The Psychology of Human Sexuality
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Justin J. Lehmiller (PhD, Purdue University) is the Director of the Social Psychology Graduate Program and an Assistant Professor of Social Psychology at Ball State University. He is also a Faculty Affiliate of The Kinsey Institute at Indiana University. Dr. Lehmiller has been teaching college-level human sexuality courses for more than a decade and is an accomplished educator. As a graduate student at Purdue, he received an award for outstanding teaching and, as a College Fellow at Harvard University, he was awarded a Certificate of Teaching Excellence three times.

Dr. Lehmiller is also a prolific scholar, having published more than 40 pieces of scholarly writing to date, including articles in some of the leading scientific journals on sex and relationships, such as the Journal of Sex Research, The Journal of Sexual Medicine, and the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships. He conducts research on topics including sexual fantasy, secret relationships, prejudice and stigma, sexual orientation, safer-sex practices, and friends with benefits. Dr. Lehmiller’s credentials have made him an internationally recognized expert on sexuality and a much sought-after voice in the popular media. He is frequently interviewed by outlets such as The Wall Street Journal, CNN.com, The Chicago Tribune, The Huffington Post, Men’s Health, and The New York Times. He also performs freelance writing for numerous outlets including Playboy and VICE, and he writes a popular blog, Sex and Psychology. His blog is updated several times per week and presents the latest research on sex and relationships in a way that is both educational and entertaining. Learn more about Dr. Lehmiller and follow his blog at www.lehmiller.com.
Sex. Almost everyone does it, but almost no one wants to talk about. It is quite the paradox when you consider how vital sex is to human life. Not only is it the act that propels our species forward, but it is also a way to bond with a romantic partner, a way to relieve the stress of daily life, not to mention an enjoyable way to pass the time. Of course, sex is not fun and games all of the time. For some people, sex can be a constant source of anxiety and insecurity, an awkward and embarrassing topic of discussion, not to mention a potential pathway to disease and death. Sex thus has both a light side and a dark side, and each deserves to be acknowledged.

The goal of this book is to give you a better understanding of the ins and outs of sex from a psychological perspective. There are many excellent books out there already that tackle this topic from a largely biological standpoint, and you could certainly learn a lot from reading those texts. However, most of those books give short shrift to the roles that psychology and the social and cultural context play in shaping human sexual behavior. I used many of these books in previous courses I taught and found that students who were majoring in psychology or who took the course because it was advertised as Psychology of Human Sexuality were largely unsatisfied. In fact, the first few times I taught this class, my end-of-semester evaluations looked pretty similar: students commented on how much they loved and enjoyed the course, but wanted to know, “Where’s the psychology?” Because I was unable to find a book that truly met the needs and desires of my students, I decided to write this one.

Of course, this book will not focus on psychology to the total exclusion of other factors, because that would ultimately do a disservice to readers by providing an utterly imbalanced perspective. I have therefore sought to put psychology front and center throughout, but also to give due consideration to biological, evolutionary, and sociocultural influences on sexuality where relevant. As some of you may recognize, this book mirrors the biopsychosocial perspective adopted in most health psychology textbooks.

When it comes to teaching a sexuality course, my philosophy is to be sex-positive. I have heard people define sex-positive in many different ways, but my personal definition involves: (1) adopting comprehensive and inclusive definitions of gender and sexual orientation; (2) rejecting narrow definitions about what constitutes sex (e.g., the view that only vaginal intercourse “counts”); (3) giving due consideration to the potential positive and negative consequences of being sexually active; (4) providing students with the information and tools they need to optimize their sexual health and to make healthy decisions; (5) promoting healthy and respectful sexual and romantic relationships; (6) recognizing that monogamy and marriage are not universal relationship goals and ideals; (7) understanding that not everyone is a sexual being and that a lack of sexual desire is not inherently dysfunctional; and (8) respecting people who have different views about sex. I kept this philosophy in mind when writing this book with the goal of making it as inclusive and respectful as possible for a diverse audience.
Although I have done my best to present the information in this book with great sensitivity, I fully recognize that not everyone will agree with everything I have written, despite the fact that it is all based in science. Some of the topics we will cover may challenge your beliefs or make you feel uneasy. This is to be expected. Indeed, it is not uncommon for sex research to make people uncomfortable, which is part of the reason why this field is—and always has been—highly controversial. Should you find that you disagree with something in this book, please avoid the temptation to ignore, dismiss, or attack it. The integrity of this field and the advancement of science fundamentally depend upon a free exchange of ideas and a willingness to consider new and different perspectives. As such, I implore you to keep an open mind as you approach the chapters ahead—and if you encounter things that personally challenge you, use them as learning opportunities. Perform additional readings. Ask questions. Hold discussions with friends, classmates, or colleagues. You do not have to change your mind—all I ask is that you commit to educating yourself and acknowledging that different perspectives exist.

After reading this book, my hope is that you will have a better understanding of and appreciation for the amazing complexity of human sexuality, as well as the incredible variation that exists in sexual perspectives and behaviors. The ultimate goal is to enhance your psychological training and for you to be able to think and communicate about sex at a much deeper level in your everyday life, in both casual conversations and interactions with sexual and/or romantic partners.

Now let’s talk about sex.
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At the beginning of any study on sex and sexuality, participants must be informed of their rights, the nature of the research, and the potential risks involved. This usually entails obtaining a written or electronic signature. ©gajus/123RF.COM. 50

In recent history, the penis has largely been seen as vulgar and makes infrequent appearances even in artistic depictions of the male body. ©Karashaev under Shutterstock.com. 56

The appearance of the penis and scrotum varies substantially across persons. ©stnu (Own work) [CC-BY-SA-2.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0)], via Wikimedia Commons. 60

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Penis size is one of men's biggest body concerns. Some men pursue dangerous and untested treatments with the hope of enhancing the size of their genitals. ©PrinceOfLove, 2016. Used under license from Shutterstock.com. 64

The appearance of the vulva can vary widely. ©Hutanisa, Ingrid w, Peter Klashorst, Amateurlover, and Knuter (Derivative work) [CC-BY-SA-3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons. 68

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The female reproductive system. ©Tsaitgaist (Derivative work) [CC-BY-SA-3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons. 73

Anatomy of the female breast. ©Alexilusmedical. Used under license from Shutterstock.com. 76

Female dolls often have extreme and unrealistic bodily proportions, some of which would be nearly impossible to obtain in real life. ©Leah-Anne Thompson, 2016. Used under license from Shutterstock.com. 77

Research has found that breast self-exams are not as effective as doctors once believed. Thus, they are not a substitute for consulting with a physician. ©National Institutes of Health via Wikimedia Commons. 81

In this photo you can see some of the structures of the vulva, including the labia, clitoral hood, and introitus. ©Bobisbob (en.wikipedia) [CC-BY-SA-3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons. 89
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