoughts can take many forms, some of which may not be pleasurable to the individual. However, there is little specificity in the research literature as to what *exactly* constitutes a sexual fantasy. The following discussion will adopt Leitenberg and Henning’s inclusive definition, with a proviso that not all fantasies discussed will serve a function of pleasure for the individuals experiencing them.

The great majority of men and women engage in sexual fantasy, either as an activity by itself (i.e., daydreaming), or in conjunction with other sexual activities, including masturbation and partnered sex. For example, when asked “how often do you think about sex?”, 97% of men and 86% of women responded with a few times a month or more (Laumann et al., 1994). In terms of content, men seem more likely to have explicitly sexual fantasies (Ellis & Symons, 1990), to imagine themselves in positions of dominance (Byers, Purdon, & Clark, 1998; Hsu et al., 1994), to see themselves as the “doer,” (Byers, Purdon, & Clark, 1998; Knafo & Jaffe, 1984) and to fantasize about multiple partners (Ellis & Symons, 1990). Women tend to have more emotional and romantic

fantasies and to see themselves in positions of submission (Hsu et al., 1994; McCauley & Swann, 1978). Lesbians and gay men tend to have fantasies similar to heterosexual women and men, respectively, except that they typically imagine same-sex partners (Hurlbert & Apt, 1993; Keating & Over, 1990; Masters & Johnson, 1979; Robinson & Parks, 2003). In general, people report a wide variety of content in sexual fantasy. People who have more sexual fantasies tend to have fewer sexual problems and report more sexual satisfaction than people who have fewer fantasies (Byrne & Osland, 2000; Leitenberg & Henning, 1995).

Fewer studies of sexual fantasy have been conducted in Canada, but Renaud and Byers (1999) found that all of their New Brunswick university student sample reported having had sexual thoughts at some time. Both men and women reported more positive than negative thoughts, with men reporting more of both positive and negative thoughts. Participants reported a wide variety of content in sexual thoughts. Later, Little and Byers (2000) showed some surprising results: People often enjoyed having sexual fantasies while in public places, and people in committed relationships were not more likely to evaluate sexual thoughts as negative. Our survey of Ontario students enrolled in an introductory sexuality course (1999-2006) indicated that 63% of women and 78% of men—who have had sex—fantasize while engaging in sexual activity with a partner. Our students fantasize in greater numbers (98% of men; 93% of women) during masturbation—sexual self-stimulation.

Masturbation. Historically, masturbation has been stigmatized and associated with immorality and pathology, but it is quickly gaining respect as a common and healthy sexual activity (Coleman, 2002). A recent survey of American university students (Pinkerton et al., 2002) found that about two-thirds of the women and almost all of the men reported masturbating at least once. Both genders reported frequent masturbation in the past three months. People masturbated more if they perceived social norms in support of this behavior (Pinkerton et al., 2002). More sexually active people masturbated more often, indicating that masturbation is not a substitute for other sexual activity (also see Davis et al., 1996).

Men tend to masturbate fairly uniformly whereas women tend to have more varied masturbation techniques from woman-to-woman (see Masters & Johnson, 1966). There were no gender differences in reasons for masturbating: the majority of men and women stated that they masturbated to relieve sexual tension and the second most commonly cited reason was for physical pleasure (Laumann et al., 1994).

Since sexual fantasy and masturbation are pursued by individuals for their own purposes, these may be most clearly defined as pleasure-oriented activities. While we may have many reasons for sexually fantasizing, it can certainly serve the purpose of pleasure in itself (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995). Of all sexual behaviors, masturbation seems most clearly motivated by pleasure, or at least, release of tension. Moreover, these behaviors require little effort. In contrast to these activities, partnered sexual activity may serve a number of needs (e.g., reproduction, emotional intimacy, relationship maintenance, making money, etc.). Partnered sexual activity, however, has much potential for both the giving and receiving of sexual pleasure; pleasuring a partner may also contribute to one's own sexual pleasure (see Mah & Binik, 2005, for a discussion).

Partnered Sexual Activity

A common North American sexual script suggests that we have a shared idea about the sequence of partnered sexual behaviors that proceeds from kissing and touching ("petting" above the waist) to more intensive touching ("petting" below the waist or manual stimulation of the genitals) to oral sex to genital-to-genital contact to vaginal or anal intercourse (Gagnon & Simon, 1987; Laumann et al., 1994; McKay, 2004). Of course, there are a multitude of variations on this script and many behaviors have been omitted from this generic description. In almost all cases, kissing is a starting point.

Kissing. Kissing is a very common behavior with same-sex and other-sex couples reporting that they usually kiss when they have sex (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). In a U.S. study of university students, most (96%) had "dry" kissed someone and a large ma-

majority (89%) reported having “French-kissed” (i.e., kissed with open mouths). Ninety-one percent (91%) of men and 95% of women who participated in our human sexuality student survey indicated that they were experienced French-kissers, as well. A representative study of Canadian youth found that about a third to half of seventh-grade students, approximately two-thirds of ninth-grade students, and about eight out of ten eleventh-grade students reported engaging in “deep, open-mouth” kissing (Boyce et al., 2003). It should be noted that, while kissing is generally considered an erotic activity in North American society, it is not considered erotic in all cultures (Harvey, 2005). When kissing is considered erotic, however, it is often a precursor to petting (kissing, of course, may accompany petting).

Touching. Petting is a rather odd term for sexually touching another person—usually interpreted as meaning in the genital region. This is also known as mutual masturbation or being masturbated by a partner. This is a common behavior amongst university students. In U.S. studies, 80-85% of university men and women had engaged in touching the genitals of another person (Browning, et al., 2000; Pinkerton et al., 2003). Our Canadian sexuality students were similar with 88% of men and 91% of women reporting touching and/or being touched genitally by a partner. Canadian youth also engage in “petting.” Over a third of seventh-grade students, about two-thirds of ninth-grade students, and eight out of ten eleventh-grade students indicated that they had engaged in “touching above the waist at least once.” The incidence of hand-genital contact was less common—with about a quarter to a third of seventh-grade students, slightly over half of ninth-grade students, and about three quarters of eleventh-grade students responding yes to “touching below the waist at least once” (Boyce et al., 2003). Mutual masturbation is a common sexual behavior and being masturbated by one’s partner tends to be ranked as highly pleasurable relative to some other sexual behaviors (Pinkerton et al., 2003). Another form of touching is oral sex: sexual stimulation of the genitals by mouth.

Oral Sex. People frequently engage in oral sex. Recent national surveys in the U.S. indicated that a large majority of adult men (79-

85%) have had oral sex performed on them (called fellatio) while many women (73-83%) have received oral sex (called cunnilingus) (Laumann et al., 1994; Mosher, Chandra, & Jones, 2005). About 90% of adults have had oral sex (Mosher et al., 2005). This has changed somewhat since the Kinsey surveys (1949, 1953) which indicated that about 60% of men and women had engaged in oral sex. Our survey of sexuality students indicated that between 80% and 85% of women and men had performed and received oral sex. Not surprisingly, oral sex is becoming more common among Canadian adolescents, as well (Boyce et al., 2003; McKay, 2004).

There is an emerging literature where researchers and lay people alike discuss adolescent oral sex as an activity on the rise as a “substitute” for intercourse—as this helps prevent pregnancy, reduce STIs risk, and maintain “virginity” (Barrett, 2004; McKay, 2004). Mosher and others (2005) found that just over 10% of teenagers (15-19 years old) have had oral sex without intercourse with about 55% of all teens having had oral sex. Canadian teen oral sex rates are quite similar to the United States (just over 50% of eleventh-grade students have had oral sex; Boyce et al., 2003). Canadian studies of youth sexual behavior indicate that oral sex has exhibited a “modest” increase (i.e., rates increasing by around 5%; Boyce et al., 2003; Warren & King, 1994). Canadian sex educators and researchers consider this to be a natural increase as oral sex rates have increased for adults, as well (Barrett, 2004; McKay, 2004). One of the major reasons why youth engage in oral sex is that it is fun and pleasurable (Barrett, 2004). Similarly, university students ranked receiving oral sex as the second most pleasant activity after vaginal intercourse (Pinkerton et al., 2003).

Penis-in-Vagina Intercourse. Pinkerton and others (2003) found that penis-in-vagina intercourse was rated as the most pleasurable sexual activity (as did Laumann et al., 1994). This is a behavior in which almost all adults have engaged at least once (Laumann et al., 1994; Mosher et al., 2005; Wellings et al., 1994). In terms of U.S. university students, around 80% have had vaginal intercourse (Browning et al., 2000; Pinkerton et al., 2003). Our sample of Canadian sexuality students had slightly fewer men indicating that they have had vaginal intercourse (75%) compared to women

(79%). Most of these students (40-45%) had their first intercourse between the ages of 16-18 years; this is congruent with the representative survey of Canadian youth finding that between 40-46% of eleventh-grade students have had intercourse at least once (Boyce et al., 2003).

While there are *many* different positions for intercourse, there are four “basic” positions: man-on-top (“missionary”), woman-on-top, side-by-side, and rear entry (“doggie style”). Each position has certain “advantages.” For example, the woman-on-top position is good when a man has poorer ejaculatory control, allows the woman to control sexual positioning and rhythm, and allows greater accessibility to the clitoris (a key organ to female sexual pleasure). The man-on-top is the recommended position when a couple is trying to become pregnant. Rear entry is good when a woman is pregnant or when particularly deep penile insertion is desired. Browning and others’ (2000) study of U.S. university students found that most (76-80%) had been “on top” as well as “on bottom.” While vaginal intercourse is considered pleasurable by most people, a substantial minority of people also report enjoying anal sex.

Anal Sex. Anal sex can take different forms. There is penis-in-anus intercourse whereby a man inserts his penis into the rectum of his partner. As the anus has no natural lubrication, a sterile lubricant gel is recommended (e.g., Astroglide, K-Y Jelly) so as to reduce the likelihood of trauma to the anus (e.g., tearing tissue, damaging sphincters). It is recommended that the inserter wear a condom. Because anal intercourse typically involves some tearing of the tissue, there is a direct route for pathogens into the blood stream, making this a very efficient route for HIV transmission and other STIs. It is important that the penis be washed after anal intercourse and prior to any further genital contact. For example, if a man removes his penis from the anus and inserts it into the vagina, various bacteria can be transferred to the vagina.

Anilingus or “rimming” is oral stimulation of the anus. Again, because of the presence of bacteria and possibly other STI pathogens (e.g., gonorrhea, hepatitis), it is prudent to use a barrier (e.g., cut a condom up the side or use a dental dam). Some people en-

joy digital stimulation of the anus by having fingers or the hand inserted in the anus during sexual arousal.

Anal intercourse is not as commonly performed as the other sexual activities discussed thus far. A representative U.S. sample found that roughly a third of adults have had anal sex (Mosher et al., 2005), although an older study found the lifetime incidence of anal intercourse to be lower (Laumann et al., 1994). About one-fifth to a quarter of university students in two U.S. samples reported ever having experienced anal intercourse (Browning et al., 2000; Pinkerton et al., 2003). In our sexuality student survey, about one-fifth reported having had anal intercourse. Laumann and others asked their participants if they had experienced anal sex *in the past year* and approximately 5-10% had experienced anal sex that recently. Finally, Laumann and others posed an interesting set of questions to their participants about how “appealing” a variety of sexual behaviors were. When asked about various forms of anal sex, between 1% and 5% of people rated anal contact as ‘very appealing’ (including stimulating a partner’s anus, having anus stimulated by a partner’s finger, and anal intercourse).

Techniques of Same-Sex Couples

A substantial minority of people are lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB; Laumann et al., 1994). A recent representative U.S. survey found that around 8-10% of adults identified as LGB (Mosher et al., 2005). About 9% of men and 6% of women in our human sexuality class self-identified as LGB. One does not need to be LGB to engage in same-sex behavior; 6% of men and 11% of women indicated that they have had a same-sex sexual partner in their lifetime (Mosher et al., 2005). Laumann and others (1994) found that about 3% of men and women rated having a same-gendered sexual partner as “very appealing.”

Same-sex couples tend to engage in similar sexual behaviors as other-sex couples including kissing, hugging, mutual masturbation, oral stimulation, and penetrative sex (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Masters & Johnson, 1979). Male couples sometimes engage in interfemoral intercourse; this is where one man thrusts his penis

between the thighs of the other man. Female couples may engage in tribadism whereby “two women rub their vulvae together to stimulate each other’s clitoris to orgasm” (Wikimedia Foundation, 2006; also see Caster, 1993) or, there may be mons-to-thigh stimulation. Other-sex couples also engage in this non-penetrative genital-to-genital stimulation (Kinsey et al. [1953] call this apposition; “dry humping” is a more common, but less sophisticated, description).

Masters and Johnson (1979) observed and compared the sexual behaviors of same-sex couples to other-sex couples and found differences in arousal *techniques* rather than sexual behaviors. In general, the same-sex couples tended to “take their time” in comparison to opposite-sex couples. That is, Masters and Johnson characterized heterosexual couples as more “performance-oriented”—oriented toward the penis-in-vagina act—in contrast to the same-sex couples, who engaged more in pleasure-seeking throughout the sexual encounter. There were no differences between heterosexual and homosexual people of the same gender in terms of masturbation techniques.

Spicy Sex

Thus far, we have discussed relatively common sexual activities. There are practices that are not necessarily common or usual but that are pleasurable for many people. While not exhaustive of all of the variations that might be considered spicy, a few examples include use of sex toys and sexually explicit material (erotica and Internet sexuality), sadomasochism, and sex tourism—each of which will be discussed, in turn. While these behaviors may be more or less common, it is important to remember that uncommon does not equal pathological. Most sexual behaviors can be placed on a continuum from healthy (e.g., having a mild or strong preference) to pathological (e.g., when the behavior/object becomes a necessity or a substitute for a human relationship; see Hyde, DeLamater, & Byers, 2006). Spicier activities may be an indication of the importance of sexual pleasure. While many of the “vanilla” techniques are quite pleasurable, they are often socially scripted, and are cheap and easy

in which to engage. More “spicy” techniques may require creative thought, monetary expense, or even travel plans. The trouble that people are willing to go through for the “spicier” activities might indicate that these are primarily pleasure-seeking activities.

Sex Toys. “Sex toys” are devices that people use to enhance their sexual pleasure (e.g., vibrators, dildos) and, while sex toys have been around for years (in the late 1800s, early 1900s as “medical devices”; see Maines, 1999), people have become more open about discussing sex toys perhaps because of popular media portrayals (e.g., *Sex and the City*, King, Chupack, Melfi, Bicks, Raab, et al., 2006; *The L Word*, Chaiken, Golin, & Kennar, 2006) and books and stores devoted to sex toys (e.g., Venning & Cavanah, 2003). Masters and Johnson (1979) observed lesbian and heterosexual couples’ dildo and vibrator usage and concluded that both types of couples used the devices in a similar fashion. In our survey of human sexuality students, about a third of women had experience with a “mechanical aid” compared to 8% of men. This is quite different from the representative survey of American adults which found less than 1 in 20 (< 5%) of men and women rated vibrator/dildo use as appealing (Laumann et al., 1994). Laumann and others found that the more educated women in their sample found vibrator/dildo use the most appealing—education may impact attitudes toward sex toy use.

Davis et al. (1996) conducted a study of women who use vibrators; the sample was drawn from purchasers of vibrators from a mail-order store and, thus, is not necessarily representative of all women. The results suggested that many of the women who used vibrators found that clitoral-vibrator stimulation usually triggers an orgasm, they used their vibrators on a variety of sexual sites (clitoral, vaginal, and anal), and in a variety of ways (circular motion, up/down, or back/forth). Most (80%) of the sample used the vibrator during partnered sex—sometimes with the partner watching the woman use the vibrator while sometimes the partner held the vibrator for the woman. Women, who were lesbian and were more likely to, reported being younger when they first used a vibrator and were slightly more likely to use a vibrator with a partner than were bisexual or heterosexual women.

Sexually Explicit Material. Use of erotica—sexually explicit depictions—is also a relatively common aid in autosexual or partnered sexual activity. Erotic materials are broad-ranging and may include books, magazines, videos/DVDs, live shows (e.g., exotic dancers), telephone sex, and cybersexuality (e.g., sex in chat rooms, webcam sex). Laumann and others (1994) found that as many as one out of five men used some form of erotic materials when fantasizing/masturbating while fewer women did (as many as one out of ten). These researchers asked about the appeal of “watching other people do sexual things” (which might be interpreted as erotica or, alternatively, voyeurism) and found that 5% of men and 1% of women found this activity sexually appealing. In the human sexuality student survey, a majority of men and women had favorable attitudes toward erotic materials, although there was a gender difference such that men were more favorable than women were.

Online sexual activities have increased in recent years. One study found that about 15% of the online population used the Internet for sexual purposes (Cooper et al., 1999). A more recent study of people who use the Internet indicated that 80% of participants used the web for sexual purposes. Of those people, about a third had engaged in “cybersex.” Cybersex was defined as “when two or more people are engaging in sexual talk while online for the purposes of sexual pleasure and may or may not include masturbation” (Daneback, Cooper, & Månsson, 2005: 321). This cybersex most commonly took the form of a sexual encounter in a “chat room” with the second most popular medium being instant messenger-type programs.

Sexual Internet activities are probably on the rise because of the fact that these materials are affordable, readily available, and can be accessed anonymously (Cooper, McLoughlin, & Campbell, 2000). The Internet allows people with uncommon sexual proclivities to both find and support others with similar interests. As well, the Internet offers users the opportunity to experiment with new behaviors in a relatively safe setting, satisfy curiosity, and seek out new information. While there has been a substantial discussion of “Internet sex addiction,” sexually compulsive Internet

users typically already have a history of unconventional sexual practices (i.e., diagnosable paraphilias, risky sexual activity). Many people who are recreational users of online sexual material spend less than an hour per week, on average, visiting sexual websites (Cooper et al., 1999).

Sadomasochism. Sadomasochism (S&M) is a term that collectively describes a variety of sexual behaviors which may involve the administration of pain (e.g., use of clothspins/clamps, hot wax, spanking), deliberate humiliation (e.g., use of a gag, faceslapping), physical restriction (e.g., handcuffs, chains), and hypermasculine activities (e.g., cockbinding, watersports, rimming) that are experienced as pleasurable by both partners (Alison, Santtila, Sandnabba, & Nordling, 2001; Sandnabba, Santtila, & Nordling, 1999). The S&M scene typically involves fetishistic elements such as leather clothing and whips, and ritualistic activity such as bondage. S&M has been characterized as fantasy-oriented and role-playing scripted behavior.

While sadomasochism, in an extreme sense, can be psychiatrically classified as paraphilic (i.e., sexual sadism and sexual masochism; see American Psychiatric Association, 2000), there is a distinct subculture of psychologically well-adjusted individuals who engage in S&M activities—many of whom belong to S&M “clubs” (Alison et al., 2001; Sandnabba et al., 1999). Partners in S&M activities described here refer to consenting S&M participants. People who have participated in research studies about the S&M subculture have been found to be well-integrated into society in general as they tend to be highly educated and earn high incomes (Alison et al., 2001; Mosher & Levitt, 1987; Sandnabba et al., 1999). Most of these people report engaging in S&M activities occasionally and in non-S&M sexual activities frequently—which indicates that the S&M activities were not part of a “diagnosable paraphilia” (Sandnabba et al., 1999). Most of the information known about S&M involves men; it is sometimes difficult to obtain adequate samples of women within the S&M subculture (Mosher & Levitt, 1987; Sandnabba et al., 1999). In a study of men, Sandnabba and colleagues (1999) found the most common S&M behaviors to include (in order): oral sex, bondage, wearing leather

outfits, flagellation (e.g., whipping), anal intercourse, rimming, handcuffs, and the use of chains, dildos, and verbal humiliation; at least 70% of all of the men interviewed participated in each of these behaviors. The most popular role-play for heterosexual men was master/slave (for Mosher & Levitt's, 1987, sample, too) while, for gay men, the most common role-play was a "uniform scene" (e.g., police officer and arrestee).

Although we do not know how many people practice S&M, we do know that people fantasize about and/or have a sexual response to S&M activities. For example, the Kinsey surveys (1949, 1953) found that about a quarter of men and women had an erotic response to being bitten during sexual activity. In a sample of students from a New Brunswick university, about two-thirds reported having fantasies of tying up a partner or being tied up (Renaud & Byers, 1999). While S&M fantasies appear to be fairly common, we do not know how many people act upon these fantasies.

Sex on Vacation. There is a phenomenon that has recently begun to be documented whereby people travel for the purpose of obtaining sex outside of their community. Much of this literature has focused on heterosexual men who travel to areas such as the Caribbean or Southeast Asia for sexual gratification. While most of these men do not view themselves as engaging prostitution services, the transactions are clearly a form of commercialized sex. Researchers and theorists in this area actually find that sex tourists of this sort tend to be racist, sexist, and believe in their own Western cultural superiority over the people in these Third World locales (O'Connell Davidson & Sánchez Taylor, 1999).

Heterosexual women are also sex tourists who "purchase" the sexual services of local men (e.g., Cabezas, 2004; Herold, Garcia, & DeMoya, 2001). Sánchez Taylor's (2001) study of single women vacationing at resorts in the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, approximately a third, had engaged in sexual relations with local men; this was significantly more new sexual contacts compared to single women vacationing in Europe. Over half of the women with "vacation" sex partners had remunerated the sex partner in some way (e.g., cash, gifts). These women did not view themselves as being consumers of prostitution services despite the economic

element to their relationship; rather, they tended to characterize these sexual behaviors as “holiday romances.” However, the men tend to be in lower socioeconomic positions (e.g. “beach boys,” hotel workers), often live in poverty, and earn a living through various forms of “hustling.” Interviews with the men indicated that they do not conceptualize themselves as prostitutes or sex trade workers but they acknowledge that they reap financial and material benefits from entering into a series of fleeting sexual relationships with female tourists. These men even have strategies to assess which women are likely to be the most “generous” (Sánchez Taylor, 2001).

A different type of sex tourism is popular with university students who are on vacation. This involves having casual sex with a relative stranger while on spring break. By *relative stranger*, researchers mean that the individual has met the sexual partner while on vacation and typically known the sex partner for 24 hours or less. In a study of Ontario students, Matika-Tyndale and colleagues (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997; Maticka-Tyndale, Herold, & Mewhinney, 1998) found that approximately 16% of students vacationing in Daytona Beach had engaged in sexual intercourse with a new casual partner (this excludes those traveling with their boyfriend/girlfriend). Almost half (46%) reported “fooling around in a sexual way” with a new partner; this involved sexual activity excluding intercourse. In the spring break subculture, sexual norms are more permissive than what is expected “back home” (e.g., “what happens in Daytona Beach stays in Daytona Beach”; Mewhinney, Herold, & Maticka-Tyndale, 1995). Having a partner “back home” did not seem to deter vacationers from having casual sex; one-fifth to one-quarter of people who were currently in a relationship had intercourse with a casual partner while they were on vacation.

It seems that being on vacation—away from the social constraints of “home”—creates a subculture of sexual permissiveness whereby one can have sex for solely the purpose of having sex (e.g., for fun, to “let loose”). As one student characterized casual sex during spring break vacation: “It is generally expected ... to have a great time and that includes having sex” (Mewhinney et

al., 1995: 278). There are similar destinations that are known for tourist-tourist casual sex such as Ibiza and Cap d'Azur that cater to non-students populations (O'Connell Davidson & Sánchez Taylor, 1999). The fact that some will go through so much trouble for the purpose of having sex lends credence to the unspoken value we place on sexual pleasure. The pursuit of sexual pleasure can be seen clearly, not only in sex tourism, but in the multi-faceted behaviours we have chosen to call "spicy" sex.

Spicy sex encompasses a diversity of behaviors, many of which we have *not* discussed (e.g., group sex and swinging, other commercialized sex, cross-dressing, etc.). What is interesting about these diverse behaviors is that, while not popular with everyone, people who engage in these behaviors tend to find a social group who are supportive of the activities (e.g., fantasia parties for those who have an interest in sex toys, S&M clubs, online chat groups devoted to various sexual acts). It is possible that when there is a supportive social network for the "spicy" sexual behavior, people will be more comfortable with their "less common" sexual behavior (see Kutchinsky, 1976, Sandnabba et al., 1999). Moreover, a social support group may define which behaviours are acceptable (e.g., voyeurism, or peeping, is often considered deviant, but may be rationalized when social support is present—see Bryant, 1982, Chapter 3; Feigelman, 1974).

What Can We Conclude about Sexual Pleasure?

What is sexually pleasurable is in the eye of the beholder. "Sex" and "sexual pleasure" are very much "social constructions" in that certain attitudes, behaviors, and activities are considered taboo. Societal norms exert a great deal of social control over what is "acceptable" sexuality. In Western society dominated by Christian values, there is a tendency to view the pursuit of sex for pleasure's sake as hedonistic; for example, a person who has casual sex tends to be viewed negatively (Parrinder, 1996). The pleasure of sex for a particular person depends not entirely on attaining orgasm but on the context and psychological state of the individuals involved (Mah & Binik, 2005). How a person has internalized the cultural

messages about various aspects of sexuality will have a profound impact on the person's experience of sexual pleasure. For example, if sex is seen solely as a means of procreation—a strongly Christian perspective (Parrinder, 1996)—there may be great guilt associated with feeling pleasure if one engages in sexual behavior solely for pleasure purposes. Similarly, when sex is fundamental to the maintenance of a long-term relationship, it can become an obligatory duty (see Hawkes, 1996, Chapter 6, for a discussion). In both cases, sex can become a matter of performance-pressure and anxiety.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sex was officially defined in terms of the social and interpersonal functions it fulfilled; there was little mention of sex as a pleasurable experience (or, if so, it was pleasurable only for men). When attention was drawn to the sexual pleasure of women (somewhat ironically, by the work of Freud), social forces constrained that pleasure to marriage. People seeking sexual pleasure outside of marriage were labeled as “deviant” (Hawkes, 1996). Our current societal views on sexual pleasure have their roots in our Victorian history of sex negativity and the subsequent need to “quell” or control a dangerous instinct (Foucault, 1976/1978; Weeks, 1981, 1986).

Current North American attitudes toward sexual pleasure run the gamut from “only for procreation” to “okay when in love or when dating” to “anything goes.” While there is no consensus, sex with love or in the context of a committed relationship tends to be deemed as more acceptable and changes in attitudes toward sex tend to relate to concurrent changes in sexual behavior (Barrett et al., 2004). Views about sexuality and sexual pleasure are constantly changing (DeLamater & Hyde, 2003). Enhanced discussions about sexual pleasure will occur as our society incorporates an increasingly positive perspective on sexual pleasure into the existing sexual scripts (Gagnon & Simon, 1987). This positive view of sexual pleasure will need to be incorporated into scripts at all levels: the intrapersonal (i.e., self-acceptance of sex for personal pleasure), the interpersonal (i.e., acceptance of one's partner(s), friends, family, etc. as enjoying sex for pleasure reasons), and finally, the overarching cultural scripts (i.e., schemas for the sexu-

ality of men, schemas for the sexuality of women, environments that reinforce rather than punish the concept of sexual pleasure for pleasure's sake).

While the social discourse surrounding sexuality will continue to evolve and to complicate the meanings attached to sexuality, the avoidance and guilt associated with sexual pleasure seems to be lessening. In fact, a new discourse appears to be arising that specifically and explicitly emphasizes the often-lost pursuit of sexual pleasure (McKay, 2004; Abramson & Pinkerton, 1995). This pursuit, in itself, can become a source of enlightenment spurred by the realization of simple, physical pleasures associated with human sexuality. The dark side of sexuality will continue to exert its influence, of course, in the specters of sexual harassment, sexual coercion, stalking, paraphilias, and related phenomena. And, the individual's pursuit of pleasure will continue to be constrained by society when it infringes on the rights of others. This process may move us away from an ethic of divinity—based on often arbitrary moral codes—toward ethics of autonomy—based on consent and the prevention of harm—and of community—based on social stability (see Shweder et al., 1997). But, an acceptance of sexual pleasure would open avenues for personal satisfaction that will, hopefully, serve as a safeguard against such negative outcomes.

APPENDIX

The Authors' Survey of Human Sexuality Students

One of the authors regularly teaches an introductory course in human sexuality (<http://www.sju.ca/courses/course.php?course=407&id=29&ad=10&dir=sexuality>). As a part of a course exercise, students are asked to complete a questionnaire concerning many issues of sexual attitudes and behaviors. The questionnaire is given in a multiple choice format and includes nominal, ordinal, and interval scale items (mainly Likert-style scales). The students who opt to complete the questionnaire (the project is mandatory) can submit it anonymously to the instructor. This survey was given to the students at the start of a lecture concerning research methods and takes about 45 minutes to complete. We estimate that 80% of students enrolled in the course attended this lecture and that 80-90% of those in attendance completed the survey; our worst estimate of the participation rate is about 64%. The survey has been administered to multiple sections of human sexuality courses each year from 1999-2006 (seven years; 21 courses in total). Most classes had enrollments over 200 students, but some courses taught in the spring semester had enrollment around 50 students. Aggregated data from these surveys were used as one source of data for this paper.

In total, 2,405 (1,662 females and 743 males; this ratio is typical for arts courses) students have completed our survey. Most students (93%) were younger than 24 years and only the majority were single and dating (59%) or single and not involved (34%); only 6% were married and only 0.6% reported a different status (i.e., widowed, divorced or separated). Our sample is probably representative of young Canadian students taking a sex course. Limitations of our study include the select sample, the probably liberal nature of the sample, and volunteer bias.

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