

Human sexual activity

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(Redirected from Human Sexual Activity)

Human sexual activities or **human sexual practices** or **human sexual behavior** refers to the manner in which humans experience and express their sexuality. People engage in a variety of sexual acts from time to time, and for a wide variety of reasons. Sexual activity normally results in sexual arousal and physiological changes in the aroused person, some of which are pronounced while others are more subtle. The objective of sexual activity in humans is typically to achieve orgasm. Sexual activity also includes conduct and activities which are intended to arouse the sexual interest of another, such as strategies to find or attract partners (mating and display behavior), and personal interactions between individuals, such as flirting and foreplay.

Human sexual activity has biological, physical and emotional aspects. Biologically, it refers to the reproductive mechanism as well as the basic biological drive that exists in all species and can encompass sexual intercourse and sexual contact in all its forms. Emotional aspects deal with the intense personal bonds and emotions generated between sexual partners by a sexual activity. Physical issues around sexuality range from purely medical considerations to concerns about the physiological or even psychological and sociological aspects of sexual behaviour.

In some cultures sexual activity is considered acceptable only within marriage, although premarital and extramarital sex are universal. Some sexual activities are illegal either universally or in some countries, and some are considered against the norms of a society. For example, sexual activity with a person below some age of consent and sexual assault in general are criminal offenses in many jurisdictions.

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Close relationships

Types of relationships

Family · Marriage
 Husband · Wife
 Soulmate · Significant other
 Siblings · Cousin
 Domestic partnership
 Widowhood

Boyfriend · Girlfriend
 Cohabitation · Casual
 Romantic friendship ·
 Sexual partner

Friendship · Kinship
 Monogamy ·

Same-sex relationship

Non-monogamy · Open marriage

Polyamory · Polyfidelity ·
 Polygamy

Mistress (lover) · Cicisbeo ·
 Concubinage · Courtesan ·

Romantic relationship events

Bonding · Breaking up ·
 Courtship · Dating · Divorce ·
 Infidelity · Mating ·
 Meet market · Romance ·
 Separation · Singles event ·
 Transgressing · Wedding

Feelings and emotions

Affinity · Attachment ·
 Compersion · Intimacy ·
 Jealousy · Limerence · Love ·
 Passion · Platonic love ·
 Psychology of sexual monogamy

Human practices

Bride price (Dower · Dowry) ·
 Hypergamy · Infidelity ·
 Sexuality

Relationship abuse

Child abuse · Elder abuse ·
 Dating abuse · Infidelity ·
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Types of sexual activity

Sexual activity can be classified in a number of ways. It can refer to acts which involve one person, such as masturbation, or to two people, such as sexual intercourse, oral sex, or mutual masturbation. If there are more than two participants in the sex act, it may be referred to as group sex. Autoerotic sexual activity can involve use of dildos, vibrators, anal beads, sybian machines, and other sex toys,^[*citation needed*] though these devices can also be used with a partner.

Sexual activity can be classified into the gender and sexual orientation of the participants.

Sexual activity can also be classified according to the relationship of the participants. For example, the relationships can be ones of marriage, intimate partners, casual sex partners or anonymous. Sexual activity can be regarded as conventional or as alternative, involving, for example, fetishism and/or BDSM activities.^{[1][2]}

Sexual activity can be consensual or under force or duress. It may be lawful or illegal or otherwise be contrary to social norms or generally accepted sexual morals.

Reasons for sexual activity

People engage in sexual activity for any of a multitude of possible reasons. Most people engage in sexual activity because of the sexual pleasure they derive from the activity, in which the most heightened pleasure is derived through orgasm. Erotic pleasure can also be experienced during foreplay and from flirting, and from fetish or BDSM activities.^{[3][4]}

Most commonly, people engage in sexual activity with a person to whom they are sexually attracted; but at times, a person may engage in a sexual activity solely for the sexual pleasure of the partner, such as because of an obligation they may have to the partner or because of sympathy or pity they may feel for the partner.

Also, a person may engage in sexual activity for purely monetary considerations, or to obtain some advantage from either the partner or the activity. Furthermore, a man and woman may engage in sexual intercourse with the objective of conception. Some people engage in hate sex, which occurs between two people who strongly dislike or annoy each other. It is related to the idea that opposition between two people can heighten sexual tension, attraction and interest.^{[5][6]}

Aspects of human sexual behavior

Cultural aspects

As with other behaviors, human intelligence and social complexity have yielded the most complicated sexual behavior of any animal. Most people experiment with a range of sexual activities during their lives, though they tend to engage in only a few of these regularly. Some people enjoy many different sexual activities, while others avoid sexual activities altogether for religious or other reasons (see chastity, sexual abstinence, asexuality). Some prefer monogamous relationships for sex, and others may prefer many different partners throughout their lives.

Social aspects

Alex Comfort and others propose three potential social aspects of intercourse in humans, which are not mutually exclusive: reproductive, relational, and recreational.^[7] The development of the contraceptive pill and other highly effective forms of contraception in the mid- and late 20th century has increased people's ability to segregate these three functions, which still overlap a great deal and in complex patterns. For example: A fertile couple may have intercourse while using contraception to experience sexual pleasure (recreational) and also as a means of emotional intimacy (relational), thus deepening their bonding, making their relationship more stable and more capable of sustaining children in the future (deferred reproductive). This same couple may emphasize different aspects of intercourse on different occasions, being playful during one episode of intercourse (recreational), experiencing deep emotional connection on another occasion (relational), and later, after discontinuing contraception, seeking to achieve pregnancy (reproductive, or more likely reproductive and relational).

Frequency of sexual activity

The frequency of sexual intercourse might range from zero (sexual abstinence) to 15 or 20 times a week.^[8] In America, the average frequency of sexual intercourse for married couples is 2 to 3 times a week.^[9] It is generally recognized that postmenopausal women experience declines in frequency of sexual intercourse^[10] and that average frequency of intercourse declines with age. According to the Kinsey Institute, average frequency of sexual intercourse in US is 112 times per year (age 18-29), 86 times per year (age 30-39), and 69 times per year (age 40-49).^[11]

Safety aspects

There are four main risks that arise from sexual activity. These are unwanted pregnancy, contracting a sexually transmitted disease, physical injury, and psychological injuries.

Sexual activity that involves sexual intercourse or even contact of semen with the vagina or vulva carries the chance of pregnancy. People who want to engage in such behaviors with a reduced chance of pregnancy employ any of a variety of available contraception methods, such as birth control pills, the use of a condom, diaphragms, spermicides, hormonal contraception, and sterilization.^[12]

Sexual activity that involves contact with another person's bodily fluids carries the risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease such as those arising from HIV/AIDS, chlamydia, syphilis, gonorrhea, and HPV. Safer sex practices try to reduce these risks. These precautions are often seen as less necessary for sex partners in committed relationships, if they are known to be free of disease. Some people require potential sex partners to be tested for sexually transmitted diseases before engaging in sex.^[13]

Physical risks vary with the type of sexual activity being engaged in. The medical condition and physical



A rolled-up male condom

limitations of the participants must be kept in mind.

The risk factors are increased by a condition (temporary or permanent) which impairs a person's judgment, such as excess alcohol or other drugs, or emotional states such as loneliness, depression or euphoria. Age and mental capacity of the participants can also affect the risks of sexual activity.

Sexual morality and social norms

Main articles: Sexual morality, Religion and sexuality, and Norm (sociology)

Most world religions have sought to address the moral issues that arise from people's sexuality in society and in human interactions. Each major religion has developed moral codes covering issues of sexuality, morality, ethics etc. Though these moral codes do not address issues of sexuality directly, they seek to regulate the situations which can give rise to sexual interest and to influence people's sexual activities and practices. However, the impact of religious teaching has at times been limited. For example, though most religions disapprove of extramarital sexual relations, it has always been widely practiced. Nevertheless, these religious codes have always had a strong influence on peoples' attitudes to issues of modesty in dress, behaviour, speech etc.

On the other hand, some people adopt the view that pleasure is its own justification for sexual activity. Hedonism is a school of thought which argues that pleasure is the only intrinsic good.^[14]

Human sexual activity, like many other kinds of activity engaged in by humans, is generally influenced by social rules that are culturally specific and vary widely. These social rules are referred to as sexual morality (what can and can not be done by society's rules) and sexual norms (what is and is not expected).

Sexual ethics, morals, and norms relate to issues including deception/honesty, legality, fidelity and consent. Some activities, known as sex crimes in some locations, are illegal in some jurisdictions, including those conducted between (or among) consenting and competent adults (examples include sodomy law and adult-adult incest).

Some people who are in a relationship but want to hide homosexual or heterosexual activity from their partner, may solicit consensual sexual activity with others through personal contacts, online chat rooms, or, advertising in select media.

Some people engage in various sexual activities as a business transaction. When this involves having sex with, or performing certain actual sexual acts for another person in exchange for money or something of value, it is called prostitution. Other aspects of the adult industry include (for example) telephone sex operators, strip clubs, pornography and the like.

Legal issues

Main article: Sex and the law

There are many laws and social customs which prohibit, or in some way have an impact on sexual activities. These laws and customs vary from country to country, and have varied over time. They cover, for example, a prohibition to non-consensual sex, to sex outside of marriage, to sexual activity in public, besides many others. Many of these restrictions are non-controversial, but some have been the subject of public debate.

Most societies consider it a serious crime to force someone to engage in sexual acts or to engage in sexual activity with someone who does not consent. This is called sexual assault, and if sexual penetration occurs it is

called rape, the most serious kind of sexual assault. The details of this distinction may vary among different legal jurisdictions. Also, what constitutes effective consent in sexual matters varies from culture to culture and is frequently debated. Laws regulating the minimum age at which a person can consent to have sex (age of consent) are frequently the subject of debate, as is adolescent sexual behavior in general. Some societies have forced marriage, where consent may not be required.

Same sex laws

Many countries used to have laws prohibiting same-sex sexual activity, though these have been largely removed by many countries.

Minimum age of sexual activity (age of consent)

The laws of each jurisdiction set the minimum age at which a young person is allowed to engage in sexual activity.^[15] The median age of consent seems to range from 16 to 18 years, but laws stating ages ranging from 9 to 21 do exist. In many jurisdictions, age of consent is a person's mental or functional age.^[16] As a result, victims can be of any chronological age if their mental age is below the age of consent.^[17] Many jurisdictions regard any sexual activity by an adult involving a child as child sexual abuse.

Some jurisdictions forbid sexual activity outside of legal marriage completely. The relevant age may also vary by the type of sexual act, the sex of the actors, or other restrictions such as abuse of a position of trust. Some jurisdictions may also make allowances for minors engaged in sexual acts with each other, rather than a hard and fast single age.

Incestuous relationships

Most jurisdictions prohibit sexual activity between certain close relatives. These laws vary to some extent, such acts are called incestuous.

Sexual abuse

Main article: Sexual abuse

Non-consensual sexual activity or subjecting an unwilling person to witnessing a sexual activity are forms of sexual abuse, as well as (in many countries) certain non-consensual paraphilias such as frotteurism, telephone scatophilia (indecent phonecalls), and non-consensual exhibitionism and voyeurism (known as "indecent exposure" and "peeping tom" respectively).^[18]

Sexual activity and orientations

Heterosexuality

Main article: Heterosexuality

Heterosexual sexual practices are subject to laws in many places. In some countries, mostly those where religion has a strong influence on social policy, marriage laws serve the purpose of encouraging people to have sex only within marriage. Sodomy laws were seen as discouraging same-sex sexual practices, but may affect opposite-sex sexual practices. Laws also ban adults from committing sexual abuse, committing sexual acts with anyone under

an age of consent, performing sexual activities in public, and engaging in sexual activities for money (prostitution). Though these laws cover both same-sex and opposite-sex sexual activities, they may differ in regard to punishment, and may be more frequently (or exclusively) enforced on those who engage in same-sex sexual activities.^[19]

Different-sex sexual practices may be monogamous, serially monogamous, or polyamorous, and, depending on the definition of sexual practice, abstinent or autoerotic (including masturbation).

Different religious and political movements have tried to influence or control changes in sexual practices including courting and marriage, though in most countries changes occur at a slow rate.^[20]

Homosexuality

Main article: Homosexuality

People with a homosexual orientation can express their sexuality in a variety of ways, and may or may not express it in their behaviors.^[21] Some have sexual relationships predominately with people of their own gender identity, another gender, bisexual relationships or they can be celibate.^[21] Research indicates that many lesbians and gay men want, and succeed in having, committed and durable relationships. For example, survey data indicate that between 40% and 60% of gay men and between 45% and 80% of lesbians are currently involved in a romantic relationship.^[22]

It is possible for a person whose sexual identity is mainly heterosexual to engage in sexual acts with people of the same sex. For example, mutual masturbation in the context of what may be considered normal heterosexual teen development. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual people who pretend to be heterosexual are often referred to as being closeted, hiding their sexuality in "the closet". "Closet case" is a derogatory term used to refer to people who hide their sexuality. Making that orientation (semi-) public can be called "coming out of the closet" in the case of voluntary disclosure or "outing" in the case of disclosure by others against the subject's wishes. Among some communities (called "men on the DL" or "down-low"), same-sex sexual behavior is sometimes viewed as solely for physical pleasure. Men on the "down-low" may engage in sex acts with other men while continuing sexual and romantic relationships with women.

The definition of homosexuality is a preference to members of one's own sex, though people who engage exclusively in same-sex sexual practices may not identify themselves as bisexual, gay or lesbian. In sex-segregated environments, individuals may seek relationships with others of their own gender (known as situational homosexuality). In other cases, some people may experiment or explore their sexuality with same (and/or different) sex sexual activity before defining their sexual identity. Despite stereotypes and common misconceptions, there are no forms of sexual activity exclusive to same-sex sexual behavior that can not also be found in opposite-sex sexual behavior, save those involving contact of the same sex genitalia such as tribadism and frot.

Pansexuality

Main article: Pansexuality

Pansexuality (also referred to as **omnisexuality**)^[23] is characterized by the potential for aesthetic attraction, romantic love, or sexual desire towards people without regard for their gender identity or biological sex.^[24]

Some pansexuals suggest that they are gender-blind; that gender and sex are insignificant or irrelevant in determining whether they will be sexually attracted to others.^[25] As defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*,^[26] pansexuality "encompasses all kinds of sexuality; not limited or inhibited in sexual choice with regards to gender or practice."

Alternative practices

Some people derive sexual pleasure from engaging in variety of alternative sexual practices, such as fetishism and/or BDSM activities.^{[2][27]}

BDSM often involves a consensual power exchange, whereby one person submits to the control of a dominating partner. These practices can include spanking, bondage, role playing, role reversals, and raising endorphins through the use of whips, floggers and other implements.

Fetishism can take many forms ranging from the desire for certain body parts, for example large breasts, armpits or foot worship. The object of desire can often be shoes, boots, lingerie, clothing, leather or rubber items.

Some non-conventional autoerotic practices can be dangerous. These include erotic asphyxiation and self-bondage. The potential for injury or even death that exists while engaging in the partnered versions of these fetishes (choking and bondage, respectively) becomes drastically increased in the autoerotic case due to the isolation and lack of assistance in the event of a problem.

See also

- Child sexuality
- History of human sexuality
- Human female sexuality
- Human male sexuality
- Lesbian sexual practices
- Mechanics of sex
- Orgasm control

Footnotes

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