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sexual practices 4247

Probably more than any other factor, HIV/AIDS has played a huge role in transforming global sexual politics, forcing governments to address the most intimate areas of people's lives, and challenging deeply embedded cultural and religious traditions. Responses to HIV/AIDS have been analyzed in the context of globalization, with attention to the political economy of the crisis (Altman 2001). Research such as that of Ros Petchesky and the International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group demonstrates that the battles of sexual politics remain to be fought in much of the world, particularly Africa, but also criticizes the imposition of prescribed western agendas and solutions (Petchesky & Judd 1998).

SEE ALSO: AIDS, Sociology of; Coming Out/Closets; Feminism; Feminism, First, Second, and Third Waves; Femininities/Masculinities; Foucault, Michel; Gay and Lesbian Movement; Gender Ideology and Gender Role Ideology; Globalization, Sexuality and; Heterosexuality; Inequality/Stratification, Gender; Patriarchy; Queer Theory; Sex and Gender; Sexual Citizenship; Sexualities and Culture Wars

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sexual practices

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Sexual practices have varied widely across time and space. In the broadest terms, societies are either *sex-positive* or *sex-negative*, with the majority the former (Bullough 1976). The Trobriand Islanders of Melanesia were described by Malinowski as unusually sexually permissive. Sex life may begin for young boys as early as age 10 and for young girls as early as age 6. Polynesian societies were also renowned for their high levels of sexual permissiveness. For example, among the ancient Hawaiians, "a little girl's clitoris was stretched and lengthened through oral stimulation. The penis received similar treatment so as to enhance its beauty and prepare it for sexual enjoyment later in life" (de Waal 2005: 107).

Homosexual relationships have also been common in a number of preliterate (and in modern) societies. In some North American Indian societies, a man known as a *berdache* dressed as a woman, performed women's roles, and engaged in sexual relations with other men, all with social approval. Other societies (e.g., India, Polynesia, Oman) have had the local equivalent of a *berdache*. Among the Azande of the Sudan, man-boy homosexual relations were common, and institutionalized homosexuality has been widespread throughout Melanesia. For example, among the Etoro of New Guinea, men and young boys sleep together in men's houses, and man-boy homosexual relations are common.

In agrarian civilizations, outside of western civilization, with its sex-negative Judeo-Christian tradition, sexual permissiveness has usually far exceeded restrictiveness. The Greeks were a fairly permissive culture, and are famed for their institutionalized form of homosexuality between older men and young boys. India was perhaps the most sex-positive of all the historical agrarian civilizations. Hindus thought that women enjoyed sex at least as much as men, and a wide range of sexual practices was considered acceptable. The Chinese were also quite open about sex and had a form of man-boy homosexuality that resembled the Greek pattern (Bullough 1976), and the same was true in Japan (Leupp 1995).

Freud and the Freudians dominated the study of human sexuality for many years. For Freud, sex was an overpowering biological drive that was repressed by society in varying ways and degrees. The Freudian tradition was kept alive in altered form by such thinkers as Reich and Marcuse. Kinsey emerged onto the scene in the late 1940s, and Masters and Johnson in the 1960s. Their work had little theory and has been referred to as a kind of "radical empiricism" (Brake 1982).

The currently dominant approach to explaining sexual practices seems to be *social constructionism*, which downplays the biological nature of humans and emphasizes that sexual practices are socially and culturally created. Among the earliest sociologists to take this approach, specifically in the form of symbolic interactionism, were John Gagnon and William Simon, as well as Ken Plummer. Social constructionists oppose "essentialism," or the notion that sexuality is largely a matter of biologically pre-given drives. For the constructionists, sexual practices are less biologically given than determined by society through complex webs of social interaction and social definition. Gagnon and Simon emphasized the importance of "sexual scripts"; for them, sexual conduct "is acquired and assembled in human interaction, judged and performed in specific cultural and historical worlds" (Gagnon 1977: 2). And, as Plummer tells us, "Sexuality has no meaning other than that given to it in social situations. Thus the forms and the contents of sexual meanings are another cultural variable, and why certain

meanings are learnt and not others is problematic" (1982: 233).

Outside the symbolic interactionist tradition, social constructionist views of sexuality start with Foucault (1978). Foucault not only challenged biological essentialism, but also linked sex with power. Foucault was particularly interested in the development of a new science of sexuality in the nineteenth century, which he saw as part of the rise of a "disciplinary society" in which the state was increasingly trying to bring its citizens under control. Knowledge of sexuality was central to this control (Seidman 2003). Social constructionists in the Foucauldian tradition include Jeffrey Weeks and Steven Seidman. In Seidman's words, "We are born with bodies, but it is society that determines which parts of the body and which pleasures and acts are sexual. Also, the classification of sex acts into good and bad or acceptable and illicit is today understood as a product of social power: the dominant sexual norms express the beliefs of the dominant social groups" (2003: 39).

The leading alternative to social constructionism today is the *Darwinian* approach of sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists. Donald Symons (1979), for example, has sought to show how Darwinian sexual selection has acted on human sexual desires by looking in particular at universal or extremely widespread sexual attitudes and practices. He points to such things as the overwhelming tendency of males everywhere to be aroused by visual sexual stimuli; to the apparently universal desire of men to mate with younger females; to copulation as primarily a service provided by females to males; and to the universal desire of males for a wide variety of sexual partners. Such preferences, when acted upon, help males to achieve higher levels of reproductive success than would be possible by a preference for older, less fecund females, or by being indifferent to the sight of naked females. Research in the Darwinian evolutionary tradition has also emphasized the widespread existence of sexual jealousy in both males and females. For males, sexual jealousy is seen as a way to avoid having one's mate inseminated by another man, whereas for females it is a way of holding onto mates who otherwise might abandon them for other females (Buss

2000). The Darwinian approach has made little headway in sociology, but it has been highly influential in psychology and anthropology (cf. Sanderson 2001: 177–94).

Two other recent approaches to human sexuality are Collins's (2004) interaction ritual theory and Posner's (1992) rational choice theory. Collins argues that sexual practices can best be understood as Goffmanian interaction rituals. If humans are hard-wired for anything it is "for the kinds of pleasure in emotional entrainment and rhythmic synchronization that make humans pursuers of interaction rituals" (2004: 227). Posner's rational choice theory is based on the notion that "the balance of private costs and private benefits determines the relative frequency of different sexual practices" (1992: 116). For example, in societies in which there is a high ratio of men to available women, opportunistic homosexuality and prostitution will be more frequent than in societies with an approximately equal ratio of men to available women.

The study of sexual practices has become an especially vigorous subfield of sociology, but is also of great interest to psychologists, anthropologists, and even historians. Despite major theoretical disputes, there has been a great deal of progress in this subfield and continued progress is likely to be both substantial and rapid.

SEE ALSO: Compulsory Heterosexuality; Globalization, Sexuality and; Heterosexuality; Homosexuality; Lesbianism; Oral Sex; Pornography and Erotica; Sadoomasochism; Safer Sex; Sexuality

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sexual violence and rape

Liz Kelly

Rape attracted limited attention across the social sciences and humanities until it emerged as a key issue for feminists in the early 1970s. Most scholarship on the subject dates from this time, with the highest concentration appearing during the 1970s and 1980s. The first sociological study – Menachim Amir's *Patterns in Forcible Rape* (1971) – addressed the victimology of rape. But it, along with most previous work, was subjected to intense feminist critique, including in Susan Brownmiller's prescient *Against Our Will* (1975), which, in "giving rape its history," explored rape two decades before it became widely recognized. Rape was relatively invisible in feminist, policy, and research agendas during the 1990s outside the context of war/conflict. As we enter the twenty-first century, shoots of renewed interest are evident with a series of books and major research reports addressing theory (Cahill 2001), reporting and belief (Jordan 2004), rape in diverse contexts (Barstow 2002), and prevalence and attrition (Kelly et al. 2005).